

○ EDITORIAL

Judging by the overwhelming response to the first issue of *The Bible and Critical Theory*, the journal has begun to meet a distinct need, a hunger even, for the work that we set out to publish in the intersections between biblical studies and critical theory. The fact that I have been inundated with articles (beyond this issue, over forty at the moment of writing in various stages of submission, review, revision and awaiting publication), that boxes of books for review now arrive at the door of our book review editor, George Aichele, unsolicited from publishers, that these books are often claimed within an hour or two of their notice appearing in the mailboxes of the ever-increasing list of reviewers, and that within the first few weeks of going 'live', without any formal advertising apart from word of mouth, there was the sweet music of more and more people putting their names down for subscription – all of these factors, all these straws in the wind suggest that we are off to a good start.

One issue that has come up in numerous comments and discussions about the journal is the quality of the website. People have said time and again that the website is well presented, easy to navigate, much better than other humanities electronic journals they have seen, and that the first issue was a very strong one. This is obviously closely related to that other discussion I have had so many times that I have lost count, namely the relation between print and electronic publication. So let me put out front one of the journal's agendas: we are aiming to set new standards for electronic publishing in the humanities. You will see some of these when you explore the various web pages of the journal: over against the tendency of electronic humanities journals to have passive websites, often nothing more than electronic versions of what would have appeared in print, which many people will then print out anyway, what we seek to do here is utilise the capabilities of electronic publication itself. It is what may be called a pro-active and inter-active website (although I claim no intricate knowledge of the way everything works).

But then there is the thorny problem of the perceived quality of electronic over against print publication. While many will say that electronic publication, especially for journals, is the way of the future, when it comes to an actual assessment of quality, there is a lingering assumption that in some way print – that combination of pulp, glue and dye cut into various sizes and then, after ink has been spread over it, bound together with yet more glue and maybe a little cloth – is more substantial, carries greater authority, weighs in with that much needed *gravitas*. To be sure, much of this has to do with the first flush of internet information, much of it very dodgy and used with little discernment. I know the feeling: after sweating over a somewhat shaky argument as I send it off to the press, waking at 3am obsessing over whether its weakness will be evident to all, when it comes into my hands in print it somehow seems more coherent, stronger, authoritative. Unconsciously I say to myself, 'hey, that's not so bad' as the crisp pages flip by under my fingers, relieved that others won't find out my little secret. Of course I do not want to belittle the real needs of Assistant Professors seeking tenure in the USA, or those on the lookout for jobs or promotion in the UK where, I am told, these assumptions still preside. Others tell me they seem to be slipping away, albeit at the pace of a slimy monopod. By contrast, in nation-states such as Australia and South Africa, for instance, the actual material conditions of publication count for nothing. What matters instead, at least for those institutional decision makers, is whether the journal appears in one of the lists of refereed journals, such as Ulrichs.

I am dying to bring some Althusserian categories, especially the conflicted notion of the ideological state apparatus (education being a central, if not *the* central one of these under capitalism) to this discussion. But I will restrict myself to suggesting that we might make use of some dialectical thinking on this problem. Instead of regarding electronic publication as in some sense a poor and ephemeral second to print, a supplement to print (oh yes, it *also* appears in electronic format), we need to begin to think of the relation between print and electronic publication in terms, perhaps, of the horse and buggy over against the solar-powered vehicle, at least as far as journals are concerned. Venerable, well-respected, having stood the test of time, it is perhaps time to encourage the slow process of retiring print, what used to be called not so long ago (note this), 'hard copy'. Of course, we will be able to visit it regularly in the retirement village, regale each other with stories of the good old days, enjoy each other's warm company by the fire on a cold evening.

Enough for now on the relation between print and electronic publication, but it has been at the forefront of a number of conversations I have had before and since the first issue of the journal.

What, then, is there to look forward to in this issue of *The Bible and Critical Theory*? One of the areas in which we publish is at the intersections between the Bible and various aspects of culture, be that popular culture, what used to be called high culture and so on. And one of the major engagements is with film and television (although the two are by no means to be equated). Films that deal directly with biblical material remain as widespread and popular as courses on the Bible and film in universities and colleges. And it seems that many have also responded in some way to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, as any perusal of newspapers, magazines, the Society of Biblical Literature's *Forum* (see www.sbl-site.org), and indeed journal discussions such as the one found in the latest issue of the *Australian Religious Studies Review*. Like a lightning bolt into these responses comes Richard Walsh's 'Wrestling with the Passion of the Christ'. Juxtaposing the story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel at the Jabbok with Roland Barthes's reflections on the spectacle of wrestling, Walsh's viewing and response to the film becomes a profound wrestling with the Bible and Christianity per se. He is interested less in whether Gibson is in fact 'faithful' to the gospels (the subject of so many responses), or indeed in criticising its violence as violence; rather what Walsh finds is that Gibson has in fact got the gospel down rather well, has identified the core of this type of Christianity and put it out there for all to see, clearly and unambiguously. The film itself becomes a sacrament, a 'reel sacrament', and a myth, but it is a negative myth that achieves its mythic status by writing 'the Hollywood passion hero and legalistic Western Christianity over Christ (Jesus is nowhere to be found) as if it were the universal essence of Christianity'. And unless we resist, arguing that it is but *one* reading rather than *the* reading, then we find ourselves drawn in to its logic: the leering sadistic torturers of Jesus become 'us', who put him to death with our sins, and who then all too easily inflict pain and suffering on others. It is not for nothing that the film not only appeared, but has also been immensely popular at the beginning a renewed period of imperial conquest and violence.

As an *inclusio* to this issue of the journal, George Aichele's 'The Politics of Sacrifice' comes at the end, framing with Walsh's article the other papers. Although a very different subject matter – the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* television series – Aichele's paper intersects with Walsh's at various points, but above all on the theme of sacrifice. Aichele takes his cue from Yvonne Sherwood's discussion of 'afterlives' and takes as his premise that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* may

be read as an afterlife of the Gospel of Mark, or rather that the final episode of the series is an afterlife of Mark 10:45. How? It is not that this final episode quotes Mark but that the TV show actually ‘transforms the gospel of Mark’s text into a precursor’. Apart from being an excellent example of a close reading of a biblical text to bring out his argument, Aichele also urges us to consider biblical texts floating free of their canonical location and determination of meaning. Once *Buffy* enables him to do this with Mark’s Gospel, we find that *Buffy* provides, as it were, the ‘truth’ of that Gospel. And the truth is that contrary to the assumed uniqueness of Jesus in Mark, salvation happens only when he gives up his uniqueness. He is after all just one of many political prisoners put to death by the Romans. Just as *Buffy*, who dies vicariously and voluntarily for the second time, gives up her uniqueness and releases many young women and vampire slayers, so also Jesus, the ‘Son of Man’ in Mark’s Gospel, also relinquishes his inimitability and enables many to become ‘sons of men’.

Jione Havea’s piece, ‘Stor[y]ing Deuteronomy 22:13–19 in missionary positions’ is a welcome piece of sophisticated criticism that draws on postcolonial theory, deconstruction and psychoanalysis (to name but a few of the methods), in order to reread a section of Deuteronomy. In doing so three narratives or collections of stories overlay each other – one concerning Parklea prison in Sydney, Australia, others drawn from the Pacific Islands, and the third from Deuteronomy itself. Keenly aware of the ambivalences and tensions, the leakiness if you will, of (post-)colonial interactions, Havea would rather side with the colonised natives, privileging their readings and avenues of resistance, however speculative that might be. All of which shows up in what is a key question in the paper: ‘Did the missionaries rightly label the primitive savageries of the natives, or did the natives “become savages” in response to the way missionaries looked upon and treated them?’ And once we give the preferential option to the natives, then indeed it turns out that the ‘missionaries failed to convert the natives so they called them savages, among other things, and natives became savages in response to that treatment in order, maybe unintentionally, to materialise what missionaries really wanted’. So, taking this particular hermeneutic back to Deuteronomy, Havea suggests that when a husband charges his wife with not being a virgin when he took her for his own wife, this is actually the result of failure, of lost virility, of impotence, or as it is now termed ‘erectile dysfunction’. The text then becomes a curious form of literary Viagra, the missionary position reading now overlaying the biblical: in the same way that the missionary who fails to convert natives can accuse them of being savages, so also the husband who remains floppy can accuse his wife of not being a virgin.

But Jesus will not leave us alone for too long, and he returns to us in a completely different form in Janell Watson’s “‘The Face of Christ:’ Deleuze and Guattari on the Politics of Word and Image’. Watson offers us an exploration of Deleuze and Guattari’s arguments concerning faciality in art, particularly as that has been determined heavily by the face of Christ itself, a face that itself inaugurates a new regime of signs. What we find then is a politics of the face in which Christian regimes must have a visible face. Hence the extraordinary concern with Jesus’ face, its perpetual reproduction in obsessive fashion. But Watson also brings into her discussion the whole realm of art history, particularly its political history, which in its own right is a welcome contribution. And she does so from the side of critical theory rather than biblical studies, which gives her paper an added freshness. But perhaps the most stunning element of this paper is her argument that we must rethink Christian art ‘outside of the realm of representation, as picture without image’. And so she distinguishes between ‘picture’, ‘painting’, ‘artwork’, or ‘portrait’ over against

'image' itself (thereby attempting to avoid the slippage between graphic, optical, mental, verbal and perceptual images). In order to see how she does this, you will have to read the article, but for biblical critics accustomed to interpreting artworks in relation to or even as though they were written texts, there is much to ponder here.

Finally, at least in my introduction to these pieces, we have the second half of Alberto Moreiras's article, 'Children of Light: Neo-Paulinism and the Cathexis of Difference'. In my generosity (actually a euphemism for lack of organisation), I gave Moreiras much more time than he thought he had initially. But I am thankful that he had this time, since the two halves of this article make for a substantial argument. Moreiras's concern is with what he calls the 'non-subject of the political'. In all of the recent debates concerning the political subject, Moreiras spies the continuing presence of political theology. And so those who have recently turned to Paul in the New Testament – Moreiras's examples are Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou – show up this fundamental logic, namely that the very attempt to think of the political subject is theological. Moreiras's challenge is to develop an entirely non-theological form of political thought, one focused on the non-subject, the un-loved, those without faith or hope. The article is but a taste of his forthcoming book, *The Non-Subject of the Political*, and my sense is that will become a crucial statement in these debates.

A word, finally, on the book reviews. These have increased from the last issue and we have decided to publish them as they come in. One reason is that we like a quick turnaround, over against the much slower pace of print publishing. But it is also the case now that the journal is one of the few, if not only, places where books of this nature are reviewed consistently. For this reason we see the reviews as a very important part of the journal's task.

As Lacan would say, Enjoy!

Roland Boer, Editor, January 2005

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