

○ INTRODUCTION

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I (JK) first encountered the work of George Aichele as a graduate student. ‘Aichele’ was a name very much associated with ‘contemporary’ biblical studies, especially with what was known in the eighties and early nineties (and, to a lesser extent, still today) as ‘postmodern’ approaches to reading (biblical) literature/texts. I think Gary Phillips describes Aichele rather well in his contribution to this issue of BCT honouring George and his work:

Author and co-author, editor and coeditor of numerous monographs and compendia of essays, teacher/scholar in the liberal arts vein, George Aichele is a consummate traveler and guide to many foreign lands, a postmodern psychopomp who conducts souls to the worlds of the Bible beneath and beyond. Theorist and practitioner of close readings, essayist and assayer, exegete and didact who traverses the wide gulfs separating biblical studies, theology, religion, and cultural studies, a Charon of critical theory, George has over the course of a rich career ferried his readers to the foreboding shores of semiotics, structuralism, narratology, ideological critique, film criticism, and postmodernism with the aim of making the contours of those places understandable, comprehensible, if not inviting.

While I was also encountering the more traditional approaches in biblical studies, I knew from reading Aichele and those like him that the traditional approaches were not for me. I recognise now, thinking back to those early days in my still ‘early’ career, that reading the sophisticated, tough and thoroughly rewarding writings of George Aichele led me to the realisation that I had found my tribe. I am sure I am not the first student to come to such a realisation; nor will I be the last.

The three essays here grew out of a panel at the Society of Biblical Literature in 2009 honouring and assessing Aichele’s work. We had hoped to have a fourth by David Jobling, who was relishing the chance to show how he used George’s work in his preaching, but David had a large stroke a few months ago and, although he has made significant progress in recovery, was understandably unable to complete his contribution. We wish David all the best in his recovery.

All three essays are written by long-term collaborators and co-conspirators with George Aichele: two (Gary Phillips and Tina Pippin) from the Bible and Culture Collective, which produced the benchmark text, *The Postmodern Bible* (Harvard, 1997), one (Walsh) a co-editor of *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections Between Scripture and Film* (Trinity Press International, 2002) and *Those Outside: Noncanonical Readings of the Canonical Gospels* (T. & T. Clark, 2005), and one again (Pippin) a collaborator on a series on volumes on fantasy and the Bible – *Fantasy and the Bible* (an issue of *Semeia* from 1992), *The Bible and Fantasy* (an issue of the *Journal for the Fantastic in the Arts* from 1997), *Violence, Utopia and the Kingdom of God: Fantasy and Ideology in the Bible* (Routledge, 1998) and *The Monstrous and the Unspeak-*

able: *The Bible As Fantastic Literature* (Sheffield, 1999). But we do not want to reiterate George's list of publications here, especially since you are far better served by visiting his own website at <http://home.comcast.net/~gcaichele>.

Each of the essays that follow is distinct, despite their common inspiration in George Aichele's work. The reader may profitably begin with Gary Phillips, who provides a broad picture of Aichele the biblical exegete, the teacher, the seer, the one who tackles the painful task of thought without looking back: 'Theorist, ambassador and anthropologist, poet and exegete, unit commander of a postmodern military unit, George teaches us what it means to observe, record, lead, teach, see, and conceptualize the different in terms we might hope to grasp without domination'. Phillips's portrait may well be regarded as an effort to see around the corner, to look beyond the surface matter of George's work in order to locate another level of work. And Phillips spies an ethical agenda that would both surprise and, we suspect, please Aichele himself.

Richard Walsh chooses to focus on two central matters throughout Aichele's writing: the Gospel of Mark and the question of canon. In order to imagine that there is no canon – which Aichele has argued is now defunct with the digital age – Walsh juxtaposes variant readings of Mark, all of them unlocked by the allegorical key of Borges's tale 'The Gospel According to Mark'. Not a bad way to explore Aichele's work, and thereby provoke a new reading of Mark, for George himself has read Mark in terms of *Blade Runner* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Tina Pippin goes a step further, offering a full-blooded – or rather, bloodless – analysis of the role of the undead in New Testament apocalyptic scenes. Zombies abound, it seems, whether Lazarus, or the raised bodies in Acts, or the apocalyptic image of the tombs opening and the dead emerging on the last days. And a rich panoply of critics and artists join the discussion – Caravaggio, Jean-Luc Nancy, Nick Cave, Terry Eagleton, Mel Gibson, to name but a few – some of them dead too, others close enough. Provocative, insightful, vintage Pippin; in itself a fitting tribute to George Aichele.

Finally, George offers his own characteristically humble and fascinating response to these papers.

But we cannot let George go without a profound word of thanks for his role as book review editor and active board member of the journal from its inception in 2004 (and indeed beforehand in its early planning). George's steady hand and ability to extract reviews from authors, along with the establishment of enviable working relations with the major publishers in biblical studies and wider theoretical studies, have all ensured that the book review section is widely read and much anticipated. We will miss him in that role. Thankfully, that incurable bibliophile, James Harding from the University of Otago in New Zealand, has taken up the mantle left behind by George.

This issue also includes reviews of the following books:

1. Andrew W. Hass, David Jasper and Elisabeth Jay (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 (hardcover); 2009 (paperback). (Duc Dau)
2. James G. Crossley, *Jesus in an Age of Terror: Scholarly Projects for a New American Century*. London and Oakville: Equinox, 2008. (Deane Galbraith)
3. Uriah Y. Kim, *Identity and Loyalty in the David Story: A Postcolonial Reading*. Hebrew Bible Monographs 22. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008. (Ben J.M. Johnson)

4. Roland Boer, *Political Grace: The Revolutionary Theology of John Calvin*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. (Mark Manolopoulos)
5. Dan W. Clanton Jr., *Daring, Disreputable, and Devout: Interpreting the Bible's Women in the Arts and Music*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2009. (Judith McKinlay)
6. Rebecca M. Lemon, Emma Mason, Jonathan Roberts, and Christopher Rowland. *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature*. Blackwell Companions to Religion; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. (Peter Miscall)
7. Danna Nolan Fewell, Gary A. Phillips, and Yvonne Sherwood (Eds), *Representing the Irreparable: The Shoah, the Bible, and the Art of Samuel Bak*. Pucker Art Publications; Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008. (Peter Miscall)
8. Martien E. Brinkman, *The Non-Western Jesus: Jesus as Bodhisattva, Avatara, Guru, Prophet, Ancestor or Healer?* Translated by Henry and Lucy Jansen. London: Equinox, 2009. (Eric Repphun)
9. Larry J. Kreitzer, *Philemon*. Readings: A New Biblical Commentary. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008. (Robert Paul Seesengood)
10. Jay Twomey, *The Pastoral Epistles Through the Centuries*. Blackwell Bible Commentaries. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. (Robert Paul Seesengood)
11. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Noli me tangere: On the Raising of the Body*. Translated by Sarah Clift, Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008. (Jay Twomey)
12. Étienne Nodet, O.P., *The Historical Jesus: Necessity and Limits of an Inquiry*. Translated by J. Edward Crowley. London/New York: T & T Clark, 2008. (Richard Walsh)