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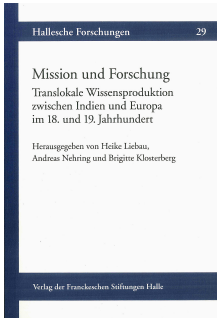
Book Reviews

Mission und Forschung: Translokale Wissensproduktion zwischen Indien und Europa im 18. & 19. Jahrhundert, edited by Heike Liebau, Andreas Nehring, and Brigitte Klosterberg



Hallesche Forschungen 29 | Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2010 | xv + 303 pages | ISBN: 978-3-447-06392-0 (softback) €48.00

This volume emerges from a conference held in 2006 to mark the tercentenary of the first Protestant mission in India. The conference saw the release of a major three-volume work on the history of the mission,[1] and an exhibition catalogue,[2] both of which include the work of a number of the contributors here. Brigitte Klosterberg ("Forschungen zur Dänisch-Halleschen Mission: Schwerpunkte und Perspektiven"), in her contribution to this volume, provides a concise and useful survey of these and other works published to mark the anniversary, and of other recent scholarship on the mission. The emphasis of the volume under review is on the contributions of missionaries and their Tamil interlocutors to the development of science and scholarship in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and to a shift in European views of the non-European world. It seeks thereby also to contribute to the debate over whether the modern missionary enterprise is better thought of as a child of, or a reaction to, the Enlightenment. For the editors, however, the Enlightenment is not to be seen as a European event, brought by missionaries and colonial administrators to other continents, but rather a multidimensional process of exchange between (here) India and Europe, in which missionaries played a key role as intermediaries for information flows in both directions.

The first section of the book, "Aneignen, Ordnen, Speichern," opens with Wolfgang Reinhard's survey of the mutual perceptions of Europeans and Asians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ("Bornierter Blick? Gegenseitige Wahrnehmung von Europäern und Asiaten im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert"). The evidence offered for Asian views of Europeans is lim-

[1] Andreas Gross, Y. Vincent Kumaradoss, and Heike Liebau, eds., *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, 3 vols. (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen zu Halle, 2006).

[2] Heike Liebau, ed., *Geliebtes Europa // Ostindische Welt: 300 Jahre Interkultureller Dialog Im Spiegel Der Dänisch-Hallesche Mission* (Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 2006).

ited to some comments on Christianity from the letters published early in the mission's history as the "Malabarian Correspondence." The survey of European views of Asia draws on a much wider range of sources. While acknowledging that missionary views of Asian religions were restricted by their western intellectual heritage, Reinhard argues that missionaries—whose vocation forced them into an intensive engagement with Asian cultures—were far less blinkered than the European elites who made use of their reports (15), and no more blinkered than Asians themselves (19).

Andreas Nehring ("Missionsstrategie und Forschungsdrang. Anmerkungen zu Mission und Wissenschaft in Südindien im 19. Jahrhundert") provides some fascinating examples of exchanges between learned Tamils and missionaries in the late eighteenth century. The missionary Christoph Samuel John describes discussing astronomy with Tamils familiar with the most recent European discoveries, but also recounts agreeing with Tamils about the inadequacy of their representation in Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* (1782). Nehring laments that contemporary mission history has a much more restricted view of its subject matter—too heavily focussed on individual biography and the life of Christians whose conversion in some sense removes them from their original cultural context. He argues that mission history must seek to recover the kind of "border-crossing" interests which drove missionary research in the eighteenth century.

The primary sources for most of the research reported in this volume are the mission archives at the Francke Foundations in Halle. In the final essay of the first part, "Die Erschließung der Quellen zur Dänisch-Halleschen Mission im Studienzentrum August Hermann Francke der Franckeschen Stiftungen," Jürgen Gröschl briefly outlines the history of the archives, to which the much smaller archive of the Leipzig Mission was added in 2006. In preparation for the mission's tercentenary, the entire archive—consisting of some 35,000 documents—was systematically recatalogued. In the process, a number of "lost" manuscripts were recovered, among them a text on Tamil medicine, summarized and discussed here in a short chapter by Josef N. Neumann ("Malabarischer Medicus—eine ethnomedizinisch-historische Quelle des frühen 18. Jahrhunderts"),[3] and a manuscript of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's *Genealogy of the Malabarian Gods* (1713). Two other complete manu-

[3] *Pace* Neumann (195), the author of the Tamil text on which this work was based cannot have been the mission's early translator, Aḷakappaṉ ("Aleppa"). The missionaries ascribe the text to a Brahmin, but Aḷakappaṉ was not a Brahmin.

scripts of the latter text are extant, one in Copenhagen and one—now also in Halle—from the Leipzig Mission archive. In his second contribution to the volume under review, "*Die Genealogie der Malabarischen Götter*—Handschriften und Drucke des religionsgeschichtlichen Hauptwerks von Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg," Gröschl meticulously reviews what is known of the transmission and circulation of the manuscripts of this text, which was not published until 1867, and concludes that the recovered, third manuscript is most likely the original version sent by Ziegenbalg to Halle in 1713.

The second section, "Berichten, Kommunizieren, Vernetzen," examines the networks in India and in Europe through which information was collected and disseminated. Ulrike Gleixner ("Expansive Frömmigkeit. Das hallische Netzwerk der Indienmission im 18. Jahrhundert") provides a preliminary report on a project examining the subscriber lists to the mission's primary publication, the periodical known as the *Hallesche Berichte*.[4] Gleixner argues that although August Hermann Francke established the periodical, it was his son Gotthilf August who was the true networker, systematically cultivating the subscribers on whose support the mission depended. She suggests also that what she calls the "chiliastic" nature of the Halle institutions—"In Halle hatte das Reich Gottes schon begonnen und sollte sich von hier aus über die ganze Welt verbreiten" (61)—played an important role in gaining support for the mission.

Rekha Kamath Rajan ("Der Beitrag der Dänisch-Halleschen Missionare zum europäischen Wissen über Indien im 18. Jahrhundertgerman") provides a similarly preliminary survey of the information in the *Hallesche Berichte* pertaining to the religion, sciences, culture, languages, and customs of the Tamils. While Rajan goes on to give a valuable account of the networks in India and in Europe through which this information was solicited and disseminated, it was inevitable—given the extent of the *Hallesche Berichte*—that her survey of the kind of information thus disseminated would be limited to a few examples, and even these few cannot be given the attention they deserve. The account, provided in 1737, of the supposed content of the Yajur Veda[5] is an interesting example of the missionaries responding to requests for information from "learned men in Europe" (96). The Vedas had been

[4] The first series was published in 108 irregular installments from 1710 to 1772. A second series, the *Neue Hallesche Berichte*, appeared in 95 installments from 1776 to 1748.

[5] The text "hat in der That mit dem Yajurveda nicht das Geringste zu thun." Albrecht Weber, "Ein angebliche Bearbeitung des Yajurveda," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 7 (1853): 236.

the object of learned speculation in Europe during the previous century, but this particular request may well have been prompted by the publication in 1734, in the Jesuit *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, of Jean Calmette's report that the Jesuits had supplied copies of the four Vedas to the royal library in Paris.[6] The letters from India in the *Lettres édifiantes* provide a direct counterpart to the *Hallesche Berichte*. Although fewer in number, the letters were written from the same region of India, by men with the same purpose, and were published in Europe for much the same reasons and over much the same period as those in the first series of the *Hallesche Berichte*. Both Rajan and Gleixner mention the *Lettres édifiantes*, but neither has the space to carry out any detailed comparison of the impact of the two periodicals on European knowledge of India. Both Gleixner (58) and Reinhard (14) make the fascinating, but unsubstantiated, claim that Francke borrowed from the *Lettres édifiantes* when establishing the *Hallesche Berichte*.

The remaining essay in the second section is Robert Eric Frykenberg's study of the missionaries' *dubashis* ("go-betweens") adapted from two chapters of his recent monumental history of Christianity in India. Frykenberg stresses, against the grain of much missionary hagiography, the importance of Indian agency in the development of Christianity in India ("Pietist Missionary *Dubashis* and their *Sishyas*: Conduits of Cross-Cultural Communication"). It is unfortunate that (perhaps because of the original format) references are not provided for many of the details described in the essay.

The articles in the third section of the volume ("Kartographie, Naturwissenschaften, Medizin") demonstrate that Nehring's challenge to contemporary mission historians to recover the breadth of early missionary scholarship is being taken up in some quarters. In addition to the article by Neumann on medicinal texts, already mentioned, there are further articles dealing with geography and cartography (Michael Mann, "Geografie in Wissenschaft und Unterricht: Die Glauchaer Anstalten zu Halle, die Missionare in Tranquebar und die Kartografie Indiens im 18. Jahrhundert"), and natural history (Brigitte Hoppe, "Von der Naturgeschichte zu den Naturwissenschaften—die Dänisch-Halleschen Missionare als Naturforscher in Indien vom 18. bis 19. Jahrhundert," and Hannelore Landsberg, "Eine Fischsammlung aus Tranquebar, die Berliner Gesellschaft Naturforschender Freunde und deren Mitglied Marcus Elieser Bloch"). Here too, the contributors underline the flow

[6] *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* 21 (1734): 455–57. The manuscripts appear in the catalogue of the royal library prepared by Étienne Fourmont, published in 1739.

of information in both directions. While, for example, the Halle missionaries (and their Jesuit rivals) provided the best early maps of south India, they also pressed Halle to print maps of the world with names in Tamil and Telugu characters for use in the mission schools. Although this enterprise foundered (on technical and financial grounds), the missions did put globes and maps in Roman script into use, and translated European geographical texts into Indian languages.

Devotion to scholarship as the means, and not merely a complement, to the evangelization of India is most closely associated with the missionary Christoph Samuel John and his collaborator Johann Peter Rottler. Karsten Hommel ("»Für solche [Theologen] wolle Gott seine Ost-Indische Kirche in Gnaden bewahren!« Physikotheologie und Dänisch-Englisch-Hallesche Mission"), outlines the "physico-theology" which underpinned their scientific and missionary work, and discusses their contemporary critics in the mission and the representation of their work in later mission historiography.[7]

The final section of the volume, "Gesellschaft, Religion, Sprache," consists of three essays on early Halle missionaries and three which extend well beyond the frame of the Tranquebar mission, into the nineteenth century and beyond. Gita Dharampal-Frick's essay ("Zur Frage des 'Kastensystems': Die Proto-Ethnografie Bartholomäus Ziegenbalgs und der vorkoloniale Diskurs über Indien") updating her earlier analyses of Ziegenbalg's writings on caste is followed by Gröschl's study of the manuscripts of his *magnum opus*, the *Genealogia der malabarischen Götter*. Adapa Satyanarayana ("Benjamin Schultze (1689–1760): The Foremost Telugu Linguist") surveys the work of Schultze, a missionary in Madras, who produced the first European grammar of Telugu, a translation of the Bible into Telugu, and an English-Telugu-Tamil-Latin vocabulary of the Hebrew Bible. He notes criticisms of Schultze's work by later European scholars of Telugu, but suggests that these may reflect the Madrasi dialect of Telugu in which Schultze worked rather than his competence in the language. Y. Vincent Kumaradoss and Elizabeth Susan Alexander ("Ethnology and Philology in Missionary Literature: Notes on the Scholar-Missionary Robert Caldwell (1819–1891)") highlight what is undoubtedly the most significant achievement of missionary linguistics in India, Caldwell's *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian Languages* (1856).

[7] For the most part, this essay is the German original of an article which appeared earlier in English translation ("Physico-Theology as Mission Strategy: Missionary Christoph Samuel John's (1746–1813) Understanding of Nature," in Gross, Kumaradoss, and Liebau, *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, 1113–33).

Although, as Caldwell himself somewhat grudgingly acknowledged, Francis Whyte Ellis had demonstrated some forty years earlier the existence of a family of South Indian languages distinct from the Indo-European, Caldwell's work had vastly greater impact. Caldwell's proof provided the intellectual foundation for the non-Brahmin Dravidian movement which transformed Tamil politics during the late colonial period and beyond. Kumaradoss and Alexander link the "virulent anti-Brahminism" (269) which made Caldwell such a hero for the Dravidian movement, with his earlier ethnographic work on the religion of the *The Tinevelly Shanars* (1849), and his rejection of what Geoffrey Oddie has called the "dominant paradigm" for nineteenth-century British constructions of Hinduism as a Brahminical religion.[8] In the next essay, "Protestant Missionary Formulations of 'Hinduism': Tranquebar Accounts and the British Missionary Discovery of Saiva Siddhanta," Oddie himself demonstrates that a number of British missionaries in South India shared and developed Caldwell's claim that south Indian Śaiva Siddhānta was quite different from the pantheistic and Brahmin-dominated traditions reported by their colleagues in the north. In stressing the independence of British Protestant ideas of Hinduism from those of the Tranquebar missionaries in the first part of the nineteenth century (271), Oddie underplays the subsequent influence of the earlier missionary works in the critique of the "dominant paradigm." Caldwell himself reports that he learnt German in the 1840s in order that he might "make use of the vast stores of Indian learning accumulated by Indian scholars,"[9] and was the first to review Ziegenbalg's *Genealogia* when it was finally published in Madras in 1867.

The final essay, "300 years of cultural counter concepts at work in South India," by Esther Fihl, returns us to Tranquebar but brings us into the twenty-first century with the impact of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. An anthropologist who has worked in Tranquebar over a thirty-year period, Fihl examines parallels in the "long term Western mental structures" (287) represented in three opposed pairs: "tsunami victim versus compassionate giver," "primitive versus civilized," and "heathen versus Christian." While Indians, as the missionaries never ceased to complain, rarely accepted the first term of the latter two pairs as accurate descriptions, Fihl's suggests that the concept of victim has been accepted by the fisherman who were most severely affected.

[8] Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant Missionary Constructions of Hinduism, 1793–1900* (New Delhi: Sage, 2006), ch. 5.

[9] Cited here by Kumaradoss and Alexander (260).

She argues, however, that the term has come to have a life of its own, and that they did not accept the connotations of passivity and helplessness which the term carried for those who identified themselves as the compassionate givers on the other pole of the opposition.

Mission und Forschung is an important contribution to the scholarship on the Danish-Halle mission and will be indispensable for anyone with an interest in mission history of the eighteenth century. If it is probably too diverse in content to make a decisive intervention on some of the major questions the editors set out in their introduction regarding shifts in the organisation of knowledge and the relationship between mission and Enlightenment, it nevertheless succeeds in demonstrating the significance of information flows—in both directions—between India and Europe.

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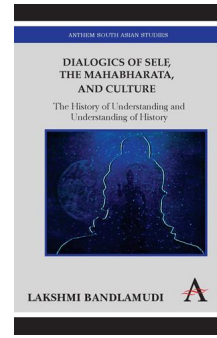
Dialogics of Self, the Mahabharata, and Culture: The History of Understanding and Understanding of History, by Lakshmi Bandlamudi



Anthem South Asian Studies 29 | London: Anthem Press, 2010 | xiv + 302 pages | ISBN: 978-1-84331-835-4 (hardback) £60.00 | ISBN: 978-0-85728-415-0 (softback) £25.00

The Mahabharata is an enormous and ancient Indian tale attested first in Sanskrit, and later in a wide variety of versions in vernacular languages and in all manner of narrative and performance traditions. Its most famous story tells of the succession conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, two sets of cousins descended from King Bharata—a conflict that leads to a devastating war prefaced by the Bhagavadgita or "Song of the Lord," in which Krishna persuades Arjuna Pandava to fight and kill his relatives and gurus. The Mahabharata claims to contain all that is contained anywhere on the topics of propriety, profit, pleasure, and salvation, and its interweaved narratives are an enduring cultural resource in the Indian tradition, being "good to think with" in diverse situations. For example, in the early twentieth century a series of plays and poems re-used the old tale to alle-

gorise the political struggle between Britain and India.[10] The Mahabharata's status as a national epic (alongside the Ramayana) is now long-established, with the word "Bharata" signifying India itself on postage stamps and elsewhere. The Mahabharata story is widely held to be true by Hindus, and the 94-episode version screened on Indian television between October 1988 and June 1990 was watched by millions, constituting a significant national heritage event. This television version, labelled "the Chopra Mahabharata" in what follows (after Baldev and Ravi Chopra, respectively its producer and director), plays an important role in the book under review.

The book proceeds from research conducted in the 1990s among forty-eight adults of Indian origin residing on the east coast of the United States of America (in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut). The participants were recruited through Bandlamudi's existing social networks; those unfamiliar with the main characters of the Mahabharata or without a listening facility in Hindi were not selected. Bandlamudi had three interview sessions with each participant: an initial one-on-one session "designed to gather demographic information and generate autobiographical narratives and to explore the subject's past engagement with the epic text" (29); a session in which participants, grouped in pairs, were shown four episodes from the Chopra Mahabharata and encouraged to voice their thoughts upon them to Bandlamudi and to each other (pausing the tape where necessary); and a brief final session in which participants commented upon the experience.

After the first part of the book has introduced the project, the four subsequent parts comment upon the data collected. Part 2, "About Self," discusses the autobiographical narratives that the participants produced. Bandlamudi presents this material in terms of seven types of self: the traveller, the biographer, the clan self, the seeker, the scriptural self, the gendered self, and the dialogic self. This typology is an adaptation of Mikhail Bakhtin's typology of novelistic genres, and references to the works of Bakhtin and other literary, cultural, and semiotic theorists are common here, as they are throughout the book. The types of self are detailed one by one and illustrated with quotations from the participants, each of whom was pigeonholed as a specific type. These quotations, which sometimes form quite long indented paragraphs, are peppered with sets of three dots in the manner of a Céline novel; they form the basis of the book's longer chapters, and sometimes they fairly

[10] See Pamela Lothspeich, *Epic Nation: Reimagining the Mahabharata in the Age of the Empire* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

jump off the page, showcasing the individual voices of the participants with their specific vocabulary, phraseology, and preoccupations.

Part 3, "About Memory," provides an introduction to the Mahabharata, to the four episodes shown to the participants, and to the principal characters of those episodes. It then explores the participants' accounts of their prior engagements with the Mahabharata, and their prior impressions of its main characters, in particular its leading lady Draupadi, the joint wife of the five Pandava brothers. Participants ranged from those who had heard Mahabharata stories daily in a family setting in India to those who had only come across it in written (or comic-book) form. In terms of impressions of characters, the participants were unanimously respectful of Karna (a champion and ally of the Kauravas who is actually the Pandavas' elder brother), and were predominantly either indifferent or even hostile to Draupadi.[11]

Part 4, "About Interpretation," discusses the participants' responses to the four episodes: the episode of Draupadi's bridegroom choice (in which she rejects Karna's suit because he is thought to be of low class by birth); the episode in which Draupadi laughs at Duryodhana Kaurava when he is a guest at her husbands' court; the dicing episode in which Yudhishthira Pandava stakes and loses his wealth, his brothers, and his wife, and Draupadi is abused by the Kauravas, makes a rousing speech in her own defence, and has her honour preserved by Krishna's intervention; and the episode in which the Pandavas' mother Kunti tells Karna that he is actually her son and asks him to switch sides just before the war. In this part of the book, the quotations are often in the form of dialogues between the participants, and the analysis is in terms of three "discourse types" taken from the work of Bakhtin (direct unmediated discourse, unidirectional discourse, and vari-directional or dialogic discourse), and also, in the case of the dicing episode, in terms of the rhetorical tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synechdoche, and irony.

Part 5, "About Self, Memory and Interpretation," briefly relates the previous parts to each other—in particular, the types of self established in part 2 are connected with the different types of discourse discussed in part 4—and closes with reflections on monologic and dialogic styles of interpretation. The appendices present statistical tables, questionnaires and interview protocol documents, and transcripts of the four Mahabharata episodes used. There is, unfortunately, no index.

[11] Sally J. Sutherland, "Sita and Draupadi: Aggressive Behavior and Female Role-Models in the Sanskrit Epics," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109, no. 1 (1989): 63–79.

There is a lot in this book, and the discussions succeed in illustrating and exploring the complex relationships between individual history and memory, sense of self, cultural background, contemporary cultural location, and textual interpretation. From one point of view, the book's purpose is to show how open the text is to multiple interpretations and how these emerge in correlation with, and through moments of action upon, specific selves. But although at one level this is an argument about the Mahabharata (which seems to revel in setting up complex and ambiguous narrative situations), more broadly it is also an argument about textual interpretation, or even about interpretation *tout court*. At the same time, from another point of view the book seems to want to make an argument about the categories that Bandlamudi uses to arrange and analyse the interview data. Yet although these categories lend structure and purpose to the analysis, they will seem obtrusive to some readers, and it is here that most of the book's methodological problems lie.

In part 2, when each participant is pigeonholed as an instance of a particular type of self, this pigeonholing process seems to me to be too subjective to carry the weight that is placed upon it. Although there are other well-known taxonomies of self (the Myers-Briggs type indicator comes to mind), self-type according to the modified Bakhtinian scheme is reified here as an ongoing characteristic of the person, rather than as a characteristic of Bandlamudi's situational analysis of the artificially produced interview data.[12] It was particularly striking to me that the "gendered self" category, which was devised by Bandlamudi, contained no men, and that Bandlamudi considered this to be natural (they are "all women, of course" [75]).

Similar criticisms can be levelled at the analytical schemes applied in part 4. Although here the discourse types that the participants manifested are situational rather than native to the specific participant, in part 5 much is made of the tendency for certain types of self to manifest certain types of discourse. Yet there is scant consideration (166) of the possibility that the discourse type manifested by a participant could have been partially dependent on the behaviour of their viewing partner. It is not clear how it was decided who to pair with whom for the viewing sessions, yet the data would surely be sensitive to such choices.

[12] This is so despite Bandlamudi's acknowledgement that "The typologies of autobiographical narratives … refer less to the essentialized features or traits of the individual than to the recognizable features of the verbal transaction and my interpretation of the accompanying behavior" (91–92).

The reservations expressed here concerning the book's analytic taxonomies would not seem so pressing were it not for Bandlamudi's apparent favouritism towards the dialogical type of self and its discursive and rhetorical correlates (vari-directional discourse and the ironic mode). Such favouritism is presumably inherited from Bakhtin, but it seems slightly out of place in this project. The book contains germinal arguments that might have been used to justify this favouritism (e.g., an ethical argument in terms of global citizenship, 262), but these remain undeveloped and unconvincing. The favouritism appears in a rather crass form when Bandlamudi employs Giambattista Vico's correlation of the four rhetorical tropes with different stages in a social-developmental scheme—from theocratic, to aristocratic, to democratic, to decadent societies (33–34, 194–96, 254–56). If one characterisation must exclude the others, I wonder how one might go about trying to determine which type of society one is in.

Notwithstanding the foregoing criticisms, and whatever one's view of Bakhtin and his admirers, the book is rescued by the voices of the study's participants. Although Bandlamudi makes no argument concerning how representative those voices are, they provide an intriguing array of contemporary, non-scholarly Mahabharata interpretations—a rather neglected topic in itself—that bear upon the issue of diasporic self-identity vis-à-vis the old country and culture. As James V. Wertsch's back-cover puff states, the book "has something to offer readers of many backgrounds." However, I am sceptical about some of the other claims made on the back cover. I would not agree with Wertsch that "Bandlamudi provides a model of textual scholarship for us all," since the texts in question are a certain specific type of interview transcript, and the model is not necessarily applicable to other kinds of texts. In the following puff, Velcheru Narayana Rao's mention of the "author's insightful readings of the ancient text" seems misplaced, since Bandlamudi's readings are of interview transcripts, which themselves are readings of (sections of) one particular non-ancient version of the Mahabharata. Indeed, as several scholars have pointed out,[13] the Chopra Mahabharata is remarkable for its elision of much of the subtle framing of the Sanskrit Mahabharata,

[13] For studies of the Chopra Mahabharata, see James M. Hegarty, *Religion, Narrative and Public Imagination in South Asia: Past and Place in the Sanskrit Mahabharata* (London: Routledge, 2011), 192–98; Angelika Malinar, "The Bhagavadgita in the Mahabharata TV Serial: Domestic Drama and Dharmic Solutions," in *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron (Delhi: Sage, 1995), 442–67.

which presents the story of the Pandavas and Kauravas as told in a specific way, to a specific audience, for specific purposes, and which thus implies that were it told to other audiences for other purposes, it might be told rather differently.

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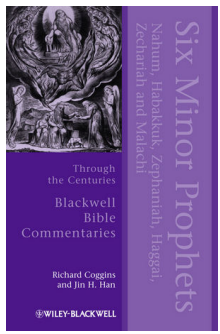
Six Minor Prophets Through the Centuries: Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, by Richard Coggins and Jin H. Han



Blackwell Bible Commentaries | Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011
296 pages | ISBN: 978-1-4051-7675-0 (hardback) $119.95

This book, part of the Blackwell Bible Commentaries series which focuses on reception history of the Old and the New Testaments, explores the uses of the latter six books of the Minor Prophets / the Book of the Twelve (Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi) in Jewish and Christian contexts throughout the ages. It provides a fascinating journey of discovery and can be read, unlike most other commentaries, from cover to cover. The key idea of the series is to produce verse-by-verse commentaries which highlight a representative selection of interpretations of the given verse from written sermons, commentaries, and other theological works. The selection is, of course, subjective, yet the guiding principle of the series is to emphasize interpretations that have been especially influential and/or historically significant. In my review, I will do the same, i.e., highlight what I perceive to be the most noteworthy interpretations.

The present book consists of two independent parts. As mentioned in the forward, Richard Coggin's commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi was already written when Jin H. Han began his work on Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah. This division of labour is reflected in many ways, both in terms of content and in terms of structure. It does not detract from the value of the book, but it explains the differences in style and content. In particular, the reader is given significantly more information about the first

three books than about the latter three books, especially noticeable when taking into account the relative difference in length of the books in question, with the fourteen chapters of Zechariah taking up fewer pages (150–86) than the three chapters of Habakkuk (36–91).

The first part, written by Han, explores the first three of the aforementioned prophetic books. Han begins each of the three chapters with a short introduction and a survey of the use of the pertinent book in literature, the arts, and worship. He then provides a verse-by-verse commentary of the book in question.

Beginning with Nahum, Han notes the early tendency of reading Nahum and Jonah together, a practice inspired by their shared focus on Nineveh. Primarily Christian exegetes used the book of Nahum as a lesson for Christians concerning the doom that awaited those who turned their back on God. In contrast, most modern interpreters focus their attention on the theological problems inherent in Nahum, namely the sanctioning of divine violence and its obvious joy over Nineveh's downfall, and highlight how these aspects render the book difficult from a modern, ethical perspective. Other modern commentators point out that the book celebrates the victory of the downtrodden Israelites over their oppressors, and proclaims divine justice for those having suffered injustice by the hands of evil-doers.

Han then provides a small sample of references to the fall of Nineveh in literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and a longer survey of the use of Nahum in art. As in literature, the focus in art is on the fall of Nineveh. Throughout the last two millennia, the prophet Nahum has been depicted standing with a scroll in his hand, against the backdrop of the city of Nineveh in various stages of destruction. Turning to Nahum in worship, Han discusses its use as *haftarah* reading in different Jewish traditions, and, likewise, its (limited) use in Christian lectionaries.

In the actual commentary, Han goes systematically through the text of Nahum. Han devotes approximately the same amount of space to Jewish and Christian exegetes. Yet, the reader perceives that he is more familiar with the Christian material. Whereas the writings of the Church Fathers are often cited directly from the primary sources, Han's use of the mediaeval Jewish exegetes appears to depend on English translations or even secondary literature. For example, Rashi is cited (18–19), yet the book listed is not his commentary in the Rabbinic Bible but Frank Talmage's book *David Kimhi: The Man and the Commentaries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). In contrast, Han cites the *Midrashim* directly.

Turning to the book of Habakkuk, Han discusses its two-part structure, with chapters 1–2 containing laments and divine oracles which deal with issues of theodicy, and chapter 3 consisting of a prayer which celebrates complete trust in God. Han notes the textual evidence from Qumran (*Pesher Habakkuk*) which may support an original version of the book consisting of only chapters 1–2. In literature, Han notes the importance of Habakkuk as a text which promotes spiritual renewal. It has also been used in the twentieth century to express critique of excessive use of violence. For example, the wolf imagery in Hab 1:8 appears in several poems in the English language.

As to the arts, Han notes how the reference in Hab 3:2b that "You will be known between two living creatures" connected Habakkuk to Jesus, which led to the appearance of the prophet in more than one nativity scene as the prophet who foresaw the crucifixion. The prophet Habakkuk is also often depicted alongside Daniel. The juxtaposition of these two characters is based on the addition to the book of Daniel known as "Bel and the Dragon" which in the LXX is introduced as "from the prophecy of Habakkuk."

In worship, Habakkuk appears in Jewish prayer books as part of the prayer "I believe" (*'ani ma'amin*) which is based on Maimonides's *Thirteen Principles of Faith*. Texts from Habakkuk have also been used in various Jewish communities as haftarah reading. In Christian tradition, Habakkuk appears in several lectionary traditions. In addition, Hab 3 has been the source of inspiration of various hymns.

In the actual commentary, Han highlights at length the importance of Hab 2:4b ("to live by faith") in Christian tradition, including an excursus on the reception history of the verse in Augustine's works. In the same manner, Han surveys the use of Hab 3:2b in the writings of the Church Fathers.

In the case of Zephaniah, Han notes that the book is never cited in the New Testament and there are overall very few direct citations of the book in the literature of the first centuries CE. A badly damaged *pesher Zephaniah* has been found among the Qumran texts, bearing witness to the use of and relevance of the biblical book in the Qumran community. Likewise, the so-called *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, probably written in Greece or Egypt, attests to the early significance of the book. In Jewish tradition, the Targums show particular interest in the prophet's conception of God's transcendence, whereas in Christian tradition, the Church Fathers maintain that Zephaniah's prophecy of promise and threat came true in the life of Jesus. In modern study, Han notes a tendency to criticize Zephaniah, primarily for his perceived failings in terms of poetic ability and lack of independent imaginary power (the book

depends to a large extent on previous prophetic traditions). At the same time, Zephaniah is applauded for his sheer religious passion and persistence as he emphasizes God's righteousness and the need for social justice.

Zephaniah does not hold a prominent place in art. In contrast, the book has had a significant impact on music, primarily due to Zeph 1:14–18 and its theme of "the Day of Wrath" (v. 15), in Latin known as *Dies irae* (from the Vulgate). The *Dies irae* appears in many requiems, ranging from those of Mozart and Verdi to the more modern ones by Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten, as well as in other types of music. In this capacity as part of the Requiem Mass, as well as in other forms, Zeph 1:14–18 has been used frequently in church liturgy. The *Dies irae* has also made its mark in literature. For example, the choir in Faust sings "*Dies irae, dies illa*" to portray Gretchen's fear as the Evil Spirit drives her to suicidal despair. Another example is its prominent place in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The command in Zeph 3:14–20 to Daughter Zion to rejoice has also had an impact in the liturgy of the church, being part of many triumphant hymns.

In the actual commentary, Han highlights, among many other things, how the reference to Cush in 3:10 has had an impact in understanding the role of the African church. Cyril of Jerusalem cites Zeph 3:10 as a proof-text in his discussion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8.

The second part, written by Coggins, has a different feel to it and a different layout. Coggins opens with an introduction devoted to the history of understanding the links between Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, as well as the editorial process which formed the Book of the Twelve.

Turning to the book of Haggai, Coggins opens with a fairly substantial general discussion of general aspects of its reception history. He notes that Haggai plays no part in Jewish liturgy and there are no obvious connections between Haggai and the New Testament. In fact, Christian tradition has largely ignored the book, with the exceptions of the promises to Zerubbabel in Hag 2:20–23 which traditionally have been understood to find a greater fulfilment in Jesus. The problem with Haggai was perceived to be his view of the cult. While his prophetic predecessors spoke out against cultic failings, Haggai's message pertaining to the building of the temple ran the danger of reinforcing those same failings. Turning to modern studies, Coggins highlights the endeavour of modern scholars of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible to overcome their issues of faith and instead to treat the biblical text as one piece of evidence in their investigation of the social and historical situation presupposed by and addressed in the text.

Coggins also offers a detailed discussion of most verses in Hag 1–2. On the whole, these comments are briefer than those of Han and offer fewer examples of the use of the text in Jewish and Christian traditions. The balance between Jewish and Christian traditions is relatively even. On some verses, Coggins chooses to interact only with modern scholars (e.g., Hag 2:14).

As with Han, Coggins does not always refer to the original sources. For example his reference to Ibn Ezra's interpretation of Hag 1:6 is based on Adele Berlin's book *Biblical Poetry Through Medieval Jewish Eyes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 78. This reference has the additional problem of being potentially misleading. To me, a reference to "the medieval Jewish writer Ibn Ezra" (141) brings to mind the exegete Rabbi Abraham ben Meir ibn Ezra. Yet, looking up Berlin's book, the person responsible for alluding to Hag 1:6 is Rabbi Moshe ben Jacob ibn Ezra (who is not listed in the later Brief Biographies at the end of present book).

I appreciate Coggins's honesty as he occasionally notes that he has been unable to verify a certain interpretation. For example, on Hag 1:11, he notes that "this verse is said to be one of those used by biblical prophecy expert Reverend Thomas Brunel" in *Weekly World News*, yet "I have not seen the article in question."

The chapter on Zechariah begins with a relatively short overview. Coggins opens by noting that Jewish and Christian scholars alike consider Zechariah to be a difficult book. Its obscurity, however, has often heightened its appeal. Notably, the New Testament—especially the Passion narrative and the book of Revelation—contains more quotes from Zechariah than from any other book in the Book of the Twelve. Modern scholarship has been concerned primarily with the unity of the book. In line with contemporary scholarly practice, Coggins discusses Zech 1–8 apart from Zech 9-14.

The discussion of the reception of the vision report in Zech 1–6 highlights intriguing uses of the biblical material. For example, I was interested to learn that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for his time very unusually, understood Zech 2:12 (Eng 2:8, "the apple of [God's] eye") as referring to the Jews. I was also intrigued to realize the importance of the image of the "branch plucked out of the fire" (Zech 3:2) in certain evangelical traditions which use the passage to emphasize the individual's struggle against evil. Notably, John Wesley saw himself as such a "branch" as he was saved from a fire as a child.

At the same time, the section is regrettably brief and sometimes too general and unspecific. For example, Coggins notes that "the Talmud" saw the red horses in Zech 1:8 as symbolizing blood, while Radak argued that the red

colour was a straightforward reference to its colour with no symbolic meaning. Coggins fails to annotate where in the Talmud this references is found (unless the reference further below to *b.San.* 93a applies also here), and I can only presume that Radak's interpretation can be found in his commentary in the Rabbinic Bible. Likewise, Coggins refers to Jerome's interpretation of Zech 2:5 (Eng 2:1) but fails to specify where exactly. This lack of precision renders the volume less useful than it could have been, as anyone who wishes to read a given interpretation in its original context does not know where exactly to look.

Turning to Zech 9–14, Coggins opens with a discussion of the famous passage in Matt 27:9 which attributes the text in Zech 11:12–13 to Jeremiah, and he explores how this passage contributed to the discussion of different authorship of Zech 1–8 and 9–14. Coggins further notes the Talmudic tradition (*b.Baba Bathra* 14b) that some parts of the prophetic texts might have been written by anonymous writers.

Turning to the actual commentary, Coggins focuses on Christian reception history, a decision which makes sense given the frequent use of these chapters in the New Testament. He discusses at length Zech 9:9-10 and its use in the New Testament as a prediction of the Passion of Jesus (Matt 21:4-7), as well as in later Christian hymns. He also discusses ways in which 1 Macc 11:60-74; 12:1-38; 13:6-11 use the passage as a prediction of the *messiah*. In a similar manner, Coggins discusses the uses in the NT and subsequent Christian traditions of Zech 11:12-13 and its reference to "thirty pieces of silver." He also notes its significance in Jewish Messianism. *Genesis Rabbah*, for example, depicts the king *messiah* as he gathers the exiles of Israel and distributes to them thirty pieces of silver. Coggins also discusses many of the Christian interpretations relating to Zech 12:10–12 and Zech 14:4. The latter passage has held a significant position in both Christian and Jewish tradition. Christian tradition understood the passage to prefigure Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:9–12) and his expected second coming. Jewish tradition, exemplified by the Targum Jonathan, envisioned God as standing on Mt Olives blowing a trumpet to awaken the dead.

Finally, Coggins discusses the book of Malachi. Coggins begins by discussing its significance as the final book of the Christian canon, and emphasizes that this is a relatively recent tradition. In the canon of the MT, it concludes the Prophets and is followed by the Writings. In addition, textual evidence from Qumran suggests that Jonah at one point ended the Book of the Twelve. Nevertheless, Malachi is often seen as the final book in the

prophetic canon and, as in some Jewish traditions, a book that is easily overlooked or treated as an appendix. It does not hold a prominent place in the reception history of the Bible.

Coggins highlights the significance of Mal 1:11 in Christian tradition. He outlines the various interpretations of the passage. Notably, Catholics tend to see this verse as prefiguring the Mass, while the dominant Jewish interpretation is to understand it as a reference to the Jews of the Diaspora. He further examines at length the issues arising from Mal 2:16, a verse which has often been understood to say that God is against divorce. Coggins further discusses the statement that God will send his messenger in Mal 3:1–3 and surveys its Christological interpretations among the Church Fathers, as well as in the libretto of the first part of Handel's oratorio *Messiah*. Likewise, he discusses the ways in which Christians have interpreted the "day" which will come according to Mal 3:19 (Eng 4:1). Turning to the final section in Mal 3:24–26 (Eng 4:4–6), Coggins highlights the Jewish tradition of setting a place for Elijah at the Passover table, and the Christian tradition of identifying Elijah with John the Baptist (Matt 11:14; 17:13; Mark 9:11–13). He also notes the importance of all of 3:19-24 (Eng 4:1–6) in Mormon interpretation which claims that Joseph Smith received a vision of Elijah.

The volume ends with a Glossary of key books referred to, Brief Biographies of biblical exegetes and theologians, and an extensive Bibliography.

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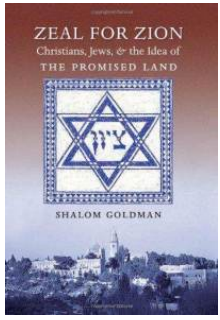
Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews and the Idea of the Promised Land, by Shalom Goldman



Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010 | 368 pages | ISBN: 978-0-8078-3344-5 (hardback) $35.00

Shalom Goldman's *Zeal for Zion* is a useful and exciting new departure for the scholarly study of political and theological Zionism, and the complex of personal and institutional relationships between secular and religious Jews and Christians that has so often undergirded it. For the last several decades, scholars have worked to produce a body of writing that has systematically examined

the Christian contribution to the origins and development of Jewish and Israeli political thought. Most of this writing has focused on relationships between Jews and evangelical Christians. But *Zeal for Zion* pushes the arguments and conclusions of this scholarship in exciting new directions, uncovering a series of unexplored contexts for the revival and evolution of Zionism from the late nineteenth century to the present day. "We think of Zionism as a Jewish political cause," Goldman explains, and "for the most part, Christians do not feature in this narrative except as antagonists." *Zeal for Zion*, by contrast, "makes the case for a wider and more inclusive history, one that takes the Christian involvement with Zionism into account" (1), and moves conspicuously beyond this literature's preoccupation with evangelicalism.

To this end, Goldman's book presents six chapters which offer fresh glimpses of the development of Christian varieties of Zionism. Chapters deal in turn with the relationship between Laurence and Alice Oliphant and Naphtali Herz Imber, with Theodor Herzl and his Christian friendship network, with Herbert Danby, with the implications of two papal visits to Jerusalem, with the experiences in Israel of Jorge Luis Borges, Robert Graves and Vladimir Nabokov, and with the complex and contested relationships between Jewish settlers and Christian Zionists over the last four decades. The chapters are generally marked by an attention to nuance and detail, and by a painstaking but artful and creative reconstruction of a wide variety of literary, linguistic, geographical and historical contexts.

The decision to move beyond evangelicalism is of course an important one. A great deal of recent historical writing has argued both for and against the benefits of evangelical-Israeli relationships. Paul Wilkinson and Stephen Sizer have presented powerful accounts both critiquing and defending Zionism as an evangelical option. Goldman's work does not deal in detail with these important sets of arguments, but instead opens up startlingly new ways of thinking about Christian Zionism.

Nevertheless, *Zeal for Zion* is, in some ways, a curious book. There is no doubt that it is adding vital new dimensions to our understanding of the relationships between Jews, Christians and the Zionist cause, but it does not explain the rationale for its selection of subjects. What it presents, instead, is a series of snapshots of how various kinds of Christians have related to various kinds of Zionism. The book, rather conspicuously, lacks a conclusion, in which an overarching argument might have been presented. As it stands, the reader is left with six detailed, engaging and generally persuasive accounts of the book's principal theme.

The lack of conclusion is certainly unfortunate. There is no doubt that Goldman's work has broken important new ground in describing "Christians, Jews and the idea of the promised land," as the subtitle puts it, but the specifics of the new themes and methods that are here proposed are left without discussion. This unfortunate modesty underplays the real element of innovation presented in the book. Goldman has moved the scholarly discussion beyond the familiar names and topics within evangelical historiography to argue, for example, that Roman Catholic Zionism is less of an oxymoron than the established literature might have led us to expect. Similarly, Goldman's decision to examine the influence of Zionism on major creative writers, not always known for their religious zeal, widens the field of relevant discussion in a profound manner. Similarly unfortunate is the lack of clarity as to the principle of selection governing the topics of each chapter. It is not clear why the argument presented in this book is best served by the rather eclectic juxtaposition of subjects.

Despite these shortcomings, *Zeal for Zion* makes a major step forward in the scholarly discussion of its subject. Future work on Christian Zionism must take this brave, nuanced, and intelligent discussion into account.

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Rewritten Biblical Figures, edited by Erkki Koskenniemi and Pekka Lindqvist

Studies in Rewritten Bible 3 | Turku: Abo Akadem University; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010 | 310 pages | ISBN: 978-952-12-2453-9 (softback) $45.00

I am typically hesitant when reading a volume that begins by defending the validity of its own internal argument. And when *Rewritten Biblical Figures* opened with Antti Laato's rather lengthy explanation of what it was the included authors were actually talking about, I was strangely reminded of my youth when I, always "late to the party," would do anything to be noticed by my peers. In fact, it is not evident that what the authors are doing here is any different from Reader-Response Criticism, Newer Literary Criticism, or even a throwback to what different

strands of Redaction Criticism sought to accomplish. While methodological repetition is not a problem, the Rewritten Bible Network's belief (as Laato describes it on page 1) that it is doing something entirely unique, and therefore paradigm-changing (a rather bold assertion), is not one soundly grounded.

Antti Laato's article ("Gen 49:8–12 and Its Interpretation in Antiquity") takes up the task of clarifying the term "Rewritten Bible" through a focus on Jacob's blessing of Judah and how it has been rewritten in ancient contexts. Laato investigates how the passage has been translated in the Targum, Pesher, Midrash, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, and theological tractates within the Christian tradition. Lotta Valve's article ("Typological Use of Traditions of the Jacob Cycle in the Book of Malachi") investigates how the Jacob traditions have been used in the post-exilic prophetic book of Malachi. She concludes that the dichotomy between Jacob and Esau does not denote only Israel and Edom but that both brothers are found within the "post-exilic Israelite audience" itself. Pancratius C. Beentjes takes on Ben Sira's view of Elijah (in "Ben Sira's View of Elijah [Sir 48:1–11]") and concludes that "Ben Sira's portrayal of Elijah definitely demonstrates there is no doubt the Jerusalem sage took the Hebrew Bible of his days very seriously" (56). Jacques van Ruiten's article ("Abraham's Last Day according to the Book of Jubilees [Jub 22:1–23:8]") shows how Jub 22:1–23:8 rewrites Gen 25:7–10. Michael Becker (in "Abraham in the *Genesis Apocryphon*") argues that the whole scroll of the *Genesis Apocryphon* is an example of "rewritten Bible," due largely to its revisions and alternatives to the biblical traditions within Genesis. Folker Siegert (in "Emotional Plausibility in Josephus's Rewritten Genesis") argues that Josephus, in his *Antiquities* (1.1–2.200), expands upon the traditions in Genesis and makes them accessible to a Hellenistic culture and psychology. Erkki Koskenniemi's article ("Joseph and Potiphar's Wife [Gen 39:6b–20]") shows how early Jewish ethical instruction retold the narrative on Joseph and Potiphar's wife and made constructive use of the narrative. Pekka Lindqvist (in "The Rewritten Broken Tablets") traces out early rabbinic retellings of Moses's shattering of the stone tablets in Exod 32. Michaela Bauks's article ("Rewritten Jephthah [Judg 11:29–40]") demonstrates why the Jephthah narrative was problematic in Medieval Jewish literature—which prompted oftentimes creative commentary. Lukas Bormann's article ("Paul and the Patriarchs of the Hebrew Bible") argues that Paul's rhetorical use of the Patriarchs was "deeply related to the Jewish traditions of his times which were formulated in the literature called Rewritten Bible" (180). Paul competes for the heritage of the Patriarchs and rewrites them as forefathers of both Jews

and Christians. Anna Tzvetkova-Glaser (in "Joseph and his Egyptian Family in the Interpretation of Origen and the Early Rabbis") tackles the interpretative particularities of Gen 41:45 by Origen and the early rabbis and argues that some traditions in the interpretation of "Aseneth's familial story" originated from first-century CE Palestine. Martin Tamcke ("Ephraem's Joseph") analyzes the role of Joseph in the Syrian Christian tradition and concludes that Ephraem selectively uses biblical narrative materials by choosing only that which was fundamental for context or theological reasons. Lautaro Roig Lanzillotta ("Cain, Ruler over the Cave") analyzes the figure of Cain in the anti-heretical writings and the Nag Hammadi texts. He concludes that while Gnostic views on Cain range widely, he is generally considered to be of low stature. Mariano Gómez Aranda's article ("Jacob's Blessings in Medieval Jewish Exegesis") concludes that the differences among medieval Jewish exegetes reflect different historical contexts and situations. Hannu Töyrylä ("The Patriarchs and the Creation in Megillat ha-Megalleh") concludes that Bar Hiyya—in contrast to criticisms that his work is fragmentary—uses a wide range of methods and source materials to create a coherent set of ideas upon which his exegesis of Genesis is based. And, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila ("The Story of Joseph in Islamic Literature") argues that the Surah of Joseph is both a rewritten narrative and one whose meaning is found within its own *Sitz im Leben*.

What, then, is the entire enterprise to which this volume is dedicated? According to Laato, "Rewritten Bible" is an interpretative process that "opens up a new horizon for a modern critical scholar to understand that a reader in antiquity attempted to build up his religious referential world with the aid of the biblical text" (26; but compare Valve's somewhat more restrictive definition of the term as a reference to post-biblical texts in which the Bible is retold [27]). But of course, the term "Rewritten *Bible*" assumes the existence of "Bible" as a canonized and socially legitimated symbol; otherwise, the appeal to a Bible, both symbol and text, to build a referential world would be meaningless. In that regard, several from among the included articles, whose foci are on the biblical text itself, seem out of place in this edited volume. Lotta Valve's article (27ff.), for example, discussed Malachi's adoption of the Jacob cycle. However, it is unlikely that the author of Malachi was aware of borrowing any *biblical* tradition above a cultural tradition. "Bible" as a meaningful symbol would be a much later development.

As a whole, the volume seems uncertain about whether to accept that the (Hebrew) Bible contains universal or objective truths transferrable from

one cultural context to another or not. That uncertainty, however, is an illicit pleasure; the process of *rewriting* necessitates the overwriting of one culturally determined meaning with another more contemporary one—an idea of which the volume does not seem expressly aware. In that more pressing sense, the biblical characters are little more than memes. That said, I would certainly agree with the volume's assumption that later authors who revised biblical stories or characters did so to give their own writings credibility—the practice of appealing to authority that was a characteristic quality of historical literature. Some articles, however, left me somewhat bewildered: Pekka Lindqvist's carefully argued conclusion (168), for example, that Moses was not a "short-tempered fool" (and so would not have carelessly thrown down tablets written by a divine hand) seems to be little more than an exercise demonstrating that rabbinic authors reinterpreted biblical texts (a fact to which the Talmud already testifies).

There is, to be sure, benefit to tracing out themes that are carried through from one text to another—it shows cultural borrowing or influence. And in this regard I was hopeful for Hämeen-Anttila's article on the Surah of Joseph (275–83). That article, however, does little more than identify the uniqueness of the surah and conclude that it is best understood within its qur'anic context (283)—hardly a conclusion that needs to be proved. While this volume should be commended for emphasizing the importance of identifying reinterpreted traditions, biblical or otherwise, I think that the volume's internal, dogged focus on validating Rewritten Bible as a new critical method or interpretative process overshadows the work of any one scholar and produces a general sense of tediousness within the collection of sixteen articles. But to be fair, this volume is part of a larger series focused on Rewritten Bible and so operates within that framework. And, there is still redemptive value in the work. It forced me as a reader to rethink some of the conventions I had previously taken for granted. To that end, something I would have liked to have seen more of is an allowance for the malleability of even "canonized" meaning rather than suggesting, intentionally or not, that biblical meaning had achieved a certain approachable universality.

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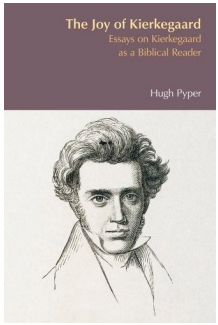
The Joy of Kierkegaard: Essays on Kierkegaard as a Biblical Reader, by Hugh Pyper



BibleWorld | Sheffield: Equinox, 2011 | xvi + 168 pages | ISBN: 978-1-84553-271-0 (hardback) £60.00| ISBN: 978-1-84553-272-7 (softback) £19.99

To get to grips with Pyper's book it is essential to appreciate the story of its composition. Written over nearly twenty years, *The Joy of Kierkegaard* consists of eleven short and fairly discrete discussions of the Dane's relationship with the Bible, theology, philosophy and morality. The essays have for the most part been left in the form in which they were originally published and, as stated in the preface, the main purpose of the book is to now bring these works together for the convenience of readers. Having said this, it should be observed that not every essay has previously been accessible. For example, the provocative and at times disturbing exploration of Kierkegaard's engagement with the issue of how one should follow ethically questionable scriptural commands (chapter 4) has not been published before, having previously only taken the form of a 2003 conference paper.

Although the essays do on occasions deal with such technical issues as specific grammatical points within biblical texts and Kierkegaard's relationship with them, Pyper's book is one that far more readily steps back and attempts to tackle much broader complexities of the human condition. How can a realistic appreciation of despair become a foundation for joy? How can humanity face up to the nature of death? How can forgiveness take place without forgetting the sin committed? It is such questions that occupy the book, and Pyper takes the view that one mode by which we might engage with them is to explore Kierkegaard's use of the Bible.

The depth of *The Joy of Kierkegaard* is such that it will certainly find a receptive audience, but at times its fragmentary nature can be felt. One rather obvious point is that there is no neat progression of argument through the book. Despite the recurring themes, such as Kierkegaard's partial disagreements with Luther's biblical readings, each essay is a largely independent unit. Furthermore, on first reading there are some chapters where one very initially gets the sense of entering a conversation already begun elsewhere. Given that some of the essays were originally published in collections devoted to specific texts of Kierkegaard's, this is perhaps not especially surprising. Despite these

mild caveats, there are nonetheless no parts of Pyper's book that ultimately fail to reward (and provoke) readers. Equipped with an awareness of what *The Joy of Kierkegaard* is, and is not, this is a text filled with ideas that linger in the mind long after its last words are read. What the book *is not* is a tidy and basic introduction for students entering into reflection on Kierkegaard's interpretations of the Bible. What the book does represent, however, is essential reading for those already broadly familiar with the field.

The one essay with which this characterisation rather falls down is in chapter 8. Focused on humour in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, there is little here for those interested in biblical reception to directly get hold of. Though no doubt of value for Kierkegaard scholars, it is the one section that does noticeably appear to drift away from the remit of the book's subtitle. Elsewhere, however, *The Joy of Kierkegaard* convincingly reaffirms that "whatever else he was, Kierkegaard was an engaged reader of the Bible" (81). As well as taking on older approaches, such as Luther's interpretations of James's epistle, Kierkegaard's ways of engaging with biblical texts are shown to raise questions of method that continue to be very relevant to this day. Examining his relationship with Tobit, for example, Pyper demonstrates how Kierkegaard illuminated "the mismatch between what is written and what is read, between utterance and reception" (125–26). Closely related to this, Kierkegaard's doubts about historical-critical scholarship's ultimate significance are repeatedly highlighted. The kinds of foundational questions about humanity noted above are, it is proposed, unnecessarily disrupted by a focus upon the historicity of a text. Thus "to ask whether Adam is myth or history deflects us from seeing what in us is mirrored in Adam" (94). The attempt to unpick the origins of the Bible is, for Kierkegaard, to largely ask the wrong, or perhaps simply less interesting kinds of questions.

Despite covering an array of angles concerning Kierkegaard's view of the Bible, it should be reiterated that *The Joy of Kierkegaard* does not function as an introduction to the topic. One indication of this is the comparative lack of attention given to his famous treatment of the *Akedah*. Pyper's focus on Gen 22 is rather brief, one suspects, because over the last twenty years he has found new prompts for discussion by instead looking at Kierkegaard's other, less iconic, receptions of the Bible. The result is a collection of essays which, though not a polished whole, demands the attention of scholars in the field.

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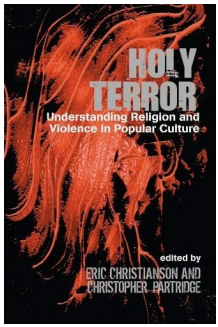
Holy Terror: Understanding Religion and Violence in Popular Culture, edited by Eric Christianson and Christopher Partridge



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The anthology *Holy Terror: Understanding Religion and Violence in Popular Culture* is a book of halves. A little more than half of these essays are devoted to film. In turn, a little more than half of the essays on film are focused on Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. To say that it is not half bad is not, while rather colloquial, an altogether unfair assessment, for while there are a number of excellent essays on display here, a little less than half of them are problematic at best, which seriously undermines the overall quality and utility of the book. There is something distinctly half-finished about this brief collection, particularly in that it lacks any real introduction or discussion from its editors, Eric Christianson and Christopher Partridge. In the final analysis, one is left with the impression of a series of loosely related conference papers (the book has its origins in an annual meeting of the Centre for Religion and Popular Culture) thrown together with little thought to overall coherence or scope, especially given the broad if implicit claims made by the title. For, as is still the case in far too many works in the academic study of religion, *Holy Terrors* remains firmly focused on Europe and North America, despite the fact that religion, violence, and popular culture intersect in incredibly varied ways all over the globe. Given this, it is perhaps natural that here "religion" is practically equivalent with Christianity, though there are a few scattered references to Islam and Judaism. Even within the narrow scope of this slim volume (even with notes, a detailed bibliography/filmography, and an index, it comes in at well under 200 pages), this cultural and religious myopia can become claustrophobic and raise doubts about the book as a whole, especially when the introduction refers to as problematic and nineteenth-century a thing as "Eastern philosophy" (3).

Christianson and Partridge provide the barest sketch of an introduction, beginning with the assertion that "'Religion and violence' together are simultaneously sensible and incongruent" (1). Disregarding a lengthy outline of the chapters, the editors provide little more than a page of context and

discussion for the volume as a whole. That the volume lacks coherence and theoretical depth is something the editors themselves seem to acknowledge:

> in this collection of essays one will not find contestation over definitions of violence (the implicit definition of physical and / or psychological force to inflict injury underwrites these essays), and religion is defined throughout with contextual specificity. The authors of these essays are, however, interested in dissecting the multitude of contexts in popular culture in which religion and violence confront, or combine with, one another. That process cogently lays bare a range of themes and questions.... These questions are all in some way about negotiation and contestation: over the multiple meaning of "religion and violence"; over public reflection on, and even protest against, their unholy alliance; over the public and private spaces where that reflection takes place. (1–2)

It is worth noting that the editors here reveal a certain normative bias, in that they assume that violence in the name of religion is in some way "unholy," despite the fact that many of those who perpetuate such acts would doubtless disagree; indeed, some would also contest the label of violence itself. That ideas of holiness or purity so often play a role in sanctioning violence in the name of religion is a point that needs to be made in any genuinely critical study of the matter.

The volume is broken down into four sections, the first of which, "In the Discourse of Terrorism," begins with Jolyon Mitchell's "Seeing Beyond Fear of Terrorism on the Web." In this essay, Mitchell provides a detailed description and analysis of the website We're Not Afraid, which surfaced after the July 2005 bombings in London and became a forum for users to post pictures and other images augmented with the phrase "We're not afraid," a gesture that Mitchell reads as defiance and "the visual expression of non-violent resistance" (10). These modified images, which he breaks down into broad categories like "images of defiance" and "images to counter fear," are "used to defy, to console, to encourage, to explain and to exhort" (12). He also provides an interesting discussion as to how users re-appropriate and adapt images and figures from popular culture and from everyday life in London, including the iconic Underground logo. Though the essay succeeds more as description than analysis, Mitchell does ask, "to what extent can this posting of images, and words, be described as the formation of a new online

community of defiance?" (11). The answer he gives is ambiguous, pointing to complex and thorny questions about digital media and community with which scholars in the field still struggle: "The We're Not Afraid site celebrates the individual's creativity, sense of humour and right to express themselves, through creating a transitory virtual network" (18). His suggestion that this kind of action makes the contributors to the site into photojournalists is rather more difficult, in that most casual Web users have no feel for or knowledge of the ethics and discipline of serious journalism, contested as these may always be.

Emma England's "Violent Superwomen: Super Heroes or Super Villains? Judith, Wonder Woman and Lynndie England" is rather more unusual, and altogether more problematic. While this essay might yield a scattering of insights, it remains a thought experiment, and a silly one at that. England begins with an assertion that makes clear that she will be drawing bold, at times completely unjustified, connections between disparate periods of history and across different media and genres of representation: "The biblical heroine Judith of Bethulia is a female superhero" (25). By comparing Judith with the comic book heroine Wonder Woman and Lynndie England, "arguably the most famous protagonist to come out the 2004 Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal" (25), she hopes "to remove the possible 'comfort-zone' associated with discussing the fictional as against the 'real'" (25). In doing so uncritically, she also removes any possibility of the sort of rigorous, critical analysis that real-world events like those that took place inside Abu Ghraib require. Her inclusion of Lynndie England is based on the slightest of arguments and turns on entirely incidental similarities between photographs of Lynndie England in Iraq and a crucial panel taken from an iconic Wonder Woman comic. In a serious academic work, it should go without saying that a snapshot and a carefully executed illustration are not the same thing, and cannot be compared blithely. Perhaps the worst thing about this essay is England's throwaway suggestion that Lynndie England was in Iraq to "save her home" (38), which ignores the reality of the war on terror and represents a wholehearted embrace of American military and political rhetoric. That Lynndie England may have believed this would be more to the point; however, the author ignores the political aspects of the abuse scandal to make the peculiar argument that this is enough to make Lynndie England a superhero, something the author admits she has difficulty accepting. Given that this conclusion is reliant on a rampant parallelism that insists on concrete connections between things—decades-old comic book heroes, millennia-old

legendary figures, and contemporary real-life war criminals—that cannot be compared directly with one another, she can take comfort that there is nothing really at stake in this essay.

The first of the essays in the "In Cinema" section, Jo Carruthers' "Biblical Epic and the American State: The Traitor and Sanctified Violence in *Esther and the King* (1960)" is a marked improvement, tackling the intersection of politics, rhetoric, violence, and religion in a far more subtle and convincing manner. By examining the film in the light of the Cold War, a time when "God's laws" were "implicitly synonymous with American political policy" (43), Carruthers makes a genuine contribution towards understanding violence by showing how rooted this connection is in the political sphere: "By subsuming American values within religious discourse, and vice versa, such biblical epics assert American political positions to their home audience through a highly authoritative framework which inherently sanctifies those politics" (45). This subsuming of politics into the gloss of Hollywood film has serious consequences: "By making Esther into primarily a romantic tale, the narrative of violence and lack of mercy is removed from any explicit doctrinal context and becomes more insidious precisely because it is a stealth narrative, not necessarily apparent enough to provoke thoughtful reflection" (48). Violence, Carruthers thus suggests, is *layered*.

Gerry Carlin and Mark Jones take us into the dark heart of the 1960s with "Cease to Exist: Manson Family Movies and Mysticism." Aside from illuminating the various connections between Charles Manson's syncretic religious doctrine, violence, and film, Carlin and Jones make a compelling argument that Manson was far from an inexplicable anomaly in the larger social fabric of the Sixties counterculture. He was, in fact, perfectly in tune with the religious tenor of his times. The relationship between Manson, his crimes, his religious claims, and the mass media is another unpickable knot of influence and counter-influence: "Though some elements of Mansonian lore come from esoteric sources, much is lifted from popular—and even trash—culture, and from the mass media, and the new messiah would strive to promulgate his message using these communicative forms" (56). Manson was indeed a popular figure in the media after the killings that made him infamous, especially in exploitation cinema, which portrayed him through various thinly veiled doppelgangers in such grindhouse gems as *Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* or *Wrong Way*, both from 1972. Further entangling this knot, the way the media understood and reported the Manson Family crimes was informed by films like *Rosemary's Baby* (directed by Roman Polanski, lover

of the Family's most famous victim, Sharon Tate). Here we can find a further hint towards understanding the frequent collisions of religion, violence, and popular culture: these things happen because the conditions that permit them often lie very close to the surface of everyday life.

"The End is … a Blockbuster: The Use and Abuse of the Apocalypse in Contemporary Film," by the reliably excellent John Walliss, explores films from the final decade of the twentieth century, a time which "witnessed an outpouring of millennial fears and expectations quite unprecedented in the modern world" (63). Building on Conrad Ostwalt's work on the "descralization of the apocalypse," Walliss shows how most films from this time present the apocalypse as something triggered by human hands or by the natural world. The world ends not for supernatural or divine reasons, then, but for mundane, this-worldly reasons. This secularisation of the apocalypse also shows itself in the way that these films re-imagine the traditional structure of the apocalyptic narrative in that they show only the (potential) destruction of the old world, not the building of a new one. Instead, the narrative changes to one in which human beings are called upon to stop the coming of the end times and restore the world as closely as possible to the state it was in before it was threatened: "without exception contemporary apocalyptic films are characterized by a valorization of the everyday wherein, in an almost Durkheimian way, the contemporary social order (understood typically as male and north-American) is reaffirmed and celebrated" (65). From Walliss' intriguing perspective, these apocalyptic narratives demonstrate not only the secularisation of the end-times but also a thoroughgoing rationalisation. The larger ramifications of this shift are intriguing; in valorising the status quo as an ideal to fight for, these films are profoundly conservative in addition to being rather unimaginative in comparison to their Jewish and Christian forebears.

The intriguing third section, "A Case Study: The Violence of *The Passion of the Christ*," kicks off with Steven Allen's "Counterfictional Suffering: Authenticity and Artistry in *The Passion of the Christ*," which examines the film's various sources of legitimisation and as well as the reasons behind its perceived authenticity. This is a valuable study of the ways in which viewers receive and understand a film that hinges on implicit and explicit claims of historical and theological fidelity:

> the cinematic text establishes an exchange with our collective reservoir of imagery of the Passion: a strategy that promotes

> a respectful borrowing from the paintings of grand masters to aggrandise the movie, but which relies on cinematic sleight of hand to juxtapose a different set of representational strategies. In summation, it depends on comparative artifice to convey a sense of authenticity. (83)

Thus *The Passion*'s sense of authenticity derives largely from its complex relationship to other visual representations of the Passion narrative: "the film still relies on a counterfactual quality for its evocation of suffering. And here I am using factual not in a sense of accuracy or realism in the abstract sense, but as a comparative term: the counterfactual arises from the divergence from our collective reservoir of imagery of the last days of Jesus' life" (87). As with the other standout essays in this collection, Allen's analysis provides the careful reader with methodological reflections that have a resonance and a use value far outside the boundaries of the essay, particularly in its relation to reception history: "How one judges authenticity is evidently multifaceted, but a unifying factor is the comparative process: a strategy of counterpointing the film with what is already known or believed" (84).

"Controlling Passions: The Regulation, Censorship and Classification of the Violence in *The Passion of the Christ* within Britain," by Shaun Kimber, is something rather less. Though it is informative in the blandest sense for anyone who might be curious about the minutia of the film's rating in its various versions, both at the cinema and in the home theatre, it offers little analysis and less insight. It is also a remarkably poor piece of writing, its main points couched overwhelmingly in the passive, as if even the author was unsure of his points or their ultimate value. It does, however, make a crucial point: "the film created a state of affairs where groups traditionally concerned with the negative impact of film violence upon audiences actively promoted the exhibition and consumption of *The Passion of the Christ*, a film which contained extended scenes of strong violence" (94).

Oluyinka Esan's "*The Passion* as Media Spectacle" fares somewhat better in noting that the film, which was in many ways a singular piece of work, was also a perfectly explicable part of larger cinema culture: "This film thus exemplifies some organizing principles of contemporary times. It demonstrates the need to rely on strategies that deliver greater proportions of the 'the spectacular' before the attention of audiences can be secured" (103). At the same time, it was also atypical, in that the spectacular nature of the film served to highlight rather than obscure its political and ideological content.

The final essay in the expansive cinema section, "Protest as Reaction, Reaction as Text: The (Con)Textual Logics of *The Last Temptation of Christ* and *The Passion of the Christ*," by Leighton Grist, expands the scope of the analysis with a detailed and very instructive comparison with Martin Scorsese's 1988 film. The two films share more than the chronological coincidence of being two successive Jesus films that courted controversy, a sequence that continues more or less unbroken back to 1898's *The Passion Play of Oberammergau*. The films provided two flashpoints for the emerging culture wars, in that the audience for *The Passion* was drawn in large part from the same individuals and groups who protested against *The Last Temptation*. Grist's astute analysis turns on the fact that both films, and their respective public reception, were marked by violence: "Switching perspective, one might propose that the violence contextually implicit to and threatened but largely repressed during the protests against *The Last Temptation* can be regarded to return textually in *The Passion* in the form of its explicit and untrammelled representation" (117). The period between 1983 (when an earlier attempt to film *Last Temptation* was shut down out of fears of controversy) and 2004 saw the rise to prominence of the religious right in American culture, which is reflected in their changing role, from fringe protestors to drivers of a mainstream cultural phenomenon, one marked, Grist suggests, with the taint of fascism.

The brief final section, "In Sport" begins with Rina Arya's "The Religious Significance of Violence in Football," one of the collection's weakest moments. Arya's conclusion—"in the cultural climate of the 'death of God' the sacred can be experienced in the collective expressions in football which transport the crowd from the state of ordinariness, which in theological terms is described as the profane, to an experience of the sacred" (123)—takes far too many things for granted, including the idea of the death of God and the meaning of the word sacred. Arya also relies heavily and uncritically on classic works like Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*, and René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred*, taking the truth of long-contested conclusions for granted. However, the primary failing of this essay is that it treats the conjunction of sport and religion as if it were a wholly new topic. There is a growing body of solid scholarly work on sport and religion that Arya simply ignores; Danièle Hervieu-Léger, in fact, made a very similar argument—though she came to a very different conclusion about whether sport constitutes religion—almost twenty years ago in *La Religion pour Mémoire* (available in English since 2000 as *Religion as a Chain of Memory*). The argument Arya presents is also internally incon-

sistent, in that she insists that we are living in a "post-Christian" age but also notes that one of the reasons football is so enduringly popular is that it is rooted in Christian ideas and symbols which must retain a good deal of the their power and meaning to have this effect.

Hugh S. Pyper closes the volume on a fascinating note with "Cultivated Outrage: World Wrestling Entertainment and the Religious Excess of Violence." Not only does he take seriously the world of professional wrestling, which very few scholars since Roland Barthes have managed to do, but he also manages to push forward our understanding of religion and violence. The WWE and other professional wrestling franchises fuse the world of fact, including religion, and fiction in intriguing ways:

> There is a strange dynamic here as the WWE seeks to boost its ratings by buying into what it conceives of as popular stereotypes. The "real world" provides the narrative framework for the wrestling event. At the same time, politicians use the same rhetorical tropes to influence public opinion in the real world, mythologizing it in terms of the confrontation between heroic representatives of good and evil. (141)

Pyper provides a fascinating case study of the various American wars in the Persian Gulf, telling the reader of WWE's activation and eventual vanquishing of a team of stereotyped French wrestlers named "La Résistance" during the period when the French government actively opposed the American invasion of Iraq in 2004. Pyper gets further mileage from his deft set-up when he turns the analysis around with the case of Chris Benoit, a wrestling star who murdered his family before killing himself in 2007. In the literally outrageous world of WWE, the lines that connect pop-culture violence and real-world suffering are hopelessly tangled and any distinction between them is perilously thin.

As we come to the end, we are left with the question we began with: does this book help us to understand the persistence of religion and violence in popular culture? It does, yet it does not. Anyone venturing into the murky and complex world of religion, violence, and popular culture for the first time will encounter a fragmentary collection of topics, methodologies, and vocabularies, and does so with little or no guidance from the editors. While the four essays on *The Passion of the Christ* would provide the uninitiated with a fair if unstated introduction to some of the most important questions

raised in this field of study, such a reader might be hard-pressed to apply these lessons to the scattershot remainder of the collection. The volume finds itself in a double bind in terms of its potential audience: those with a thorough familiarity with the discourses about religion, popular culture, and violence will find a good deal of interest here; however, those same readers will also likely be frustrated both by the lack of scope and by the serious theoretical and methodological—not to mention simply logical—missteps to which the less sophisticated contributions are so prone. When facing a topic as complex and important as the causes and representations of violence, not half bad is not good enough.

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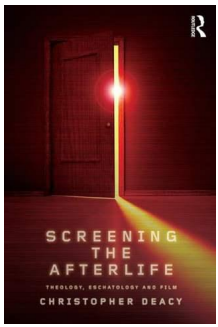
Screening the Afterlife: Theology, Eschatology and Film, edited by Christopher Deacy



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Christopher Deacy describes his project as a "two-way dialogical conversation" between theology and film (ix) that is in keeping with Gordon Lynch's correlational model (as outlined in *Understanding Theology and Popular Culture*, 2005). Both writers insist popular culture and theology offer insights and probing questions and that permitting dialogue between them is potentially instructive and transforming. These are not "discrete, monolithic or changeless entities" (x), and differences between them, "here referring to theology and cinematic eschatologies," present an opportunity. Deacy insists it is more profitable to "find a third way that moves beyond the rather static and linear model which supposes that theological traditions or cinematic works are monolithic and homogeneous entities that can only be meaningfully or constructively brought together when the values of one are in tandem with those of the other" (163). Films press us to consider whether "the values that underpin our theological positions" are necessarily more cogent, consistent and defensible just because of their antiquity (164).

In many cases, films addressing afterlife themes are easy to overlook because so many of them suffer from critical weaknesses. Some, like Warren Beatty's 1978 directorial debut *Heaven Can Wait* are overly sentimental while others appear trivial or flippant, reflecting a cultural habit of evading or romanticizing death, something that hinders serious reflection on the subject (7). Deacy warns readers not to dismiss the subject too quickly, however. Even light-hearted films like the 1993 comedy *Groundhog Day* combine entertainment with weighty theological subjects (in this case, a version of hell [143–44]). In some cases, the exploration of theological concepts are far more subtle and nuanced, as in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) and *Working Girl* (1988) that invite audiences to reconsider traditional notions about heaven (99–128). Film often encourages a reevaluation of received wisdom on sacred themes (164).

Deacy looks at ways films depict and deviate from "traditional eschatological ideas concerning life and death, heaven and hell, as well as the extent to which cinematic portrayals of the afterlife have often tended to use earthly realities as the point of departure" (ix). He does not limit notions of the afterlife to 'literal' depictions of post-mortem realities or forms of resurrection. His analysis includes films drawing on sacred terminology and imagery to explore more figurative levels of meaning, as in Frank Darabont's *The Shawshank Redemption*, which bears witness "to the idea of heaven—or, even, on a different though no less untenable level reading, hell—as a physical and geographical location on earth" (119). He approaches his subject from several directions: resurrection and immortality (chapter 2); near-death experiences and mind-dependent worlds (chapter 3); realized eschatology (chapter 4); Heaven and New Jerusalem on earth (chapter 5); and punishment and rehabilitation (chapter 6).

This book fills a gap. Even though death and the afterlife are recurring subjects in film and theological thought, they "have never been comprehensively brought together" (viii) and doing so is not easy for a variety of reasons. Film theorists often minimize or dismiss the religious nature and orientation of films (166 n. 1) and those analyses of the afterlife that do exist (Deacy mentions James Robert Parish's *Ghosts and Angels in Hollywood Films* [1994] among other examples) tend to approach the subject without reference to theology. There is also the eclectic nature of cinematic representations of the afterlife that makes simple models of correlation between film and religion difficult (162). Despite these and other challenges, the exercise remains a useful one. Taking his cue from Clive Marsh's *Theology Goes to the Movies:*

An Introduction to Critical Christian Thinking, Deacy recognizes that any theology failing to draw on "the agencies of popular culture simply misses the point about how and where theological reflection is already taking place" (ix), an idea often noted in academic analyses of popular culture art forms (cf., e.g., Robin Sylvan's *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music*: "for millions of people … religion and God are not dead, but very much alive and well and dancing to the beat of popular music; the religious impulse has simply migrated to another sector of the culture … a genuine religious impulse went underground and became entangled in the hodgepodge hybrid now called popular music"). The ubiquity of film and its role in shaping audiences' understanding of the Bible and theological concepts warrants close attention. There are many, for instance, whose knowledge of the Book of Revelation and apocalyptic concepts like that of the antichrist derives more from films like *The Omen* (1976, 2006) and *The Seventh Sign* (1988) than the New Testament itself (25–26). Whatever knowledge audiences gain about Christianity is piecemeal and filtered through an artistic lens, of course. Some movies even introduce confusion about the Bible or history deliberately through false or exaggerated claims, such as the familiar device of long-hidden or suppressed sacred writings found in such films as *Stigmata* (1999). Here the study of theological dimensions of film is complicated because their effectiveness depends, to some extent, on audiences' lack of familiarity with the Bible and history (26–27).

When films touch on theological subject matter, it is rarely part of a systematic and comprehensive worldview. For moviegoers coming to the cinema from religious studies departments, it is tempting to impose unfair questions on these artistic "texts": Is it possible to isolate notions of the afterlife and eschatology from an expressed doctrine of creation or soteriology, for instance? Is this not an incomplete story, analogous to a novel with missing chapters? But this is the nature of the beast for those analyzing film (or other art forms) from a theological point of reference, and it is our problem, of course, not a filmmaker's concern. Serious theological evaluation of film and the arts requires we engage these works on their own idiosyncratic terms. Attention to theoretical and methodological strategies for theologically informed film study is therefore a pressing need, and here Deacy makes a valuable contribution to this ongoing enterprise.

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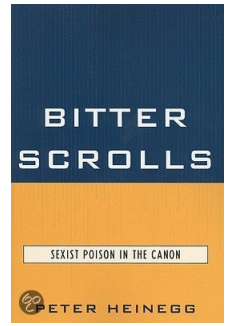
Bitter Scrolls: Sexist Poison in the Canon, by Peter Heinegg



Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 2010 | 172 pages | ISBN: 978-0-761-85288-9 (softback) $26.50

Bitter Scrolls is an ambitious book by Peter Heinegg. Beginning with the Epic of Gilgamesh, and romping through history to end up with John Donne and even throwing in Marvin Gaye for good measure, Heinegg sets out to show the "toxicity of the texts" (1). He attempts to show how texts throughout history have spelled out "formulaic roles" and have "spelled catastrophe for women and misery for the most of the rest of the human race." These classic texts, which form the foundation of many "Bible and literature" classes, Heinegg says, are oppressive of women and promote "evil" (7).

Heinegg claims these heroic texts have been shielded from our critiques. Rather, we, as a society, express our indignation at this oppression by pouring our critiques on "blatant forms of oppression like female infanticide (now mechanically updated by ultra-sound), foot-binding, polygyny, clitoridectomy, purdah, niqab, and so on" (7). Heinegg seems to imply that our failure to critique these classic works for the misogynistic texts that they are has led to all the ills in society that have afflicted women.

Heinegg's book, he himself claims, is a rock-throwing contest, which he thinks some will consider blasphemous. But, he reminds us in his introduction, it was the child who first noticed that the emperor was not wearing any clothes. This seems to imply that Heinegg is setting himself forth as this holy child, who alone can see the truth, can see the texts in all their nakedness, and proclaim to the rest of us what we have failed to see.

Admittedly, Heinegg does an excellent job of exposing and revealing the texts in all of their nakedness. Heinegg begins with the epic of Gilgamesh, which he says is "off to a very bad start" (9). Within chapter 1 alone, Heinegg throws in Henry Kissinger, Plato, Don Quixote, Adam, Job, and even Shakespeare to come up with his conclusion that the entire canon has some very basic guidelines for how males should behave. "So the basic outline and ground rules for the canon have been laid out; but the pattern is nowhere more vividly or emphatically presented than by Gilgamesh." This basic story line is "if the heroes don't always destroy the women they love, they always leave them bereft" (16).

Chapter 2 leads us into a study of Achilles, which is more or less a rehashing of *The Iliad*. Chapter 3 brings a study of the great trilogy by Aeschylus, the *Oresteia*. This myth, Heinegg states, "celebrates the triumph of the patriarchy over the primordial Earth goddesses and women in general. It's a stunning imaginative act, a brilliant etiological fiction, and twisted propaganda" (29). Heinegg's retelling of the trilogy is clear and succinct and draws out the violent and "poisonous" aspects that make this a tale intent on subjugating women. "It was a great victory—for the victors—and the key to it was the annihilation of Clytemnestra. First, she had to be demonized, turned into a grotesque image of malice and lust; then denied the protected status of motherhood (because she wasn't Orestes' 'real mother' and, ultimately, wished him dead); next, executed by order of Apollo, and last of all rendered a non-person by the loss of her right to revenge" (37).

Heinegg then leads his reader through an analysis of misogynistic texts of the Bible beginning with Moses. The only commentary Heinegg has made on biblical texts so far has been one passing reference in chapter 1 to wisdom literature which he claims, "came to Israel from Egypt and Assyria, and frequently took a dark, pessimistic, death-centered (see Job, Ecclesiastes) view of the human condition, [and] is also often bitterly misogynistic" (14). In chapter 4, Heinegg attempts to wrap up all of Moses' life including explaining the Decalogue in six pages and even throwing Jesus in for good measure. It is not so much the text that has poisoned ensuing generations; Heinegg is concerned with those who continue to interpret as if they are ventriloquists bequeathing impressive information on a new generation and, as Heinegg puts it, "just like the endless generations of unthinking bibliolaters after them." Heinegg suggests in respect of the Ten Commandments that "on that solid foundation a whole superstructure of oppressive laws confidently rises" (42). His argument is that these texts have served to distort, disfigure, and dumb down generations of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Chapter 5 is a quiet journey through Paul. Jesus, Heinegg claims, does not seem to say anything misogynistic, however, it is not Jesus's words that we need to be concerned about. Heinegg tells us Paul did not count women, only concerned himself with men, but that he did have some women friends (54). Chapter 6, "Muhammad Keeps the Ladies in Line," wraps up Islam by comparing it to the *Arabian Nights*. Chapter 7 skips through the Renaissance and Boccaccio; chapter 8, the seventeenth century and Rabelais. Chapter 9 makes quick work of Shakespeare, conveniently diving into Milton, Pope, Wordsworth, Tolstoy, Yeats, and Lawrence in subsequent chapters.

It is not that Heinegg is wrong in his analysis of the texts. The texts do contain what he claims, but he presents this information as if it is brand new, as if he is that boy who is the first to notice the emperor is naked. This approach ignores the years of struggles that various writers have invested in exposing these texts previously, working carefully with the texts, and taking great pains to uncover what Heinegg seems to believe has been a secret. He does admit that others have gone before him to critiques the texts, particularly the Bible, but they have failed: "Alternatively (and this is the preferred liberal loophole) one can water down, explain away, or just pass over the troubling texts. In days of yore, allegorizing them offered an elegant solution; but in modern times that seems too whimsical and loopy" (57).

Heinegg doesn't end his critique with the canon but bursts into popular culture bemoaning the continued use of women as objects. And the culprit may be young girls' dolls and undergarments. "And it's not as if young American women have necessarily gotten the message of feminism either. Many of them read chick lit and watch chick flicks, even as their younger sisters rave for Hannah Montana, collect Bratz dolls, and wear thong or bikini underpants" (159). I suppose in this analysis the blame all does lay on the women. Women who Heinegg identifies as finding power and positions of note include Sarah Palin and Ann Coulter.

The answer, Heinegg says, for feminists is to understand, criticize, and transcend the canon, to create a new one. As readers and critics of the canon, we control it, or so says Heinegg. It is our job to detoxify it. I'm glad that Heinegg, a man to be sure, knows what job it is that women now need to do. And I'm glad he has all the answers, though in his book, he doesn't give us any clue as to what they are, except that young girls should stop wearing thong underwear and alluring clothing. We are left to think that throwing away the canon will be a good thing and simply rewriting all of history will achieve the desired effect, with Heinegg, of course, at the helm.

What is most disturbing about Heinegg's work is not only the centuries of literature that he flays about without any thought to historical context or mention of critics who have done similar work, it is the lack of acknowledgment for *any* study that has gone before. There are no references to other scholars, no footnotes or endnotes, and no indices. In fact, at one point Heinegg states, "Not to put too fine a point on it, a huge chunk of all this misery comes from reading a bad book and taking it much too seriously. The Qur'an wouldn't be so awful if only readers were allowed to study it critically and discuss it skeptically; but within the *umma* that's just not done" (64–65).

Now what feminist scholar would not like to jump on the bandwagon and bash misogynistic readings of texts? Heinegg's book, however, does not achieve that. He accomplishes a quick look at a large canon addressed with inflammatory language (even types "YAWN" into his text to show his boredom with the Qurʾān) that suggests women need to remedy this solution. After reading Heinegg's book, I have decided I should throw away my thong underwear, turn off the radio any time Hannah Montana comes on, throw all my books away, forget studying any book in Heinegg's canon and await Heinegg's finest words of wisdom. Feminist scholars who have come before, who have spent their lives and risked their jobs, taken chances, and advanced the cause of feminist scholarship beware: this book is not for you. However, Heinegg succeeds in bringing to light in a very quick succinct fashion misogynistic texts that a beginning feminist scholar, unfamiliar with the texts, might find helpful. Heinegg is also very right; we have a long way to go.

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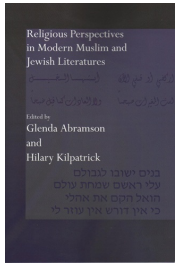
Religious Perspectives in Modern Muslim and Jewish Literatures, edited by Glenda Abramson and Hilary Kilpatrick



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With this essay collection, republished in softback edition in 2011, Glenda Abramson and Hilary Kilpatrick offer a well-composed book, consisting of eight essays dealing with literature that relates to Jewish belief, culture, and thought, and eight reflections on writings from within the Islamic realm. One must consider the title carefully: the essays are not mere studies of religious beliefs, but more correctly reflections on literature that emerges from within a certain religious realm, or refers to religious themes or conditions within religious societies. This means that the writings analysed in these sixteen essays are not merely to be described as religious; and on the other hand

the analysts themselves are not easily identified as either religious or non-religious or at all belonging to a certain group. The editors in this regard consciously use, for example, the term "Muslim literature" instead of "Islamic literature" (1–2). By "modern literature," the compendium means both the "recent contemporary" as well as the historical period of "modernism." The book's authorship is evenly divided between female and male contributors. This is impressive because it is a rarity in this field. A brief account of the authors' backgrounds and current positions can be found in the beginning of the publication.

In their introduction, Abramson and Kilpatrick remark on various understandings of the expressions "Muslim" and "Jewish" with regard to either the analysed writings or the authors themselves. By raising issues of terminology, used throughout the book and signified in the title of the compilation, the editors and subsequently their co-authors avoid the criticism of including essays that seem to address religious ideas to a lesser degree. Reading the essays by themselves, and reflecting back on the title of the book, such criticism might arise within the reader, particularly considering the categorical term "religious perspectives" as mentioned in the title. Despite the fact that some essays—in a narrow sense—only just match this category, the thoughtful introduction to this collection validates the inclusion of those essays.

The compendium begins with the article "Urdu poetry as a vehicle for Islamic re-expression" by Christopher Shackle. His analysis focuses on poetry expressed in Urdu, a Hindi dialect expressed in Perso-Arabic script. Urdu poetry and rhetoric carries certain forms of expression that are attributed to Shiite poetic literature; it also incorporates Indian styles of poetry. Urdu as language of the Muslim population in the former part of India, now Pakistan, served as a device for promoting independence, not only from India but also from English, the language of the ruling colonizers. Understandably, the literary field to which this poetry belongs steps into the socio-political scene and questions old "hierarchies of authority" (21). It does so, for example, in Hali's Musaddas work, which focuses on social challenges here and now. For Muslim Indians, plentiful questions arose about their religious and national identity. In this context, Muhammad Iqbal's literary efforts attempted to reconnect with the Muslim heartland, through language and the invocation of strong religious images. Particularly intriguing is the tradition of re-invoking idealistic images of Muslim Spain, which is thought of in Urdu poetry as a symbol for the intrinsic dynamic powers of Islam. Thus, past Andalusia emerges as a fairly romantic model for contemporary Pakistan (27).

More "progressive" Urdu poetry fashioned literature with Marxist tendencies, filled with anti-materialist jargon, while anticipating an age of human thought, liberated from religion (28). Shackle gives a well-informed account of the intentions of Urdu poets, and the political and historical setting.

The subsequent contribution engages with the "search for religious faith in the poetry of Itamar Yaoz-Kest." Yaoz-Kest's struggle for a religious identity is instantly winsome. With humour, doubt, and constant self-reflection, the poet shares this exciting but also at times tiresome quest for a religious conscience. David C. Jacobson presents a thoughtful analysis of selected pieces of Yaoz-Kest's work. His poetry is contemporary, dynamic, and immediately appealing. His ("neo-religious") language tries to grasp wider horizons of meaning, not so much of knowledge and assurance, but rather of hope. For Yaoz-Kest, the horizon of faith lies outside the dominion of religious ritual. Jacobson writes: "he was driven to create 'a synthesis between the values of the world of religious faith and the spiritual achievements of the secular world'" (37). Influenced by Spinoza, Feuerbach, and the poet's own life experiences, Itamar Yaoz-Kest acquired a sense of the divine presence (43). But at the same time he expected no more or less than "spiritual enlightenment," which in its peculiarity ought to subdue the idea of God being "interested in granting reward and punishment for the deeds of the individual" (39). Walking the course of life between this sense of the supernatural and the knowledge about one's limited individuality establishes itself for Yaoz-Kest as inevitable modus vivendi. Jacobson's observations, of Yaoz-Kest's internal modification of a wanderer on his way to religiosity, are insightful and reveal facets, which are also common in today's pursuits of spirituality.

Next, B. Babür Turna's "Paths to God within the Poet: Necip Fazil Kisakürek (1904–83) and his mystical poetry" introduces the Turkish writer Kisakürek, who, inspired by *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) expressed his mystical experiences through poetic language. One can hence trace back Kisakürek's personal development in his writings. There, Turna identifies, amongst other elements, the influence of Kisakürek's time in France and the author's occupation with the works of Henri Bergson, with whom other Muslim writers also engaged (e.g., Muhammad Iqbal, 1877–1938; and ʿAbdallāh al-ʿAlāyilī, 1914–1996).[14] In his quest for spirituality, Kisakürek was guided by a Naqsh-

[14] Cf. Manfred Sing, *Progressiver Islam in Theorie und Praxis: die interne Kritik am hegemonialen islamischen Diskurs durch den "roten Scheich" ʿAbdāllah al-ʿAlāyilı (1914–1996).* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007).

bandi sheikh who helped him to see "beyond the material world" (63). Thereafter, Kisakürek lightened up his previously rather dark and heavy poetry; he came to understand poetry as a "mystical experience" itself (65). Turna does well in portraying Kisakürek as a searcher for faith. But at the same time, Turna does not neglect to epitomize the author as a voyager into the depths of human angst and desperation. The essay nicely demonstrates how "the religious" (*das Religiöse*)—in this regard the mystical sphere of Islam—influenced a man to arrive at his own self.

On a similar "religious and spiritual quest" (71), for some sort of spiritual outlook onto the affairs of the world, we find poet Binyamin Shvili, who was inspired by a kabbalistic "religious perspective." Nili Gold in her study "'Merciful Father Abraham': The mystical poetry of Binyamin Shvili" shows how Shvili supposed that a mystical account of religion resonates in the messianic movement that emerged around Shabbetai Zevi (the "false messiah," 80).[15] Shvili apparently has in common with the historical persona Zevi that his family also originated in formerly Greek Smyrna (today Turkish Izmir). From Shvili's poems Nili Gold extracts—as does Turna from Kisakürek's works—a great deal of biographical information. We learn about a childhood trauma and the author's dispatching from the biological father and subsequent turning towards the divine father (78). The reader of Gold's essay might detect the absence of explicit references to particularly Jewish beliefs in Shvili's poetry. Primarily, Nili's essay reads Shvili's as writings the self-search by an author who absorbs some religious figures and narratives into his own reflections about the world and human dismay.

Edwin Wieringa, an expert in Indonesian philology, analyses how writers and performers of Javanese songs aimed at educating children ("Moral Education Through Islamic Songs in Twentieth-Century Java"). Wieringa focuses "on the genre of Javanese Islamic poetry called *singir* … that is mainly sung by girls and women" (90). The reader will discover some parallels to Oesseina Alidou's essay (cf. 209), which also speaks about an oral tradition practiced by females, aiming at young peoples' personal growth. Now, *singirs* are written in Perso-Arabic script (reminding us of the Urdu script Christopher Shackle addressed above, cf. 1). The *singirs* consist of moral lessons and basic religious knowledge that ought to help children, once grown up, to be spared from punishment in the afterlife. This broadcasting of knowledge un-

[15] Cf. Stacy Beckwith's essay on Leopoldo Azancot's *Novia Judia* (305). Zevi propagated "the concept 'redemption through sin.'"

surprisingly contrasts with modern ways of education, in both content and style. Wieringa, however, illustrates that even traditional *singirs* provoke new interpretations in current times (96).

Sigrid Kleinmichel's essay "The Uzbek short story writer Fiṭrat's adaptation of religious traditions" delivers a discussion of how Abdurauf Fiṭrat engages with religious narratives and the modes by which he transforms religious themes into stages for his own reflection and criticism of socio-political affairs from 1910 to the late 1930s in (today Uzbek) Bukhara, until his violent death in 1938. Amongst the themes Fiṭrat tackled with his work (on culture, economy, politics, society), Kleinmichel chooses to concentrate on how particularly religious narratives feature in his writings. Fitrat's view on religion was rather sceptical, sarcastic, satiric, ironic, and comic, but at the same time went far beyond pure ridicule. This means he was indeed concerned to substantially judge various systems of thought, may they be political or religious. From Kleinmichel's article we do not discover much about Fiṭrat's own religiosity, but the reader grasps that Fiṭrat was decidedly critical of religious ideology and principally meant to pan the managers of faith. The fact that he often alluded to commonly known religious narratives or figures seems to indicate his confidence (or rather hope) in addressing a wider audience, outside purely literary circles. The reader senses here parallels to Iqbal's poetry (cf. the first essay): an anti-colonial spirit and ferocity in promoting a genuinely Muslim way of progress.

Next is Dan Urian's "Kulturkampf in the Israeli Theater," which investigates how "the issue of religion" is featured in Israeli theatre (ca. during the 1980–90s). The "theatre stages" are expanded to the realm of other media such as cassette recordings and radio shows. Urian detects that all these arenas transmute into platforms (battlefields) for playing out diverse aspects of a rampant identity crisis within Israeli society. The reader learns about the existence of several conflicting ideological parties: secular Ashkenazy or "Western" Israelis, political Zionists, highly-educated vs. Oriental Jews, religious Zionist / (ultra-)Orthodox Israelis, less-educated classes, etc. These groups and the contrasts between them are not only represented on stage but also reflected in the composition of the audiences. Urian's article is an interesting account of how *Religionskritik* is carried out through theatrical art. In the frame of critique, Israeli theatre, for example, ridicules religious dreams about children becoming fighters for holy places (152); it also strives to "reveal" the hypocrisy of ultra-orthodox men and their suppressed sexuality, and targets certain superstitious beliefs while generally opposing the "religionisation of

politics." Through Urian's selected analysis of theatrical performances, the reader becomes aware of two major struggles of Israeli identity. One comes to ask: Are there two religions, namely the Jewish and the Zionist religion? Furthermore, how does one define "Jewishness" and "Israeliness"? Urian's essay portrays the *Kulturkampf* in Israeli theatre as a constant re-assessment of values. Here, the reader perceives that essays like Urian's, namely relating to "Jewish literature," often debate the authors' efforts for defining Jewishness (rather than what Judaism entails). This impression is fortified by playwright Yehoshua Sobol: "I too am a Jew in essence but not in religion" (153).

The following essay, "Martyrdom and Gender in Jewish-American Holocaust Memory," discusses how today's American memories of the Holocaust are echoed and explored in Jewish literature. The author, Sara Horowitz, explains how, for example, the Rabbis' Talmudian explanation of unjustified suffering resonates with the depiction of martyrdom in Jewish poetry and contemporary liturgy. For example, the theme of *morior invictus* (death before defeat) is woven into the piece "Martyrdom of the Ninety-Three Maidens" (Hillel Bavli), which is part of the liturgy of "American liberal Judaism." Horowitz successfully demonstrates, that although for many American Jews the Holocaust "took place elsewhere" (182), Jewish literature displays a range of unique ways of (somehow) "relating" to the horrors of the Holocaust. When Jewish women are depicted as victims of Nazi atrocities, their alleged, implied, and threatened sexual violation symbolises the murders carried out. In that sense, "sexual violation" (a stage of criminality, as I understand, somewhat lower than actual murder) serves as a "domestication" of the Holocaust horrors (188). For contemporary American readers, it is hence possible to relate to a proportion of the cruelty the Jewish people suffered. Obviously, Horowitz' essay does not primarily tackle "religious perspectives" in literature, but is more interested in the effects Jewish literature can have upon its American readers.

"A 'Cinderella' goes to Hausaland: Islam, gender and Hausa literature" analyses a current version of the Cinderella narrative, as read out by a female radio host in contemporary Nigeria. The author, Alidou Oesseina reflects on the tale's symbolic implications for its audience. Oesseina introduces us to some interesting transformations the Hausa oral tradition of storytelling underwent. Folk tales were memorized and expressed and mostly by females in domestic spaces. This practice served didactic, pedagogical, and socialisation purposes. However, the language of the Muslim Hausa experienced a literarisation through religiously trained males, who transcribed scores of

formerly orally transmitted stories, infused religious jargon and ultimately raided "a female narrative space" (211). Thus, the language of domestic storytelling not only transitioned from orality to writing and from female to male execution, but also absorbed Islamic symbolism. Nevertheless, storytelling today is "re-versioned" by women who utilize traditional material as basis for a re-telling that addresses a contemporary audience. One could argue that this way women gain back their control over this genre. It is before this background of the history of Hausa storytelling and today's incentives for social change that Oesseina analyses the radio-told story of a Hausa "Cinderella." Most significantly, the author identifies in her study elements within the modern Cinderella narration suggesting a possible liberation of women from poverty, illiteracy and oppression.

The collection features a further four essays concerning religious perspectives in Jewish literature, and three more from within the Muslim realm. At this stage of the book review more brief reflections occur. "'Together with the shell, they have thrown away the kernel': Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn's critique of contemporary Judaism" (Jutta Strauss) and "Rahel Morpurgo in the context of Jewish Emancipation in Italy" (Gabriella Steindler Moscati) feature works of two authors writing during the torrent of Jewish enlightenment (*Haskalah*).

Rahel Morpurgo (1790–1871) expressed great piety in her Hebrew poetry. Being female and writing Hebrew poems spawned numerous commentaries on her person and work. Hence we get a glimpse into the reception of a female Hebrew poet. The reader also learns that Rahel's work has to "be read in the light of the Italian Jews' struggle for emancipation" (227). Nevertheless, Steindler Moscati successfully depicts the author's struggle for her own spiritual identity.

Aaron Halle-Wolfssohn (1756–1835), a German Jew, engaged with topics such as human morality along with civil rights for Jews. As a teacher, he promoted secular learning for Jewish children. However, Jutta Strauss' investigation into Halle-Wolfssohn's *Leichtsinn und Frömmelei* shows that he warned Jewish youth not to abandon their Jewish faith by adhering to a misguided understanding of enlightenment.

The last two essays in this line of Jewish thought are "Avrom Goldfaden's theatre of Jewishness: three prooftexts" (Joel Berkowitz) and "Between Eros and Dios: Leopoldo Azancot's *Novia judía*" (Stacy N. Beckwith). Goldfaden (1840–1908) and Azancot (b. 1935) come from distinctly dissimilar backgrounds but nevertheless wrestle with similar themes. Goldfaden does

not principally discuss religious elements but rather a definition of *yudelickeyt* (*Jüdischheit* or *Jüdigkeit*, "Jewishness"). Azancot—likewise on an identity quest—enlivens in his stories the sweet tensions between eroticism and religious law. Beckwith's reader also learns about the history of Sephardic *conversos* and Jewish literary accomplishments in modern-day Spain.

The remaining essays represent studies into literature written within the Islamic realm and composed in three different languages. Isabel Stümpel ("Religion in contemporary Persian prose") inquires into prose fiction in contemporary Iran and admits to difficulties in finding "religion" in Iranian literature (164). While looking at novels from different time periods, she finds connections to Islamic folk-beliefs and superstitions (170) as well as Shia narratives with their main theme: martyrdom. "Religion" might also be found within "descriptions of rituals" (172). Fundamental Islamic theological concepts or references to the Qurʾān are mostly absent. For some novelistic characters, Islam shifts to the background and "religion means nothing more than a childhood memory" (167). Moreover, "religion is closely connected with a sense of guilt and has a paralyzing effect, especially on women" (169). In addition, religion is reflected upon as affecting discrimination against women. Nonetheless, Stümpel rightly points out that religion is a "side-dish" of Iranian novels. What is more, Islam in particular is often (if depicted at all) alluded to alongside other religions (172–174).

From Shawakat M. Toorawa's article "Modern Arabic literature and the Qur'an: inimitability, creativity … incompatibility" we learn that literary creativity, writing in Arabic about religious themes, inspired by the Qurʾān, can be, to say the least, a difficult task. Many literary works inspired by religion and the Qurʾān fall under scrutiny and often condemnation by religious authorities with strong links to the political sphere. Sanctions and censures are invoked, books taken off the market and withdrawn from book fairs. Understandably, then, the study of these works is subjected to related obstacles.

Toorawa explains that the controversy about literary inspiration through the Qurʾān, is rooted in the theological concept *iʿjāz* (the miracle-character) that makes the holy book inimitable. The *iʿjāz* is traced back to the belief in an eternally and uncreated Qurʾān's existence on the preserved tablet (*lawḥ maḥfūẓ*). I remark here that, in addition to the concept of *iʿjāz*, it is also the resentment displayed by managers of faith that makes literary creativity—whether by Qurʾānic content or structure—a difficult task. The managers feel their domain of religious authority threatened by intellectuals, who dare

to step from the literary field onto theirs, the religious field. Hence, the fight against such literature, as discussed by Toorawa, is often also a territorial brawl. Nevertheless, the author here gives an interesting account in how far some Arabic writers in fact utilize their inspirations through religion and the Qurʾān. The works feature a range of religious ideas: fallen angels, Qurʾān-based Islamic legends (243), and sexual escapes inspired by Qurʾānic narratives. Most works try to connect the religious themes with contemporary (sometimes political) situations and personal experiences (248).

"Transcending the boundaries of Islam: written Swahili literature in the twentieth century" (Alamin M. Mazrui) features Swahili, an East African dialect written with a "revised Arabic alphabet" (287), and carrying a discrete Islamic vocabulary. This language of Islamic spirit dominated the written accounts of Swahili, while in its oral form it by all means transmits secular narratives (286). But it was Swahili writing that was later used in public education, Christian sermons, Bible classes (289), Bible translations, and utilized by Western Christian missionaries as "part of the competition for the soul of the East African" (297). Alamin M. Mazrui offers here a fascinating account of the powers of language and the politics of script.

In conclusion, this is a fascinating book, introducing the reader to a vast landscape of languages, customs, beliefs, histories, and cultures. In addition, we learn about a wide spectrum of types of creative writing. Often "the religious" within these artistic productions must be filtered out with a good deal of sensitivity and patience. In this venture, the authors gave their very best. Furthermore, their study of writings in many different languages must be acknowledged. By itself, the selection of these essays reflects an ongoing scholarly "negotiation" about the definitions of terms such as "Muslim," "Jewish," or "religious" as adjective attributes. In this regard, the book is a valuable addition to this ongoing and ultimately essential discourse about what "religious perspectives" might possibly entail.

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