

## ○ EDITORIAL

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This is now my third issue as Managing Editor for the *Bible and Critical Theory*. In this time, I have read and published essays that bridge, in a multitude of ways, the seemingly disparate (though more often than not intimately related) fields within the Humanities through a discussion of the Bible or through a discussion of thinkers who make, or have made, use of the Bible in their own intellectual lives. In this respect, this journal is continuing to offer – in accord with what Roland Boer initially knew would be – a fecund ground within which biblical and non-biblical scholars could dwell together, productively. I have to admit that I have had my doubts about some of the papers sent to the journal, and not just the ones rejected by the referees. As an atheist reader of the Bible, sometimes I cringe at what the journal's sophisticated thinkers have to say about the biblical texts, because of the way their god manages to make his way in. But then this is not explicitly a journal for atheists. Not by a long shot. That would be fundamentalism, by any other name ...

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I am now in my third week teaching a course I have never taught before to largely American study-abroad students at Bond University (on the beautiful, though some would say vulgar, Gold Coast in South East Queensland). I was offered the chance to teach their 'Great Narrative Literature' course, and I accepted. However, given the tight time-frame, I had to come up with a course that I could, well, actually teach. So, for the first time they have offered a course that is sub-titled 'The Bible and Contemporary Literature'. Obviously with a background in biblical studies, the Bible was going to have to make a substantial appearance. (I know there are people out there who teach stuff they know nothing about – 'If there's a textbook, I can teach it' – but I am not among them. I can only teach what I know, which is also what I want to know more about.) But this course enabled me to go back to my other love, contemporary (nineteenth, but mainly twentieth century, which is fast becoming non-contemporary I know) literature.

I was a little terrified, particularly given that I was told that a large number of students might come from theological colleges in the USA. Would I have to answer questions such as 'Did God write the New Testament in Greek because it is such a logical language?' or 'But how do you know that Adam and Eve did not exist?' I walked in with my first lecture prepared to deal with delicate hearts and minds.

What an idiot I am.

After four weeks of lectures and tutorials, I am still shaking my daft head, for I have had some truly *inspiring* conversations about literature, both biblical and contemporary, and about life. With 18–24 years old folk! It seems the only person who brought biased assumptions about this literature (and this age group) to the class was me.

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For this final offering for 2008, we have chosen to run with a reviews-only issue, for a number of reasons. First, we had a massive back-log of reviews, enough to take us to the end of 2009 with more coming in every other week. It seems scholars in our fields like to read new books (healthy) and like to talk about them in print (*very* healthy). However, I noticed that we had a number of books reviewed, ready to go, that were published in 2005, 2006 and 2007. So, with the approval of Roland Boer (my very helpful advisor), the Monash ePress, and the enthusiasm of George Aichele, our reviews editor, I have fortunately been given the go-ahead with an issue of nineteen book reviews. We have many great essays just itching to get out there to you, but I am sure these authors (most of whom are also the producers of monographs) will understand our desire to publish these engagements with the larger works of their peers. Incidentally, next year promises to be a HUGE year for BCT given the papers sitting patiently awaiting their time in the limelight of cyberspace.

As is the case with any caché of reviews, this issue runs the gamut from informed, glowing reports to informed, scathing (shall we say) questionings. For those interested in recent books about critical theory and the New Testament and/or early Christianity, we have reviews of the following:

1. William Arnal's *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Identity* (2005);
2. Stephen Moore's *Empire and Apocalypse. Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (2006);
3. Joseph Marchal's *Heirarchy, Unity and Imitation: A Feminist Rhetorical Analysis of Power Dynamics in Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (2006);
4. Dale B. Martin's *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (2006);
5. David L. Barr (ed.), *The Reality of Apocalypse: Rhetoric and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (2006);
6. Robert Seesengood's *Competing Identities: The Athlete and the Gladiator in Early Christian Literature* (2006);
7. George Aichele's *The Phantom Messiah: Postmodern Fantasy and the Gospel of Mark* (2006);
8. J.L. Houlden's *Jesus: A Question of Identity* (2007);
9. James A. Metzger's *Consumption and Wealth in Luke's Travel Narrative* (2007);
10. Joerg Rieger's *Christ and Empire. From Paul to Postcolonial Times* (2007); and
11. Brian K. Blount, Cain Hope Felder, Clarice Jannette Martin and Emerson B. Powery (eds), *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (2007).

With respect to recent books dealing specifically with either certain books from the Hebrew Bible or with the reading of the canon more generally, we have reviews of:

1. Elliott Rabin's *Understanding the Hebrew Bible: A Reader's Guide* (2006);
2. Tim Meadowcroft's *Haggai. Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (2006);
3. Roger Ryan's *Judges* (2007); and
4. Madeline Gay McClenney-Sadler's *Recovering the Daughter's Nakedness: A Formal Analysis of Israelite Kinship Terminology and the Internal Logic of Leviticus 18* (2007).

More generally, we have reviews of:

1. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (eds), *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (2007);
2. Roland Boer (ed.), *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies* (2007); and
3. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *The Power of the Word: Scripture and Rhetoric of Empire* (2007).

And finally, we have a review of a work that doesn't touch on biblical studies directly, but that many of us will be interested in reading: Sylvie Gambaudo's *Kristeva, Psychoanalysis and Culture: Subjectivity in Crisis* (2007). Actually, we are very keen to receive more reviews of works such as this; books not specifically about biblical texts but that will nevertheless interest those of us with a focus on critical theory, understood in its broader sense.

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It is somewhat ironic that I am splicing a discussion of my teaching this new course with a discussion of this reviews-only issue – seriously academic reviews of books written by scholars about biblical texts and, in one instance, the work of a great feminist philosopher who has written at length about the Bible – for I have *not* set any secondary readings, such as these, as 'Required Readings' for this course. I am simply asking my students to read the biblical stories and an excerpt from the set novels. A number of students were at a loss – they wanted to know what I wanted from them in their weekly reading reports which, again, were only based on biblical texts and a chapter from the set novel for the week. I told them I only wanted to know what they thought about the stories they were reading, whether these stories seemed in some way valid to them, and whether they could make any connections between the ancient, biblical literature, and the contemporary texts with which we were dealing.

I began to realise that this was a big ask. I certainly was not taught to read literature (Australian and American, in my case) in this way at university. Back then, we were taught to 'know' the author's biographical past and literary oeuvre. Only then would we have a grasp on the material he or she was offering us. We also had to know how to talk about characterisation, plot, theme and imagery, something I'm holding on to because it gives students and readers some kind of entry into the curious world of literature and how we can explain its effects on us. But unlike my formal training, I am just making my students read (I suspect many of us are doing this now, if only because it is enjoyable). I don't mean that I am not equipping them with critical questions. I think it is quite obvious to my students that I read as a feminist. And, I have set 'suggested' readings for those interested in pursuing the questions I bring up in class further.

I suppose I am doing this for two reasons. First, when I learnt Old Testament/Hebrew Bible with Ed Conrad, years after formal literary training had turned me off contemporary studies (temporarily it now seems), he actually emphasised the importance of reading the *actual* stories, rather than focussing on what scholarship had to say. Ed Conrad always spoke of how traditional biblical scholars seemed rarely to read the Bible! And one gets the sense that many non-biblical, literary scholars are tarred by the same brush.

Rather surprisingly, these students (many of whom tell me they knew the biblical stories, but had not ever read them – one even said she was intimidated by the Bible) are apparently really

enjoying the biblical stories. Again, I haven't set the whole novel (which is what we had to read, every week, back in 'the day'). Generation Y, I'm told, has little ability to read such lengthy tomes. Well, maybe. But how funny that a generation that apparently has a short attention span, unlike previous generations (so we're told), can return to the texts of our cultural heritage and really, *really* enjoy them, maybe because they're short! And that reading the biblical texts with contemporary literature is enabling them to ask serious questions about the contemporary literature ... well, they may even go on and read the whole damn book! I wonder if the Bible might actually make a comeback in literary studies because of some late-Capitalist, technological subject (re)formation. Stranger things have happened.

*Julie Kelso, Editor*