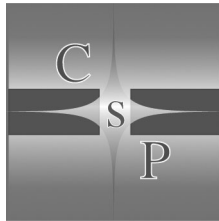


The Strategic Smorgasbord of Postmodernity:
Literature and the Christian Critic

The Strategic Smorgasbord of Postmodernity:
Literature and the Christian Critic

Edited by

Deborah C. Bowen



CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING

The Strategic Smorgasbord of Postmodernity, edited by Deborah C. Bowen

This book first published 2007 by

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

15 Angerton Gardens, Newcastle, NE5 2JA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2007 by Deborah C. Bowen and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN 1-84718-161-9; ISBN 13: 9781847181619

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	viii
Acknowledgements	x
Introduction	1
Deborah C. Bowen, Redeemer University College	
Part I. Situating Literature: Constructing Theories	
Chapter One	16
“Late Have I Loved You”: From Hermeneutics to Love in Augustine’s <i>Confessions</i> Gregory Clark, North Park University	
Chapter Two	30
Placing the Early Modern in Dialogue with the Post Modern: Christian Humanism and the Renaissance Daniel Knauss, Marquette University	
Chapter Three	49
Ends as Means: Christian Eschatology as a Critical Tool for Approaching Postmodernism G. J. Clarke, University of New South Wales, Australia	
Chapter Four	71
Desiring Faith and the Ethics of Reading Randall J. VanderMey, Westmont College	
Chapter Five	87
Althusser, Foucault, and the Community of the Word Liam Corley, Point Loma Nazarene University	

Part II. Engaging the Dialogue: Reading Theories

Chapter Six.....	110
Centers, Margins, and the Christian Scholar: A Discussion with Jacques Derrida Joel Westerholm, Northwestern University	
Chapter Seven.....	122
Simon Critchley: The Ethics of Deconstruction, <i>or</i> Metaphysics in the Dark Jens Zimmermann, Trinity Western University, and Norman Klassen, St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo	
Chapter Eight.....	135
Word and Flesh: Reading Luce Irigaray Ada Jaarsma, Sonoma State University	
Chapter Nine.....	150
The Located Utterance: Bakhtin, Embodiment, Jesus Julie Rak, University of Alberta	
Chapter Ten.....	173
Gathering up God's Remains: The Practice of Michel de Certeau —An Introduction to What Can Only Ever Be an Introduction Tamas Dobozy, Wilfrid Laurier University	
Chapter Eleven.....	192
Bhabha, the Trickster, and the Church: Re-Viewing Canada's Post-Colonial Present Jane Hogeterp-Koopman, University of Waterloo	

Part III. Telling the Old, Old Story Anew: Reading Texts

Chapter Twelve.....	206
Interpreting the Self and George Herbert: Modern, Post-modern and Biblical Alternatives Shiao C. Chong, York University	

Chapter Thirteen	225
The Artist Rooted in a Traditional Community: Mennonite Writers Escape the Binary Paradigm	
Hildi Froese Tiessen, Conrad Grebel College, University of Waterloo	
Chapter Fourteen.....	238
The Semiotics of Time and Place and Eternity in Two Stories by Flannery O'Connor	
Irwin H. Streight, Royal Military College of Canada	
Chapter Fifteen.....	253
Postmodern realism and fictional play: Rushdie, Winterson, and the historical imperative	
Deborah C. Bowen, Redeemer University College	
Chapter Sixteen.....	265
“And have not charity”: New Testament Ethics and the Caribbean Poet	
Joel Westerholm, Northwestern College	
Chapter Seventeen.....	278
Poets, Witnesses, and Community: The Christian Reader and Denise Levertov’s and Carolyn Forché’s Communities of Witness	
David Wright, Wheaton College	
Chapter Eighteen.....	292
“I do not want you ever to die”: Grace and Extravagance in Mark Doty’s Elegies	
George Piggford, C.S.C., Stonehill College	
Chapter Nineteen.....	307
From the Clenched Fist to the Open Hand: A Postmodern Reading of the Twenty-Third Psalm	
J. Richard Middleton, Roberts Wesleyan College	
List of Contributors	326
Index	330

PREFACE

This book is for two kinds of readers of literature. First, it is for those students, teachers, and scholars within the contemporary university and college world who want to espouse a Christian perspective in their academic work, but who have felt embattled and unnerved by difficult encounters, anticipated or actual, with what they perceive to be a radically secularized environment. Second, it is for those, Christian or not, who are interested in what Christian voices might have to say in dialogue with contemporary literary theories. Of course these two kinds of reader may be united in the same person; if so, we hope that this volume will be doubly stimulating, productive, and encouraging for you.

It is our experience that there is a new place for Christian entrées on the Smorgasbord presented by the academy under postmodernity, and that, contrary to the fears of many conservative Christians, there are often tasty, frequently tantalizing, and sometimes edifying dishes to be concocted which relate various postmodern theorizations with Christian approaches to literature—in fact that the formulations of the first can season the convictions of the second. We contend that both the pragmatism and the nonfoundational nature of the contemporary academy offer opportunities, unprecedented in the last hundred years, for Christian scholars to contribute distinctively to current debate.

A number of the papers collected here were presented in preliminary form in Christian-identified sessions within wider professional conferences in the last few years—specifically, at ACCUTE (Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English) conferences in Canada and at NEMLA (Northeast Modern Language Association) conventions in the United States. Not only were the conference sessions given space and well received, but also, at one conference, the organizing committee encouraged the session's conveners to arrange more such sessions in the future, on the basis that "these are voices that also need to be heard." We have therefore felt prompted to make these materials more widely available, particularly in the virtual absence of much other scholarship of a similar type. We seem continually to meet up with Christians from a wide diversity of backgrounds and at various levels of literary scholarship who feel oppressed and discouraged about the possibility of having anything to say within and beyond the discourses of postmodernity. It is because we have found it possible to speak that we want others to overhear the conversations. About half the papers included here have been specially written

for this volume, and the enthusiasm and commitment of these contributors to the project have been a further confirmation of its timeliness.

Our thanks are due to the organizers of several Christian conferences and a number of individuals who have encouraged us to pursue this project. I am particularly grateful to the Pew Evangelical Scholars Foundation for a 1998 Research Fellowship which, though its primary focus for me was elsewhere, nevertheless provided the stimulus and some initial time and resources to begin to get the *Smorgasbord* strategically set up; to Redeemer University College for a grant in the summer of 2000 which enabled me to acquire the services of an efficient and enthusiastic graduate student, Jane Hogeterp-Koopman, as my first editorial assistant; and to the funding made available by SSHRCC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) through two Aid to Small Universities Grants at Redeemer UC, in 1999-2002 and 2002-2005, which enabled me to keep Jane on board a little longer, to travel to present papers, and to meet with potential participants to the *Smorgasbord*. And in the final sprint, I have been very grateful for a SSHRCC Institutional Grant and further funding through Redeemer UC, which have enabled me to employ as editorial assistant Angela Bick, whose careful reading, clarity of thought, and thoroughness in editorial work have been nothing less than a Godsend.

Our thanks are warmly extended to all those readers, colleagues, and correspondents who have acted as peer reviewers and general commentators on the papers in this project and on the project itself as it has progressed. The virtues of the resulting volume have been much strengthened by their help; the faults are our own responsibility. It would be remiss of us at this point not also to thank the contributors themselves, many of whom have hung in with the project and encouraged us through the lean times when we really wondered if this volume would ever see the light of day. And, most of all, my personal thanks to my husband John, whose patience, understanding and support along the road that I was foolhardy enough to take have made all the difference.

Deborah C. Bowen
March 2007

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editor and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission granted to reproduce the copyright material in this book:

Chapter Four: Excerpt from Part III of “Little Gidding” in *FOUR QUARTETS*, copyright 1942 by T.S. Eliot and renewed 1970 by Esme Valerie Eliot, reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Inc.

Chapter Eight: *A GRIEF OBSERVED* by C.S. Lewis copyright © C.S. Lewis Pte. Ltd. 1961. Extract reprinted by permission (world rights excluding the UK) and Faber and Faber Publishers Ltd. (UK rights).

Chapter Ten: *WHITE NOISE* by Don DeLillo. Copyright © 1984, 1985 by Don DeLillo. Used by permission of the Wallace Literary Agency, Inc.

Chapter Eleven: Excerpted from *Kiss of the Fur Queen* by Tomson Highway. Copyright © Tomson Highway 1998. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday Canada.

Chapter Twelve: An earlier version of this paper was originally published as part of the author's M.A. Thesis at the University of Alberta (1997).

Chapter Thirteen: This paper appeared, in a slightly different form, as “Beyond the binary: re-inscribing cultural identity (or the locations of culture) in the literature of the Mennonites” in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* LXXII.4 (October 1998): 491-501. Used with permission of the *Review*.

Chapter Fourteen: Excerpts from *THE COMPLETE STORIES* by Flannery O'Connor. Copyright © 1971 by the Estate of Mary Flannery O'Connor. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.

Chapter Fifteen: This paper appeared, in a somewhat different form, as “A Christian epistemology of postmodern realist fiction: Rushdie, Winterson, and the historical imperative,” in Selected Papers of the 1998 Northeast Regional Meeting of the Conference on Christianity and Literature, collected under the title *On the Eve of a New Millennium: Belief and Unbelief as Expressed in*

Literature, Philosophy, Theology and the Visual Arts (Saint Anselm College Press, Manchester, NH, 1999), pp. 24-30. Used with permission of the Press.

Chapter Eighteen: “Chanteuse” and “Difference” from *My Alexandria*. Copyright © 1995 by Mark Doty. Used with permission of the poet and the University of Illinois Press. “Tiara” from *Bethlehem in Broad Daylight* by Mark Doty. Reprinted by permission of David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc. Copyright © 1991 by Mark Doty. “Charlie” from *Turtle Swan* by Mark Doty. Reprinted by permission of David R. Godine, Publisher, Inc. Copyright © 1987 by Mark Doty.

Chapter Nineteen: “Strange Waters” written by Bruce Cockburn © 1997 Golden Mountain Music Corp. (SOCAN) Used by permission.

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The editor apologizes for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful to be notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

INTRODUCTION

DEBORAH C. BOWEN,
REDEEMER UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

Alarm and despondency

Among those from traditional monotheistic faith-communities, the most common responses to the term “postmodernity” seem still to be fear, anxiety, and a sense of being embattled by an alien culture. The label “postmodern” signals extreme relativism, the demolishing of traditional structures and value-systems, a loss of clear boundaries, whether social, psychological, moral, or spiritual, and an exaltation of the narcissistic consumption-culture of the image. Roger Lundin, Professor of English at Wheaton College, pointed out a few years ago in an article in *Books and Culture* that several contemporary Christian critiques talk about postmodernity apocalyptically, in terms of cultural crisis, decline, and demolition (“Toasting”).

How to define "postmodernity"?

Perhaps it may be helpful to begin by trying to determine just what we mean by using the term “postmodernity.” We may usefully focus on five interrelated characteristics:

1. In *material* terms, postmodernity names the age of Information Technology and global markets for the economic imperialism of Western capitalism. The prefix “post” implies both a coming after and perhaps a distinction from the modernity that preceded it; however, some theorists, like Fredric Jameson, argue that, at least in a material sense, there is no seismic shift but rather an intensification of the model of capitalism under modernity. Insofar as there are material distinctives to this periodization of late-twentieth-century western culture, they might be said to revolve around a democratization and homogenizing of culture through the ubiquitous power of the mass media, living awkwardly alongside a growing consciousness of the rights, obligations and dilemmas of citizenship in a world of diverse and often competing nationhoods.

2. In *philosophical* terms, postmodernity has been marked by an intensified epistemological emphasis, evident even at this level of mass awareness, on perspectivalism. This is the claim that reality cannot be known as it is in itself, but only as it appears to us humans, and the related view that our claims to knowledge unavoidably reflect our particular perspectives as members of different interpretive communities.

3. In *narrative* terms, postmodernism, the cultural face of postmodernity, has been particularly marked by what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, speaking broadly of a loss of faith in the traditional underpinnings of social formations, has famously called “incredulity toward metanarrative” (xxiv). This incredulity follows from the notion of perspectivalism: how can any one story tell the truth for more than its own community? But it also stems from the perception that such narratives are “cultural explanations that silence others” (Spivak 33), because they have been used as tools of oppression and exclusionary cultural legitimization.

4. From a *semiotic* perspective, postmodernity has created a cultural environment which emphasizes the conventional nature of texts and images. This stems from perspectivalism's necessary emphasis on the centrality of hermeneutics, learning to “read” the world, and from the dictum of semiotics and structuralist linguistics that meaning is defined only by difference. The Marxist theory of use and exchange-value is supplemented by sociologist Jean Baudrillard's theory of “sign-value,” the symbolic meaning of an object, for which the consumer buys it. Thus we have a culture in which we accept and, indeed, value a substitution of the “simulacrum” for the real.

5. From a *political* perspective, a recognition of power-differentials in truth-claims has an ethico-political purchase, particularly in relation to the rights of racial minorities, feminisms, and postcolonial concerns. Ethics requires that, under these conditions, some of the more abstruse claims of poststructuralist theory about the making of meanings must be moderated: as one South African postcolonial theorist has put it, “Undecidability, multiple and endless possibilities of meaning . . . have no place in a context of real political urgency, where there is a need not for endless self-reflexivity but for definite decisions to be made” (Carusi 101). In this context, to the surprise of many Christians and other traditionalists, what may emerge is that “[t]here are no rules but the old rules”—this is Gayatri Spivak, quoting Jacques Derrida; and there is need then for at least a “strategic essentialism”—“you pick up the universal that will give you the power to fight against the other side” (Spivak 21, 12).

As is already apparent from this brief summary, there are fault-lines within the very project of postmodernity that must render its staying-power limited. Indeed, many would argue that postmodernity is no longer a useful term, precisely because the conflicts within it have become the focus of attention.

They might point in particular to the conflict between postmodernism and postcolonialism, the former discourse, largely of the West as traditionally conceived, declaring the death of the author and affirming the culturally-based and indeterminate nature of all subjectivities, the latter, largely of the South and East, demanding that its authors finally be heard and its subjects finally be recognized. In the chapters that follow, this tension will be acknowledged both tacitly and overtly, and the relationship between the material and hermeneutical conditions of postmodernity will be explored.

Challenges and celebrations

It is true that for a while in recent years a Christian approach to literary criticism had become, at any rate from the conference platform and in the public university classroom, one of the least respected minority positions. Sensing ridicule as much for metaphysical logocentric presuppositions as for apparently patriarchal sympathies, the Christian critic felt particularly hard-pressed to maintain a credible voice in a postmodern flux that validates trace over pretensions to Truth and absence over intimations of presence. To adhere to notions of God's immanent presence and divine intervention in the world might be considered intellectually dishonest and linguistically naïve, if not psychologically suspect. Faced with the question of how to sing in a strange land, the Christian critic became the dispossessed. No-one wanted to identify with, or even give airtime to, the erstwhile colonizer, the relic of empire, least of all of an empire which required of you the submission of your soul as well as your body. In any case, neither you nor your soul, so the story goes, is more than the construction of a particular epistemic configuration.

However, it is possible for the Christian to read the postmodern turn as a God-given change of paradigm, from modernity's privileging of reason, progress, individuality and mastery over the environment, to that face of postmodernity which is interested in community and global unity in diversity, epistemological humility, and environmental responsibility. In fact, moving from concern with bureaucracy and hierarchy to concern with democracy and cultural engagement may provide a fresh perspective for recognizing the spiritual dimensions of everyday life. Theologians and church workers as varied as Dave Tomlinson in U.K. (*The Post Evangelical*, 1995) and Mike Riddell in Australia (*Threshold of the Future: Reforming the Church in the Post-Christian West*, 1998) as well as, in the U.S., Brian McLaren (*A New Kind of Christian*, 2001) and Leonard Sweet (*The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, 2003) and, in Canada, writers from J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh (*Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*, 1995) to Bruxy Cavey (*The End of Religion: An Introduction to the Subversive*

Spirituality of Jesus, 2005), have taken a more positive view of the postmodern as offering rich opportunities for fresh enactments and experiences of Christian faith. In the academic realm these possibilities also obtain. An approach like that of the Radical Orthodoxy movement in theology and philosophy, while critical of both humanism and postmodernism, nevertheless demonstrates a postmodern methodology which “mingles exegesis, cultural reflection, and philosophy in a complex but coherently executed collage” and a postmodern critique of modernity, embracing a “celebration of bodies, art, language, sexual and political union” that is “rooted in participatory philosophy and incarnational theology” (*Radical Orthodoxy* 2, 4). The present collection of papers will suggest that, for literary scholars and critics too, the undoubted challenges of postmodernity constitute unprecedented opportunities for Christian engagement, and even celebration, and this for two main reasons.

First, a living belief in God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer leads, both logically and intuitively, not to a fear of culture, but to an expectation of the discovery of God constantly and creatively at work in these cultural aspects of the divinely-made world. And second, such a belief anticipates the human need for some kind of universal in order to account for and legitimize ethico-political imperatives. In fact some Christians and other traditionalists find it possible to argue that the burning concerns of postmodernity are fundamentally ethical: “Although couched in terms that are linguistic and epistemological, at its root postmodern suspicion is ethical. The postmodern attitude turns our heads to see those who have been marginalized and oppressed by social institutions blinded by their own security and false understanding” (Padgett 132). And as David Lyon puts it in *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times* (2000), “Christian insistence on universals that embrace particularity . . . offers a cogent alternative to both modern minimizing of particularity and postmodern doubts about universality” (205).

It is valuable to consider how these opportunities for Christian engagement interact with the five characteristics of postmodernity identified above—the material, the philosophical, the narrative, the semiotic, and the political.

1. Obviously Christians can and do make use of the powerful apparatus of capitalism to proclaim their message. This kind of materialist intervention needs careful critique if it is not simply to be complicit with market forces that Christians ought more properly to expose. Liam Corley’s paper in this volume goes some way towards describing the dangers for the church of naïvely buying into covert ideological power-structures. But it is certainly the case that the global scope of IT, the mass media, rapid transportation and communication systems, and indeed the ready availability of information about global issues of all kinds provide Christians with both unprecedented opportunities and

unprecedented responsibilities for living out the Christian gospel of peace and forgiveness in a needy world.

2. The related “doctrines” of perspectivalism and pluralism, when honestly applied by the academy, provide a useful corrective to the dangers of Christian or theistic arrogance: we are not God, and our thoughts are not God’s thoughts. They also offer a new forum in which Christian voices may be heard: we are called to *proclaim* the truth, says Lundin, even when we cannot *prove* it (*Culture* 249). Merold Westphal, Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, echoes Aquinas’s distinction between subjective and immutable truth when he puts it this way: “The truth (small ‘t’) is that there is Truth (capital ‘T’), but we are not in possession of it” (“Appropriating” 25). The Smorgasbord of postmodernity can offer the Christian academic particular opportunities to celebrate belief in common grace within the structures of the academy.

3. The tendencies in postmodern narratives to destabilize traditional binaristic categories (white/black, male/female, cultured/primitive, even right/wrong) must push Christians in academia, as elsewhere, to re-examine culturally ossified positions of our own, and to consider how to retell and reinhabit the Christian story within new cultural contexts. Westphal argues that a postmodern critique legitimately identifies areas that are problematic, like that, for instance, of learning to see oneself and one’s culture as a particular moment in the historical process (*B&C* 25).

4. The postmodern culture of images challenges Christians to reassess what it means to be embodying the image of God in academia, both in our academic work and in our personal and communal interactions. The postmodern overdetermination of appearances is a renewed call to Christians to “walk the talk,” to demonstrate personal accountability and validity. George Marsden, Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, talks of the necessity of *embodying* Christ in both of the two communities to which scholars of religious faith centrally belong: the church and the academy.¹

5. The notion of self-in-community-with-Other is congruent with a Christian understanding of politico-ethical concerns, but reappears in postmodern guise.

¹ Some of us have found a humble instance of how this necessity might be played out, by working to counteract the environment of the academic “surface” in the organizing of conference sessions. Attempts to do this have involved such small moves as sending each participant in a session the papers of the other participants ahead-of-time; meeting for dinner before the session, so that the participants would be aware of one another as people; and afterwards, sending notes of appreciation, if possible with information about possible journal publication or future sessions. Of course such gestures are not inherently or exclusively Christian, but for the Christian they are consistent with his or her belief in the ultimate value in God’s sight of each individual.

Christians will work on the premise that the “Other” includes not only neighbour and fellow human being, but also, and supremely, God. Moreover, the Christian faith in God's ordering and sustaining power throughout the universe, together with belief in humankind's fallenness, offers a sound basis which is unavailable elsewhere for investigation of ethical and sociopolitical concerns. The notion of a defining Good or transhistorical grounding has traditionally been seen, and not only by Christians, as a necessary underpinning for any ethical system. Does postmodern theory provide viable alternatives to such traditional expectations? In the “ethical turn” that is especially evident in postcolonial and global literature, where “The Empire Writes Back,” as one popular text of postcolonial literary criticism has put it, particular emphasis is placed on moral responsibility, caring for the Other, and sharing power justly. Here the current honouring of the Unknown God of “strategic essentialism” witnesses to the pragmatic necessity for a moral base. As one Christian critic has acknowledged, from what can seem to be the moral morass generated by postmodernity “[w]e turn to postcolonial literature for a model of engaged moral sensibility, and there we find presented those authentic experiences that overcome solipsism as they awaken a search for justice” (Block 46).

Retelling the Christian story

This book is composed of papers by a group of scholars—professors at various stages of their careers, graduate students, and a couple of independent scholars—who are concerned about and, indeed, intrigued by the possibility of Christian voices in the wider literary academy. Many of us attempt in these papers to foreground both our faith perspective and our theoretical allegiances or borrowings. As contributors we are an eclectic group, not unified by denomination or liturgical preference, nor by our approaches to and readings of literary theory, nor even by the formulations we might use to express our Christian convictions or commitment; our voices are our own, and should not necessarily be taken to represent the views of the institutions, educational or religious, with which we are associated. For the time being, we have felt it to be sufficient, in an ostensibly post-Christian culture, that we all identify ourselves as Christian, and that we have all been prepared to work with the clear focus of speaking in the same breath about Christianity in relation to literature under, and arguably after, postmodernity.

The revisiting of the Christian story in new cultural contexts is, then, a subtext throughout this book. Sometimes it will be clearly evident; at other times it will be more like a subterranean stream. Part I of the book is called “Situating Literature: Constructing Theories.” Here we look at various ways in which the gods of contemporary theory might be challenged, and the

assumptions behind contemporary theoretical perspectives might be destabilized and questioned, if we are to take into serious account not only our faith commitments but also the pragmatic demands of historical context. The aim of this section is to set the context for more in-depth readings of specific theorists in Part II and readings of specific texts in Part III; the papers in Part I, therefore, consider the construction of theories from a range of perspectives, philosophical, historical, theological, psychological and material.

The first paper, by Gregory A. Clark, situates the whole project of “theory” at the outset of our collection within a reading of faith informed by a radical epistemological humility: Clark, who is Professor of Philosophy at North Park University, offers a Levinasian reading of Augustine, which calls for a recognition of the supremacy of love over theory, and of divinity over human systematizations. In the second paper, Daniel Knauss suggests that post-modern concerns are productively prefigured in pre-modern ones: Knauss argues that Christian Humanism in the Renaissance anticipates, though in more balanced fashion, much of the postmodernist critique of the self-sufficiencies of modernity. The paper by a second Greg Clarke (G. J., the one contributor from outside North America) proposes that another point of dialogue within postmodernity is provided by biblical eschatology, in which “the End” is perceived not as entirely closed but as personal and participatory. Clarke offers a wide-ranging exploration of the eschatological development of twentieth century literature and philosophy, and traces the transformation of eschatology from theology through sociology, literary theory and linguistics to politics and gender theory. By emphasizing the perennial human interest in hope, judgment, and the future of the world, Clarke argues for the importance of an eschatological Christian poetic.

The notion of dialogue is basic to our collection. Our intent is not to privilege one structure or model over another as a closed system, but rather to assert the necessity for and value of dialogue between different systems, and between differing participants within a single system, all contextualized within the love of God. Thus, in the last two papers of Part I the challenge to look closely at theoretical discourse is turned on ways in which Christian reading practices may be misperceived or inadequately theorized, and finally on Christian systems themselves. First, Randall VanderMey uses insights from psychoanalytic theory to challenge the dichotomy between faith and desire which is evident in literary critique, both Christian and otherwise. Arguing that faith is a mode of desire, VanderMey suggests that the work of resolving the friction between this desire and other desires, “as opposed to evading, denying, or transcending it,” is an ethical process; a recognition of reading and writing through desire, then, provides a basis for an ethical approach to literature. Second, Liam Corley addresses the similarities between traditional Christian

doctrines of scripture, sin and human nature and certain postmodern/neo-Marxist descriptions of how people are constructed by the stories and ideologies of culture. Corley argues that ideological analysis can unmask systems of complicity both inside and outside the church: “the disjunction between espoused values and actual values is a form of false consciousness that has captured as many Christians as it has American consumers.”

The papers in Part II of this book are collected under the title “Engaging the Dialogue: Reading Theorists.” Of course the papers in Part I have already involved readings of Althusser, Foucault, Ricoeur, and Derrida, among others. But the aim of this second part of the collection is that each paper enter into dialogue with one specific theorist whose formulations may offer both particular challenges and particular insights for Christian scholars. Some of the issues raised in these papers are overtly religious: the Mosaic Law, the incarnation, sacrifice, prayer. Others are more general human issues: violence, cultural difference, the problems of ethics in relation to the body. The first three papers all engage in sympathetic ways with the ethics of deconstruction. In the opening paper, Joel Westerholm takes a brief but sympathetic look at particularly the later work of Jacques Derrida. He suggests that Derrida may enable Christians to recognize the dangers of “centering” God in such a way that we reduce the deity to divinely-created structures, and of keeping to a code in such a way that it restricts us from truly ethical perspectives. The paper that follows, by Jens Zimmermann and Norman Klassen, takes further the investigation of deconstruction-as-ethics by introducing the work of a young British scholar, Simon Critchley, whose “patient, detailed commentary” on writers such as Levinas and Derrida challenges any easy Christianizing of their thought, but also leaves open the potential for a reworked notion of metaphysics which would provide grounds not merely for the ethical demand that Critchley applauds but also for the ethical assent that eludes him. And then, in what for many Christian readers will be a startling move, Ada Jaarsma’s paper on Luce Irigaray reads the story of the Annunciation and Incarnation through sexual difference, suggesting, with Derrida, that “deconstruction performs an act of love.” Jaarsma asks whether opening up the tropes at work in the gospel stories, rather than posing a threat to faith, may actually allow the reader a fuller awareness of gospel richness, enabling him or her “to glimpse the possibility of justice and love and unimaginable openness to the other in the very working out of language itself.”

Two theorists who must be recognized as more or less directly implicated in Christian faith are Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel de Certeau. The case of Bakhtin is intriguing, insofar as his faith commitments have only recently become clearer, occluded till now by the problems of translation and of an official anti-Christianity in the Soviet Union which prevented open affiliation. In her

consideration of Bakhtin, Julie Rak looks at his twin commitments to materialist thinking and an ethical aesthetic of language. Rak argues that Bakhtin's notion of dialogism is close to the Christian concept of "logos," "an embodied concept that links language and its social context to the sacred." Thus, suggests Rak, Bakhtin can offer a way for Christian scholars to critique disembodied or profane universalist discourse through a fresh reading of Christ as the embodied Word. In his consideration of the work of the Jesuit theorist Michel de Certeau, on the other hand, Tamas Dobozy shows de Certeau's emphasis to be on the notion of God as the *disembodied*, in a "vital dismemberment" that scatters any words about Him into the "always beyond." De Certeau is read here as a poststructuralist in the tradition of the Christian mystics: Dobozy suggests that de Certeau's critical practice, not propositional but processual, "is everywhere animated as prayer," in the sense that prayer presents a language forever postponing closure but always producing a series of texts that signal "the remains of God." Thus, argues Dobozy, de Certeau's texts consciously "enact the drama of contemporary faith."

The last paper in Part II proposes a specific mode of socially active involvement in this drama. Jane Hogeterp-Koopman considers here the responsibility of the Christian storyteller faced with the brokenness wrought by a colonial inheritance. She argues that the model of cultural hybridity articulated by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, though framed for the colonized, is available to the heirs of the colonizers as a productive method for entering dialogue. She thus offers a thought-provoking framework for attempting to redress the often shameful legacy of cultural supremacy. In its practical applications, Koopman's paper also provides a bridge to Part III of this volume.

In Part III, we have collected a variety of papers, some brief and some more sustained, in which a lively Christian sensibility, coarticulated with or against contemporary literary theories of different kinds, is productive of substantive analysis of literary texts. Thus we have entitled this section "Telling the Old, Old Story Anew: Reading Texts." The majority of these texts were written within the last hundred years, though the first paper breaks with this pattern for a specific purpose: Shiao Chong's essay shows how necessary is a critical self-awareness of paradigmatic criteria. At the same time as offering an approach to the poetry of George Herbert, Chong provides an overview of the development of the subjectivity of the critic over the last several centuries. Having demonstrated how different modes of constructing the self affect reading practices, Chong goes on to argue for a biblical view of the self as the most appropriate critical paradigm for a reading of Herbert, and places within this paradigm Bakhtin as a productive and arguably postmodern instance. Hildi Froese Tiessen explores a further limitation imposed by critical apparatus. Her area of interest is Mennonite literature; she argues that the dominant trope in

such literature in the last forty years, the struggle between the nonconformist writer and the traditional community, has been an unhelpfully constraining one in discourse about Mennonite writing, and has blinded readers to the mediating and fluid “third space” presented in the texts themselves.

There follow two papers which give readings of specific fictional texts, describing and assessing their attempts to negotiate the “real” under the sign of the ethical. Irwin Streight applies a “semiotheological” method to one well-known and one little-regarded story by Catholic writer Flannery O’Connor, arguing that certain overdeterminations in language signal the anagogical, and that a poststructuralist reading of text can be wed to a hermeneutic. Streight identifies the trope of syllepsis, the presence of two mutually incompatible meanings in a single word or sign, as demonstrating O’Connor’s particular way of expressing what she calls “a deeper kind of realism” which partakes of both the temporal and the spiritual. My own paper in this section considers two contemporary novels of “historiographic metafiction,” by Salman Rushdie and Jeanette Winterson. I suggest that these authors are engaged in a responsive/responsible mode of realism which, though uninterested in if not outright unsympathetic to Christian faith, is effectively paradigmatic of a Christian understanding of the givenness of the world as well as the necessarily provisional nature of our constructions of it.

The final three papers in this section of the collection give socially-engaged readings of poetry. Joel Westerholm advocates the necessity of “epistemic and ethical negotiations” with the voice of the Other in order to learn from him or her. A look at the ways in which Edward Brathwaite and Derek Walcott consider the ethics of Christian charity in the West Indian locations that they describe in their poetry teaches Westerholm to view his own faith’s ethical imperatives in a new and somber light. David Wright continues this exploration of the notion that “access to understanding is mediated by our various cultural positions.” He considers the poetry of Denise Levertov and Carolyn Forché, whom he distinguishes on the basis of Levertov’s Christian faith. He argues that, where both Levertov and Forché see the “poetry of witness” to political atrocity as an alternative to a personalized aesthetic or to political extremism, Forché’s lack of hope for rebuilding contrasts with Levertov’s Christian faith that moves her beyond despair to a sociopolitically engaged vision of functioning community. George Piggford’s paper is also politically valenced, but in the service of a differently oppressed group: Piggford suggests that the elegiac writing of gay poet Mark Doty is inspired by his grandmother’s “religion of images,” an extravagance of metaphor that tries to express “that which evades rationality: God’s grace.” Piggford relates Doty’s notion of extravagance to Levinas’s “excessiveness,” and thus brings our collection of papers full circle.

Finally, any Christian reading of literature will always and inevitably be related, either overtly or covertly, either easily or problematically, to the reading of the Christian's Ur-text, the Bible. It would be fair to say, in fact, that the major impetus in the nineteenth century behind the great growth of literary interpretation, and even the birth of literary criticism as we know it, came from the rapid and conflicted development of biblical hermeneutics. Thus it seems appropriate, in a volume committed to Christian readings of theory and literature, to conclude with an essay which looks with contemporary and critically-aware eyes at a classic and beloved text of biblical poetry. I am very grateful to J. Richard Middleton, well-known in the field of Old Testament scholarship and biblical hermeneutics, for agreeing to contribute this paper as the last word in our collection. Middleton's published work concerns itself particularly with the relevance and legitimacy of the biblical metanarrative in a postmodern world. His leanings are cross-disciplinary and narratively oriented; he works with intertexts both within biblical scholarship and from contemporary culture. His paper here on Psalm 23 demonstrates a reading of the postmodern turn in conjunction with his own necessary turn "from the simple naïveté of initial faith to the honest recognition of the backside of reality." He takes the reader on a journey from suspicion of the text to what Paul Ricoeur calls a "second naïveté"; this reading pays attention to the text's own voice, the psalmist's appeal to communal traditions, and his modelling of the freedom to indwell the ancient stories, at the same time as it allows for the vital importance of critical questioning and, ultimately, calls for a commitment to act in compassion as a necessary precursor to the revitalization of personal faith. In the process of his reading, Middleton considers not only biblical intertexts but also the contemporary and "wild" intertext of a lyric by Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn. The results of his reading are an affirmation of faith that pays attention both to his own subjectivity and to the alterity of the text, and as such provides a fitting conclusion to our investigation of the possibilities of postmodern practice in the light of Christian faith.

One further word to the reader, at the close of this introduction. While trying in this collection to touch on a number of the areas in contemporary literary scholarship that we consider strategic, we have perforce needed to be content with a selective rather than an encyclopaedic approach, and will no doubt be faulted as much for our omissions as for our inclusions. Our hope is that the papers in this volume will be sufficiently stimulating that others will be spurred to articulate a Christian approach to many of the areas that we have not touched. We hope too that it will be evident to the reader that the questions we are asking of the theories and texts that we taste from these platters on the Smorgasbord of the postmodern academy are not merely how they might reinforce or challenge our Christian commitments, but what God might be

revealing by common grace through new contextualizations of truth, responsibility, justice, and love. At the same time, we consider it to be the Smorgasbord that is “strategic” in the contemporary academy, rather than the “essentialism” of a grounded ethical base. We are concerned for the viability of literary criticism informed by a Christian world-view in a predominantly post-Christian context: how can a Christian critical position be legitimately productive in such a context? These papers demonstrate not only a belief in the value of formulating Christian perspectives within contemporary literary criticism, but also a sense of the generative power that such formulations can offer to readers whose desire is both to live out and to work in the faith that they profess.

Works Cited

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London & New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.
- Block, Ed. “Experience, Existence, and Mystery: Biblical Ideas of Justice in Postcolonial Fiction.” *Postcolonial Literature and the Biblical Call for Justice*. Ed. Susan VanZanten Gallagher. Jackson: U P of Mississippi, 1994. 34-47.
- Carusi, Annamaria. “Post, Post and Post. Or, Where is South African Literature in All This?” *Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism*. Ian Adam & Helen Tiffin, ed.s. Calgary: U of Calgary P, 1990. 95-108.
- Cavey, Bruxy. *The End of Religion: An Introduction to the Subversive Spirituality of Jesus*. Oakville, ON: Agora, 2005.
- Heie, Harold. “The Postmodern Opportunity: Christians in the Academy.” *Christian Scholar's Review* XXVI.2 (Winter 1996): 138-157.
- Hutcheon, Linda. “Circling the Downspout of Empire.” *Past the Last Post* 167-189.
- Ingraffia, Brian D. *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology: Vanquishing God's Shadow*. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1995.
- Jameson, Fredric. “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” 1984. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke U P, 1991. 1-54.
- Lundin, Roger. “Toasting the Eve of Destruction.” *Books and Culture* May/June 1997: 20-3.
- . *The Culture of Interpretation: Christian Faith and the Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1993.

- Lyon, David. *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Postmodern Times*. Cambridge, U.K.: Polity P, 2000.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. 1979. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington & Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: Minnesota U P, 1984.
- McLaren, Brian. *A New Kind of Christian*. San Francisco : Jossey Bass, 2001.
- Marsden, George M. *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1997. Rev. *Books & Culture* May/June 1997: 12-13.
- . “The Soul of the American University.” In *The Secularization of the Academy*. George M. Marsden & Bradley J. Longfield, ed.s. New York: Oxford U P, 1992. 38-41.
- Middleton, J. Richard, and Brian J. Walsh. *Truth is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity P, 1995.
- Milbank, John, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, ed.s. *Radical Orthodoxy: A new theology*. London & New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Padgett, Alan. “Christianity and Postmodernity.” *Christian Scholar's Review* XXVI.2 (Winter 1996): 129-32.
- Spivak, Gayatri. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Ed. Sarah Harasym. New York & London: Routledge, 1990.
- Sweet, Leonard. *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Westphal, Merold. “Appropriating the Atheists.” Interview with Gary J. Percesepe. *Books and Culture* May/June 1997: 24-5.

PART I

SITUATING LITERATURE: CONSTRUCTING THEORIES

CHAPTER ONE

“LATE HAVE I LOVED YOU”: FROM HERMENEUTICS TO LOVE IN AUGUSTINE’S *CONFESSIONS*ⁱ

GREGORY A. CLARK, NORTH PARK UNIVERSITY

Late have I loved you,
beauty so old and so new:
late have I loved you.
—*Confessions* 10. xxvii.38

According to the received account of meaning, meaning is the relation between the particular and the universal. The particular and the universal are often called by different names, of course. For phenomenology, they are the part and the whole, or the phenomenon and its horizon; for linguistics, the word or sentence and the structure of the language. In a variety of arenas, meaning is the relation between the object and its context.

If the reader thinks about the meaning of the above statement, that is, as the reader relates the statement to a variety of other statements and fields of inquiry, the reader may sense exhilaration, even power. The statement may appear as a revelation, for it provides a credible theory of everything meaningful—and so of everything. Nothing meaningful escapes its reach—not written or spoken words, not events or actions, not God’s own self. The general theory of meaning makes it possible to find meaning in the particular instances.ⁱⁱ Even in its most modest form, in hermeneutics, this theory of meaning retains its universal scope. Here, the revelation does not come from or concern knowledge of the gods; rather, hermeneutics is a statement of the human situation. Those who claim to step outside of hermeneutics deny their participation in the human situation. “We are,” hermeneutists say, “finite, after all. We cannot get some God’s eye perspective. Those who think that they can escape the hermeneutical account of understanding are forgetful of their own finitude.” Hermeneutists sketch the outlines of our finitude and the hermeneutical situation in terms that are as formal and universal as possible. This formality and universality provide the basis for the claim that hermeneutics

forms an ultimate horizon, beyond which we cannot go. Hermeneutics itself, then, forms a pre-understanding of understanding into which we have tried to fit all of our various disciplines. Against this pre-understanding, no evidence can count. Any such "evidence" will itself be the product of a different view of understanding and can be reinterpreted to conform to a hermeneutical understanding of understanding. Any violation of their theory of meaning will appear not as a refutation, but as meaningless.

With these last negative statements, the reader's initial exhilaration may turn to consternation. The theory of meaning, in claiming to embrace everything meaningful, may have overextended its reach. There is a problem if any theory has protected itself in principle from any and all objections and limits. The claim that one can never escape the hermeneutical circle begins to sound like the Hotel California—"you can check out any time you like, but you can never leave."

Indeed, the received account of the hermeneutical project can be contested on any number of fronts,ⁱⁱⁱ though not by a simple return to positivism. The purely formal and universal account is neither formal nor universal—not purely. It is, rather, laden with particular content, content that has been generalized as far as our own creativity permits—and further than the subject matter would allow. (This is not to deny that it is genuinely generalizable within limits.) Consequently, the hermeneutists' account is surely not the only possible account of human understanding or of human finitude, neither are human understanding and human finitude the only possible starting points for an account of meaning. The interesting move, then, is to show where the hermeneutists' vision comes up against its limits. This would be to show the place where notions like "horizon," "worldview," or "history" reach the end of their legitimacy.

Here Augustine can help us. While I cannot show how he could lead us out of hermeneutics, he does illustrate how something outside hermeneutics can get to us. In "getting to us" it provides a different kind of understanding, if "understanding" it still be. "It" is love. Love opens a door that breaks through the hermeneutical circle. Our task in the first section below, then, is to sketch as clearly as possible the nature of hermeneutical inquiry. In the second section, I will examine Augustine's description of his search for God in Book X of the *Confessions*. This will allow us to confront hermeneutics with the "phenomenon" of love and show that Augustine's search has the structure of love rather than of hermeneutical inquiry.

Hermeneutics: From Greece to Germany

As Augustine indicates in his opening and most famous paragraph, the *Confessions* is a search for God: "Our heart is restless until it rests in you." In Book X, however, the search reaches its high point both from a literary and a

philosophical standpoint. With Book X, the nature of this search comes to the fore. As if it were not clear enough through Books I-IX, in Book X it seems clear that the search for God is a matter of asking questions.

It seems reasonable (to philosophers, theoreticians, and hermeneutists) to look first at the nature of questioning itself, which provides the form for the search. What, then, does it mean to ask a question? I will first examine the structure of the question, as it is understood by the hermeneutical project. Here, I take Heidegger's *Being and Time* as offering the paradigm of the hermeneutical analysis of the question. I can then show in what sense Augustine's questioning in his search for God fails to fit the hermeneutical analysis.

The Structure of the Question

At first glance, my thesis appears implausible. First, Augustine, as a former teacher of rhetoric and as author of *On Christian Doctrine* and numerous commentaries and sermons, is keenly aware of the need for interpretation and for asking questions. It is, after all, part of the human condition that we must use language to communicate what is not directly accessible to others, and language does not do its job transparently. Further, Augustine's insights are one of the primary inspirations for Heidegger's *Being and Time*. It is not surprising, then, that Augustine's search for God seems to be adequately captured by the analysis of the question provided by Heidegger, making Augustine's search hermeneutical, after all. Let me sketch the outlines of Heidegger's analysis and show how they might apply to Augustine's own questioning.

In *Being and Time* (§ 2), Heidegger attempts to isolate the formal structure of the question. The model of questioning for Heidegger is the courtroom, where a lawyer interrogates a witness. By way of illustration, I will use Atticus Finch's questioning of Mr. Ewell in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Heidegger says that there are three structural elements in asking a question. First, there is "that which is interrogated." Atticus Finch questions Mr. Ewell, and from Mr. Ewell he can find answers that he could find from no one else. Correspondingly, Heidegger questions *Dasein*. Second, there is "that which is asked about." Thus, Atticus Finch asks Mr. Ewell if he can write his name. Heidegger's parallel question asks about Being. Finally, there is "that which is to be found out by the asking." This may not be obvious. Mr. Ewell may think that Atticus Finch is merely questioning his intelligence or his literacy. However, what Atticus is after is a demonstration that Mr. Ewell is left-handed. Heidegger wants to find the *meaning* of Being.

This general structure captures (or reflects) the nature of questioning in Book X of the *Confessions*. "What is to be found out" by Augustine's questioning (Heidegger's third element) is who God is. "May I know you, who know me. May