

Book Reviews

Roland Boer, *Last Stop Before Antarctica: The Bible and Postcolonialism in Australia*. Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, pp 219.
ISBN 1 84127 170 5.

Last Stop Before Antarctica is less a developed argument than a series of essays in which Australia provides the frame for Roland Boer's readings of biblical texts, of texts about biblical texts, and of postcolonial theory.

The style might seem quaint (this must surely be the last book seriously to bra@ke(t) individual letters), but the book is refreshing in many ways. The conversation between biblical studies, cultural studies and postcolonial theory is welcome. The distinctively Australian take is a bonus. And it is a pleasure to read a literary study of globalisation in which Marx is an unapologetic discussant.

The common theme around which the various essays dance is the idea that the bible, while a crucial part of the story of European colonisation — as a tool of subjugation, as the content of the white man's burden and, in the hands of its Indigenous interpreters, as a means of resistance — is, for the most part, strikingly absent from postcolonial criticism. Boer convincingly brings the bible back in to discussions of hybridity and globalisation. At the same time, he picks out the biblical resonances of themes which have become fashionable in postcolonial writing, such as nomadism and exile. Boer decisively pinpoints the tension of much recent theory: where nomads travel according to set social and economic patterns and exiles travel in fear of their lives, postcolonial interpretations of these terms presuppose a capitalist context, valorising 'voluntary Diaspora, migrancy and itinerancy' (113).

In Chapter One, 'The Decree of the Watchers,' Boer reads political and economic discussions of globalisation against Daniel 4's description of the 'world tree.' He finds parallels between Daniel 4's image of a despot and his destruction and current tensions between the centralizing forces of globalisation and the counterpull of increasingly assertive local identities.

The next essay, 'Explorer Hermeneutics, or Fat Damper and Sweetened Tea,' traces biblical themes in the journals of Australian explorers. Boer draws our attention to the ways both the biblical texts and the Australian landscape were remolded in the process. For example, the explorer journals frequently invoked creation imagery from Genesis to describe the land they were traveling through, but had difficulty continuing the parallel to 'God saw that it was good.' Similarly, the explorers proved remarkably adept at simultaneously interpreting the landscape as "empty wilderness" and noting the presence of its owners, whether seeking elaborate comparison between Aboriginal and Hebrew customs to make the people they met into 'implicit Israelites' or objectifying them as "lower organisms" in the order of creation.

From there we move, appropriately, to themes of exodus and nomadism in a chapter entitled 'Home is Always Elsewhere: Exodus, Exile and the Howling Wilderness Waste.' Again, Boer finds a powerful biblical image transmuted in Australia: the exodus image is consistently invoked in Australian colonial writing,

but its meaning of liberation from past bondage slips away, leaving the residue of a justification for invasion and dispossession.

Another perspective on dispossession follows, in 'Green Ants and Gibeonites.' Boer returns to the method of Chapter One, taking a biblical text, here Joshua 9, and reading it this time against a literary corpus, the works of B. Wongar/Sreten Bozic. The trickery story in Joshua 9, where a group of Gibeonites use fabricated evidence to deceive Joshua and the invading Israelites, provides a way in to the questions about essentialism and nominalism posed by Bozic, a Serbian-born novelist who adopts an Aboriginal persona and *nom-de-plume* to write about Indigenous life in northern Australia.

'Dreaming the Logos' turns from the politics of text to the politics of translation, exploring the various debates about language classification and bible translation which have developed around the continuing missionary enterprise in Australia. From discussions of whether language is a container for stable content, or whether translation inevitably changes meaning, Boer proposes an alternative view, that the content provides "the mere means by which the language sought to spread its wings and take flight," so that "the purpose of biblical translation is not the transfer of meaning into a new form, nor even the attention to form as such, but the creation of a new language. And it is the content of the Bible that enables this" (178-9).

This last chapter was one of a number of places where I felt Boer was trying to be too postmodern by half. What exactly is he claiming? Having just reminded us of "Luther's creation of a new type of German with his translation" and "the profound effect on English of the King James," our biblical scholar might be arguing that the bible, in particular, and because of its content, creates new languages in a way that a similarly serious effort to translate, say, the *Odyssey*, would not. But, if that is the claim, it sits uncomfortably against the tone of the rest of the book, and surely needs exploration rather than simply to be left hanging as the final sentence of the final chapter. But, if that is not the claim, what was the point of the chapter?

Some of these tensions are relieved and others exacerbated in the conclusion, '(E)Strange Dialectics.' Here we find reasserted the important theme of:

the Bible's own curious path from colonial text, to an adopted, owned and reread text by those colonized, to the profound effects on religious, cultural and political sensibilities, to being a key text in many colonial places. So much so that there are more Christians in these formerly colonial spaces than in the lands from which the colonial marauders and missionaries began ... Here a thoroughly foreign tool, a colonial text, becomes a key factor in the anticolonial drive and postcolonial status of these countries. (192)

This bible-based resistance is proffered as 'the beginnings of an answer' to the problem of the apparently irresistible force of globalisation, with its nagging fear that the only possible response may be "capitulation, acquiescence, with a sigh of resignation, into the world system." As the bible has conquered the world, only to have its readings thrown back upon the colonisers as a means of resisting conquest,

so Boer encourages us to go back to Marx and take hope from his conviction that it is only when capitalism has become seamlessly global that true international opposition can develop from within.

Given the centrality of this theme in what is otherwise a fairly disparate collection of essays, how, in *Last Stop Before Antarctica*, does the bible shape up as a text of resistance? It is hard to say. Perhaps it is indeed being reread by the colonized, but they and their rereadings remain strangely in the background. At the same time, the book gratingly replicates many of the colonial practices and interpretations which they resist.

"If Freud has left any legacy at all, then part of it would have to be the significance of the insignificant, the function of the peripheral" (142), Boer suggests. If so, the seemingly "insignificant" in this book raises significant questions. In this study of postcolonialism, the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is plainly significant, and indeed takes up much of the text. But the text is laced with asides, remarks in passing and slips, each seemingly "insignificant" (so that the reviewer feels narky to be even raising them), which altogether produce a reading more colonialist than post-

Consider the perplexing statement: "... approximately one third of Australians have not arrived or descended from the United Kingdom. This means that the question of what (post)colonialism meant and means for these people has been neglected, as have their relations with Aboriginal people ..." (122). This reader is still wondering whether Aboriginal people are not Australians or have arrived (or descended) from the United Kingdom. A slip of sentence construction, no doubt, but then what about the discussion of *Reading the Country*, which is introduced as the product of Stephen Muecke's appropriation of French theory, coupled with the work of "artist Krim Benterak and Aboriginal Paddy Roe" (113)? (Why is only one of the collaborators introduced exclusively by his ethnicity?) Or the explanation that translations of the bible into Aboriginal languages usually start from an English text because "present day translators share this language with their Aboriginal co-translators" (159)? (Why not 'Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal translators'?) Or, after mentioning the centrality of colonial religion for Indigenous resistance strategies, "Whether this is to be assessed as a positive or negative move is something I have consciously left out of consideration, partly for political reasons, since I do not wish to attack something that is crucial for Australian Aboriginal politics" (189) — a construction which not only undermines the announced decision not attack, but patronises at the same time.

So where are Indigenous voices in this text? The Introduction makes the book's solitary reference to an Indigenous Australian theologian, Anne Pattel-Gray, not for what she says but as an illustration of Boer's argument about the globalisation of academic life. Rather than the content of Pattel-Gray's influential article on colonialism in white feminist theology, Boer notes the fact that Pattel-Gray draws on North American womanist theology, and, in turn, is singled out 'in proper post-colonial form' in the book's introduction by the 'Romanian-born' Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In Chapter Two, we meet Indigenous peoples at second hand through the writings of explorers, who weave them into the biblical

allegories through which the explorers interpret their experience of Australian wilderness. Chapter Three offers a fleeting reappearance of Indigenous peoples as an exemplar of its secondary theme, nomadism (the Benterrak, Muecke and Roe reference), only to be ushered out again via a footnote, beginning "The whole ideological construct of Aboriginal nomadism needs a separate study ..." (114). Chapter Four, tackling the vexed question of essentialism and nominalism, gives extended treatment to a number of 'Aboriginal' texts: in most detail, the novels of B. Wongar, but with reference also to the writings of Mudrooroo and Wanda Koolmatrie. The textual joke, of course, is that the common thread between these writers is the literary controversies over their contested claims to 'Aboriginal' identity. In Chapter Five, the techniques and rival philosophies of bible translation provide for extensive discussion of famous missionaries and modern non-Indigenous translators of Indigenous languages, but Indigenous people themselves make generally unnamed appearances as "Aboriginal co-translators" or the indispensable "UNS (Unconditioned Native Speakers)" who test new translations.

'Green Ants and Gibeonites' was the chapter I found most difficult. The controversies it analyses unfolded in varying ways, the least perplexing being the straight-out hoax of Wanda Koolmatrie, who turned out (after being published by specialist Indigenous publisher Magabala Books and winning the Dobbie award for a first novel by a woman) to be a white man called Leon Carmen. Boer is rightly more interested in the more complex instance of Mudrooroo/Colin Johnson, and most of all in Wongar/Bozic, whose works are discussed in some detail. His short stories and novels were published during the 1970s and 1980s but only came to sustained critical attention in Australia in the 1990s, at which point they fitted neatly into the spiralling saga of literary hoaxes and assumed Indigenous identities, which Boer neatly catalogues. But the timing, and its significance in Australian political culture, is not explored; instead, Boer examines the Wongar case via a comparison with the British 'Vicar and Virago' affair, in which the feminist publisher Virago produced a series of stories ostensibly by a young Indian woman, actually a white male Anglican vicar. The discussions of essentialism and marginalized identities generated by that controversy raise some points which are useful for understanding the Wongar story. But I found myself wondering why Boer chose to retreat to Thatcher's Britain at this point, rather than staying with the many Australian studies of the literary and artistic identity questions which flourished in Australia in the 1990s (the Demidenko/Darville affair being of course the real biggie, curiously absent from a book so interested in non-Anglo immigrant voice).

By leaving Australia, the analysis obscures much of the political context which made questions of Aboriginality and identity so heated in the 1990s. It is extremely difficult to talk credibly about questions of authenticity, Indigenous identity and essentialism in mid 1990s Australia without also referring to the debates about 'political correctness' and, especially, the allegations of manufactured Indigenous tradition which circulated in that period, the instances *par excellence* being Coronation Hill and Hindmarsh Island, the latter with its Royal Commission show trial. This, surely, is the unspoken flip-side to Boer's point

about non-Indigenous 'performance' of Indigenous identities: the right's carefully-crafted fantasy that Indigenous identities themselves are 'fabricated,' untrustworthy, and so cannot really matter.

Such cases take identity, authenticity and essentialism out of the realm of literary esoterica and into the seminars of the rightwing thinktanks which pushed them along, the boardrooms of mining companies which funded and benefited from them and the party room of the Howard Liberals, to whose 1996 campaign they made a significant contribution. There we find the connection between 'culture wars' and the real-life consequences for constricting Native Title, imposing extraordinary levels of scrutiny on ATSIC and downgrading of the reconciliation process which changed the tenor of (post)colonial relations in Australia until the present. A crucial dynamic of much of this transition has been the marginalising of Indigenous rights supporters as 'bleeding heart', 'black armband', 'chattering classes' or 'politically correct,' and the controversies Boer discusses provided much of the cultural ammunition. For example, when the hand that signed off Wanda Koolmatrie's *My Own Sweet Time* turned out to belong to Leon Carmen, he defended himself by attacking the 'politically correct' literary culture which, he claimed, discriminates against white men (a position which must have surprised the many white men of Australian letters, and surely proved only that if you want to be published by a specialist Indigenous publishing house then being Aboriginal helps). If we are to understand Australian debates about authenticity and Indigenous identity during the mid-1990s, we need to read them against the background of those years' headlines — 'The Great Lie of Hindmarsh Island' (*Advertiser*, 7-6-95), 'Why Aborigines Now Fear the Worst' (*SMH*, 13-4-96), 'Herron Promotes 50s Black Policy Call' (*Aust.*, 17-6-96), 'Anger Over \$400m ATSIC Cut' (*Aust.*, 14-8-96). The shift of focus to an English vicar enables this background to segue into a safely literary discussion of globalisation and culture, while the economic interests which underpin globalisation and which drive much of the cultural debate about authenticity and identity drift from view.

You can't, of course, do everything in one book, and there is nothing more churlish than chiding an author for not having written a different book. In this instance, however, my frustration was that Boer has written the right book but his choice of examples distracts him from living up to his own standards. Boer is rightly, and refreshingly, impatient with postcolonial critics who wander down literary laneways, while ignoring the political and economic aspects of the globalisation which they both criticise and help to produce. For this alone, the book is well worth its RRP, its intriguing biblical readings and angles on Australian writing a bonus. But, having reminded us not to let text distract us from politics, Boer seems often to forget.

The varied subject matter of the different chapters holds readers' interest for a cover-to-cover read, and the individual essays also stand well alone. 'Explorer Hermeneutics' sparked one of the year's more memorable seminars for my Religion and Politics honours class. There are irritating misspellings (Frere for Freire, Ghandi for Gandhi, Moouffe for Mouffe, Streetson for Streeeton and, throughout, Threkeld for Threlkeld). John Dunmore Lang is inaccurately called a Free

Presbyterian. This review is now a year late (sorry, editor!), not just for the usual workload reasons, but also because I found it seriously difficult — a book at once intelligent, stimulating, enjoyable, irritating and highly provoking.

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**John Bowker (ed), *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Religions*.
Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 336.**

ISBN 052181037X (hbk)

John Bowker is an internationally renowned scholar in comparative religion, but he is probably best known to undergraduates and teachers of Studies in Religion for his many reader-friendly introductory and reference books (his *Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* is a 'must' on any student's bookshelves). The present work is just one more example of this kind of helpful and well-presented text from Bowker and a cast of experts in each specialised area. The work is up to the minute and well-informed, and lives up to the cover description as an expertly written text supported by "lavish illustration." The illustrations fit well to the text and are comprehensive in their subject matter. It is also heartening to see the many illustrations of women believers, to match the care that has been taken to include women in the text.

For the most part the book is well-organised. The major religions are given the lion's share of the text, although it is not clear why Buddhism alone is presented specifically according to geographical areas (India and Southeast Asia, Tibet, China, Japan, and Korea), when other religions could well have benefited by the same treatment. Occasionally there is a slight lack of balance among the smaller sections of the work. For example, where four pages of text are devoted to Zarathustra and the Parsis, one page only is devoted to each of Roman Religion, Greek Religion, Mesopotamian Religion and Egyptian Religion in the section on Mediterranean religion.

One especially pleasing aspect of the text is the way in which the historical perspective is very clearly differentiated from the viewpoint presented in believers' histories. In the section on Judaism, for example, readers are warned that historians must take care not only with the text of the Hebrew bible which is the only direct source for the origins of the Jewish people, but also with archaeological research which has aimed to prove the accuracy of the biblical record: "Today, while there is a general acknowledgement that archeological evidence locates the Bible firmly within its Ancient Near Eastern context, in terms of the material culture of the different periods, very little relates directly to the named persons or events described within the Bible itself" (182). Caveats about taking care with theological sources which purport to give an accurate historical record are found throughout the text, not just in the introductory paragraphs of sections.

Helpful extras at the end of the book — a comparative timeline (310-11), brief chronological notes (312-19), a bibliography (320-5), and an index (326-34)

— all go towards making this a useful product for students and non-specialist readers.

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Gerhartt and Russell, *New Maps for Old: Explorations in Science and Religion*. New York and London, Continuum, 2001, pp 220. ISBN 0826413382

Anyone examining a new book pertaining to the relationship between science and religion may be tempted to ask: What — in this super-saturated genre — could be said that hasn't already been said? Do we really *need* another book on science and religion? The professional American 'debunker' Frederick C. Crews has suggested that the surfeit of books in this area is surely testament to a fundamental incompatibility between Athens and Jerusalem (with his own loyalties undoubtedly lying with the former). But, of course, Crews has merely only added his own thesis to the debate; moreover, there are lots of other areas which produce commensurate, or near commensurate, amounts of stock — works on the relationship between science and society, for instance, or on religion and culture.

Perhaps the volume of works produced in the area of science and religion simply attests to the fact that the relationship between the two is almost inexhaustibly interesting. Nonetheless, the question remained with me: Why another? It was a profound relief, then — upon actually embarking upon reading Mary Gerhart and Allan Melvin Russell's *New Maps for Old*—to discover that this book managed to somehow avoid travelling around most of the (now) well-worn interpretative circuits common to the genre.

Gerhartt and Russell's main contention — first broached in their 1984 collaboration *Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding* — concerns the way in which two different (theoretical) viewpoints, when appropriately brought together in bidisciplinary dialogue, can furnish a "higher viewpoint"; they talk about this higher viewpoint in terms of "cognitive disruption" and "metaphoric process." This thesis might be seen to be something of a linguistic/grammatological rendering of Kuhn's well-known idea of 'paradigm shifts.' In a sense, much of the book is concerned with this (primarily) epistemological thesis; for the first seven (of eleven) chapters in particular, issues directly pertaining to science and religion are only employed to elucidate and clarify this central idea.

One of the most interesting elements of Gerhartt and Russell's book is the creative use of the continental European philosophical tradition; they enlist the work of Derrida, and especially, Paul Ricoeur and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in their examination of issues such as metaphor, myth, and hermeneutics as these apply to conceptualisation. This use of this philosophical tradition meant engaging with some conceptual possibilities not usually enlisted in discussions of this sort: questions of genre and disciplinarity, of metaphor, alterity, and (Bahktinian)

'dialogue.' Given this, what's perhaps even more notable is that the employment of the above theorists is not embedded in thickets of baroque prose.

New Maps for Old represents something of a creative exploration, a speculative endeavour, a series of working hypotheses; as such the results of this are, perhaps predictably, not uniform. Where some of their speculations on "bi-disciplinary" dialogue are very interesting, the concrete biblical exegeses seem to falter in both in terms of their knowledge of the relevant literature and perhaps also in terms of hermeneutic sophistication. At this stage it would seem, Gerhart and Russell appear a little more adept at 'meta-theory' than at theory *per se*.

Additionally, there are also what might be seen as conspicuous oversights in their use of critical literatures. In a work on metaphor and analogy, one can wonder about the lack of references to David Burrell's magisterial *Analogy and Philosophical Language*. And with a sustained discussion of the notion of 'myth' and its relationship to Judeo-Christian ideas, one wonders how they managed to avoid an encounter with the French anthropologist and literary theorist René Girard. But these kinds of gripes, I suspect, can always be made of works of this kind—and may not be altogether fair.

Overall, what makes this a refreshing book is that it manages to veer away from the common tendency to discuss science and religion primarily in terms of metaphysics. Instead, Gerhart and Russell leave this beaten path, and embark on an extended reflection on bidisciplinary dialogue and interpretation, on analogy and metaphor, and femininity and the Other. Overall, this is a refreshing read, and may well interest both scholars and non-specialists alike.

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**Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, Second Edition.
Cambridge, etc., Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. xxx + 970.
ISBN 0 521 77056 4 (hbk); ISBN 0 521 77933 2 (pbk)**

Monumental does not seem too grandiose a word for this book, covering as it does in some 870 pages of text virtually the whole of the of Islamic world from the time of Muhammad to about 2000 CE. The present edition not only updates the earlier, 1988, one but also adds a chapter on Muslims in the West, i.e. Europe and North America (it does not cover Australasia or Latin America).

The book is divided into three parts: Part I covers Islamic society in the Middle East from 600 to about 1200 CE in 194 pages; Part II covers the world wide diffusion of Islamic societies from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries in 256 pages; Part III covers the last two centuries in 420 pages. In comparison to the earlier edition this represents a considerable expansion of the modern section, which there was only slightly longer than the others. There has been some judicious pruning and rephrasing in the first two Parts so as to keep the total length of the two editions about the same, but nothing of substance has been

omitted so far as I can tell. Parts II and III devote at least half their space to the Islamic world outside the Middle East, thus providing provide good coverage to areas often shortchanged or omitted in general works on Islam. The text is supplemented with good illustrations and useful maps, tables and charts. There are almost no footnotes or endnotes, but fairly extensive bibliographies are provided for each chapter.

As the plural in the title indicates, the author does not want us to think in terms of a unitary or “essential” Islam, but he does give considerable attention to those institutional and intellectual patterns that are widely shared throughout the Islamic world. In the preface the author states three assumptions that underlie his work. The first is that the history of societies may be presented in terms of their institutions. The second is that for Islamic societies there are four basic types of institutions: familial (including tribal, ethnic, etc.), economic, cultural/religious, and political. Of these, he gives least attention to the economic institutions because their patterns were set down in the pre-Islamic period and did not change until the modern period. The third assumption is that institutional patterns characterizing Islamic societies originate in the city-states and empires of ancient Mesopotamia.

The author discerns four phases of Islamic history. In the first the teachings of Muhammad interacted first with the local Arabian culture and then with the various aspects of the wider Middle Eastern culture to produce the civilization of the Abbasid Empire (750-925 and post-imperial Abbasid period (925-c1200). In the second phase the Middle East Islamic culture was carried by conquerors, missionaries and traders to other areas where it interacted with local cultures to produce new and different societies which, however, shared elements of a common Islamic identity. In the third phase these societies encountered European imperialism and influence and reacted in diverse ways. In the fourth phase many Islamic societies are reaffirming their Islamic heritage, also in diverse ways. Thus a given Islamic society is always the product of an interaction between the Islamic tradition as received there and the local cultures and/or influences derived from Europe, and in every case there is a reformulating and reshaping of all of these elements.

Within the framework of this approach the author presents a factual narrative that provides an impressive amount of information relating particularly to religion and politics, but also to art, architecture, literature, economics and the like. The book does not present much of the scholarly debate or uncertainty lying behind the facts presented — something the author warns the reader of in the preface. On the whole the author’s judgments are sound and in line the best scholarship, so far as this reviewer knows, but there are points where I wish he had presented of the alternative footnotes, either in the text or in footnotes or endnotes. For example he presents a fairly traditional account of the career of Muhammad and makes no mention of the radical criticism associated with people such as Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, whose works are not even mentioned in the bibliography. Even if these views have not gained general acceptance, they should not be completely ignored. It must also be pointed out that in the first two parts no effort seems to

have been made to revise any of the material in the light of scholarship since the time of the first edition, nor have the bibliographies of these sections been updated.

This book undoubtedly owes some of its inspiration to Marshall Hodgson's three volume work, *The Venture of Islam*, which is the first book mentioned in the bibliography and the only one of quite the same type. The two books cover roughly the same territory, though Hodgson is more than half again as long. Lapidus is, of course, more up-to-date and gives proportionally more attention to the modern period. He does not, however, raise general moral and existential human issues or speculate on the deeper meaning of the material as Hodgson often does. His book is more straightforward and "text-book" like, something which pleased me at times and seemed a bit tedious at others. The author has, of course, had to be quite selective in the material present on any one place and period. As a result, the reader knowledgeable about that area may feel that important things have been omitted while the reader not knowledgeable may sometimes not have enough information to get a good sense of the topic. There is a problem with the genre, not the author.

In a work this monumental, there are inevitably some errors or points about which questions may be raised, and it is the responsibility of the review to point some of these out. I am not an expert in Islamic philosophy but it is surely wrong to speak of "Platonic and Aristotelian opinions such as creation *ex nihilo*" (79). This is what the theologians defended against the philosophers. Lapidus states that "Sufism brought al-Ghazzali to certain knowledge of God" (161) but my own reading of al-Ghazzali is that Sufism gave him a taste of the prophetic experience so as to give him confidence in the prophet's statements. He also seems to have al-Ghazzali teaching the pre-existence of the soul (162), which is not the case to my knowledge. The statement that the first Safavi ruler, Shah Isma'il, claimed to be hidden Imam (234) seems unlikely; I would at least like a footnote. The statement that the "Habsburgs ... took Serbia in 1689" (281) does not accord with anything I have read on this. It is probably misleading to say that Muhammad Iqbal in 1930 called for the amalgamation of several Muslims areas "into a single state" (636), since he was calling for autonomy, not yet independence. Ali Shariati did not form the Husayniyya Irshad (483) though he had a major involvement in it. To describe Khomeini as "the highest Iranian religious authority" (484) at the time of the Revolution is a bit inaccurate; at that point he was one of several high authorities. It is not accurate to say that Muhammad Ali brought the Sufi orders under state control in Egypt in the early 19th century (515) though steps were taken in that direction. The Muslim Brothers were dissolved in 1954, not 1956 (523). In later years they have not actually been a political party (523, 532). The Iran-Iraq war ended in 1988, not 1989, but the author is quite right to describe the situation as "a statement and a truce," not an Iraqi victory as some do (554). He states that the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 in Iran "overthrew the monarchy" (462); what it did was depose one monarch. When he mentions that the Nadlatul Ulama in Indonesia accepted the state doctrine of Pancasila (672) he fails to mention that all groups were forced to do this. In discussing the possible pipeline routes for Central

Asian oil, he does not mention Afghanistan (710), though this is commonly claimed to be an important reason for American involvement there. He mentions that the Chechens were deported during the Second World War (716) but not that they were allowed to return in the 1950s. The split in Nation of Islam in America took place after Elijah Muhammad's death in 1975, not Malcolm X's in 1965, as the author seems to say (807). In stating that Turkey "did not have to contend after World War I with serious tribal or ethnic opposition" (846), the author seems to forget about the Kurds. Such matters, however, are still only minor blemishes on an essentially sound and impressive work.

Among the plusses, it seems to me that Lapidus conceptualizes the relation of religion and politics well, among other things showing how contemporary Muslim secularism and revivalism both look back to earlier ideals. He also has an excellent section on gender issues in the concluding chapter.

All in all, I think that anyone seriously interested in the Islamic world should consider purchasing this book. At A\$ 59.95 it is good value. It might well be used as the basic textbook in a course on Islamic civilization for upper level undergraduates.

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Barry McDonald (ed), *Every Branch in Me. Essays on the Meaning of Man (The Perennial Philosophy)* Bloomington, World Wisdom. 2002, pp 344.

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In one of his many masterly essays, "No Activity Without Truth," Frithjof Schuon observes, "That which is lacking in the present world is a profound knowledge of the nature of things; the fundamental truths are always there, but they do not impose themselves...on those unwilling to listen" (from *The Sword of Gnosis*, ed. J. Needleman, 1974: 28). *Every Branch in Me* is an anthology of essays, written from a perennialist perspective which seeks to reaffirm that "profound knowledge" of which the contemporary world remains so wilfully ignorant. This book is addressed not only to readers already familiar with the magisterial work of such figures as René Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Schuon, but also to those many people who sense the intellectual and spiritual sterility of the modern worldview but who are yet to discover the wellsprings of tradition.

The governing theme which knits together these diverse essays is the true nature of man's vocation. Nothing is more characteristic of modernity than the reductionistic and one-dimensional "definitions" of man which abound in the contemporary world, especially in the domains of sociology, psychology, and a rationalistic philosophy, not to mention the disastrous effects of a totalitarian evolutionism which so tyrannizes the modern mentality. As E.F. Schumacher remarked many years ago, "Nothing is more conducive to the brutalisation of the modern world than the launching, in the name of science, of wrongful and

degraded definitions of man, such as “the naked ape” (*A Guide for the Perplexed*, 1977: 31). Needless to say, the fabrication of dehumanising social forms on the external plane depends on our assent to thought-forms which deny or distort our real nature.

The various authors assembled in *Every Branch of Me* seek to remind us of the human vocation wherein is to be found the deepest purpose and meaning of life, one which confers both dignity and responsibility. To put the matter in the spiritual vocabulary of the Occidental traditions one can say that the splendour of the human condition derives from our opportunity to realise that we are truly the sons and daughters of God, that we are made in His Image, that we might attain sanctity and become conduits through which God’s grace flows into the world around us. Furthermore, as the editor of this volume reminds us, nothing that properly belongs to the human domain can be divorced from the life of the spirit. To put the same point slightly differently one might say that there is no human experience, no human situation, which is without a spiritual dimension and without spiritual possibilities — a verity of which the traditional worlds of both East and West were ever mindful and of which the contemporary world is ever forgetful.

Following a lucid and eloquent introduction by the editor, *Every Branch in Me* opens with a decisive essay by Frithjof Schuon, “To Have a Center” (taken from the book of the same title, 1990). Many readers will already be familiar with Schuon’s peerless expositions of metaphysical principles and religious doctrines. However, this essay is of peculiar significance as it is one of the few places where Schuon directly confronts some of the grotesqueries of modern, European “high culture.” Within the context of what he elsewhere calls “a spiritual anthropology” (elaborated more fully in a later contribution to this anthology), Schuon exposes the profane and often Promethean pretensions of artists and “intellectuals” who have succumbed to the bogus philosophies and ideologies of modernity. The productions of post-medieval culture are, all too often, like so many luxuriant outgrowths of colourful but poisonous plants proliferating in the febrile hothouse of humanistic individualism. Discerning both the grandeur and the pathos of their ambitions, Schuon explains the tragic deflection from the human vocation of such figures as Beethoven, Wagner, Rodin, Nietzsche, Gauguin and Dostoevsky. Without denying their very considerable subjective resources and without ignoring the fact that they were sometimes “the bearers of incontestable values” (14), Schuon shows how a humanistic culture, insofar as it has an ideological and pseudo-religious function, is rooted in a fundamental ignorance — of God’s nature because it denies Him primacy, and of man who now usurps the position of God (“man is the measure of all things”).

Schuon’s reflections on 19th century bourgeois culture, marked on one side by a petty and “horizontal” mediocrity and on the other by a hubristic decadence, if one may so describe it, are followed by Thomas Yellowtail’s ruminations on the destruction of a culture as far removed as imaginable from both the mediocre and the decadent. The extirpation of the Plains Indians’ culture, pervaded by that sense of the sacred which marks all traditional civilizations, comprises one of the most

ignominious vandalisms of modern times. The fate of the Indians themselves, so tragic and so poignant, reminds us of the destruction of traditional cultures all over the globe as the juggernaut of modernity crashes onwards. However, Chief Yellowtail's central purpose is not to sit in judgement of the perpetrators of these crimes but to reaffirm, in the inimitable idiom of the Indians, those spiritual values and principles which informed Indian life and which contrast so starkly with those of the modern secularized, industrialized and urbanized world. As Yellowtail states so directly, "Modern civilization has no understanding of sacred matters. Everything is backwards" (31). This theme is taken up again in a later essay also concerned with the spiritual economy of the Indians, "On Being Human" by Joseph Epes Brown.

One of the most authoritative critics of modern science and scientism has been Titus Burckhardt and it is altogether appropriate that his contribution to *Every Branch in Me* should concern one of the most insidious forms of scientism intruding into a field in which it has no competence, thereby serving only to sow more seeds of confusion. One refers to the pretensions of a quasi-"scientific" psychology to "explain" the life of the spirit. In "Modern Psychology" Burckhardt shows how the theories of Carl Jung actually comprise a case of "psychism" — that confusion of spiritual realities and psychic phantasmagoria which was so ruthlessly exposed in Guenon's *Reign of Quantity* (1945). Burckhardt's critique of Jungian psychologism is followed by Seyyed Hossein Nasr's more wide-ranging arraignment of modern science which is contrasted with the *sacra scientia* of traditional civilisations. Many readers will already be familiar with the work of Professor Nasr, not only a leading Islamicist but a pre-eminent historian of science and a guiding light in the often confused debate about the "ecological crisis." Scientism, this time in the guise of evolutionism (hand-in-hand with its social accomplice, the pseudo-myth of Progress), is also the target of Huston's Smith's essay, "Hope, Yes; Progress, No."

The limited compass of a book review precludes any detailed commentary on all of the nineteen essays on offer here. But *Every Branch in Me* is full of treasures. One might mention Marco Pallis' fascinating reflections on "the significance of human attire" in "Do Clothes Make the Man?" or Lord Northbourne's sobering meditations on "The Survival of Civilization." Two subjects which have hitherto commanded only limited treatment by traditionalist authors concern education and work, addressed here by William Stoddart and Brian Keeble respectively. (One might note in passing that one of the most illuminating of all commentators on these subjects was Ananda Coomaraswamy who is not represented in this particular anthology). Another essay which deserves the attention of a much wider Western audience is James Cutsinger's arresting piece on the "problem" of religious pluralism, written from a Christian perspective and using both Patristic and Schuonian explications of the doctrine of Christ's "two natures" as a platform for reviewing Christian exclusivism. Many Christian folk of good will, exposed to the accumulated weight of centuries of a misdirected exclusivism, would derive immeasurable profit from this essay which affirms Christianity as one amongst many integral religious traditions.

Most of the authors mentioned above are, in varying degree, widely known by readers already familiar with the traditional outlook and with the implacable opposition to modernistic ideologies which is the inevitable corollary to any real understanding of those principles and values vehicled by traditional forms. Whilst no one will question the pre-eminence of such exponents of the traditional perspective as Schuon, Burckhardt and Nasr, it is particularly pleasing to see the work of less well-known authors represented in this volume. Some, like the Swedish philosophers Kurt Almqvist and Tage Lindblom, belonged to the same generation as Schuon and Burckhardt, whilst Gray Henry, Patrick Laude, Mark Perry and editor Barry McDonald represent a younger generation of scholars and seekers who strive to carry on the work of such illustrious predecessors. Lilian Stavely (born circa 1878) was the author of *The Golden Fountain*, a recondite mystical work; it is good to find in this anthology an extract from her spiritual autobiography, *The Prodigal Returns*.

Every Branch in Me does not present itself as any kind of compendium; it does not seek to give us a representative sample of teachings taken from the world's major religious traditions. Nonetheless, one cannot help observing that the Eastern traditions are only lightly represented. True, there are a good few passing references to the East, but one would have been grateful for some more extended considerations of Oriental teachings about the human vocation. By way of illustrating the point one might adduce Coomaraswamy's profoundly important essay on "The Bugbear of Democracy, Freedom and Equality" as the kind of piece which might usefully have complemented the material in this anthology, sitting comfortably alongside such essays as Jean Louis Michon's "The Vocation of Man According to the Koran" (Coomaraswamy's essay can be found in *The Bugbear of Literacy*, 1979). Given the burgeoning Western interest in the traditions of the East, especially Buddhism, a contribution on the Buddhist understanding of "that state hard to attain" (the human realm) might also have served a useful purpose. But one does not want to resort to the well-worn stratagem of reviewers who are more concerned with what is not done than with what is actually in front of them. Nor should the various remarks above about the spiritual impoverishment of modernity be allowed to suggest that the intent of this anthology is essentially negative. The follies of modern thought, foregrounded in several essays, are only discussed in order to clear away those prejudices which obscure traditional teachings. The sovereign purpose of this anthology, as the editor reminds us, is to reawaken a sense of man's sacred vocation and thus to immunize us against "the despair and nihilism which are the final outcomes of the secular and relativist ideologies of our time" (pxi).

It might be said that the structure of *Every Branch in Me* is polyphonic: various melodies and motifs recur throughout, with each being inflected in new and different ways but always sustaining the central theme. The editor is to be commended on not only the selection of materials but their arrangement. Like all of the books produced by World Wisdom, this one has been meticulously and attractively produced.

Every Branch in Me is a most welcome addition to the library of perennialist works; indeed, it is the most significant anthology of its kind since *The Unanimous Tradition* (ed. Ranjit Fernando, Colombo, 1991). It will return some readers to the sources from which these essays are taken while for others it will serve as an introduction to those riches which are to be found in the spiritual treasuries of the world's great religions. World Wisdom intend to publish a series of companion volumes on related themes, a development which we can await with the keenest anticipation. It is but rarely that one is able to review a book with unqualified enthusiasm — but here is one such occasion. The contemporary world stands in the most urgent need of that timeless wisdom which these authors have sought to re-express in a way which, even in these dark and troubled times, is accessible and intelligible. In so doing they offer us some signposts along the path we must travel if we are to be true to our human vocation.

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**Darren J. N. Middleton (ed.), *God, Literature and Process Thought*.
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As scholars in religion are invariably well aware, the American enthusiasm for 'process thought' knows few limits; the philosophical work of Alfred North Whitehead and — to a lesser extent — Charles Hartshorne is the subject of seemingly endless symposia, of edited collections of essays, and a fairly constant stream of scholarly (and sometimes popular) monographs. Thus, it was with some suspicion that I embarked upon the present collection of essays, edited by Darren J.N. Middleton, entitled *God, Literature and Process Thought*. It was here, in the domain of literary hermeneutics, that I thought that the work of Whitehead and Hartshorne would perhaps show its real limitations. How might, I wondered, two systematic, neo-classical metaphysicians — philosophers who concerned primarily themselves with issues in science and religion — help us navigate the enormously complex field of contemporary literary theory?

I was, however, pleasantly surprised. This collection succeeds, at least in part, by opening up the nascent field and examining a broader range of thinkers than is normal associated with process thought — Henri Bergson, Jacob Boehme, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, for instance; what's more, this opening up is undertaken with a fairly active and consistent engagement with contemporary theory. The collection explores and evaluates what it calls 'evolutionary theism' — most simply, the notion that God of monotheism is subject to change — mapping the way in which this notion surfaces as a motif in classic, modern, and postmodern genres of fiction. Examining a wide range of literary and theoretical texts, the twelve contributors to the volume reflect alternately on the relationship between God and the world, on theories of reading and interpretation, on the suffering of both God and humanity, and on the metaphysics of being and becoming. To my mind, especially notable contributions included Daniel

Dombrowski's refreshing examination of the philosophy of Bergson in relation to the novels of Nikos Kazantzakis, and Timothy Mooney's thought provoking, albeit highly selective, comparison of Whitehead and Derrida.

Overall, this is a good collection, and I am aware of no other like it. Perhaps my most serious reservation relates to the way in which proponents of process thought tend to — perhaps unintentionally — misconstrue, and even caricature, their opponents; contrary to what is often asserted, including in this collection, (so-called) 'classical theism' is not quite as monolithic as is invariably made out, and its intellectual vulnerability not quite so cut-and-dry. An unfortunate secondary effect of this kind of distortion is presented as a kind of zero-sum game: one must either adopt a process or 'evolutionary' or a 'classical' theism. But as recent work by philosophers such as James Felt, Joseph Bracken, and W. Norris Clarke has indicated, this is far from being the case.

While the collection perhaps sometimes lacks the depth and analytic sophistication that we have come to expect in literary studies, it certainly makes up for this in energy and creativity; what's more, it gives the impression of an intellectual engagement that actually wants to connect with the world. It is not, in other words, merely an attempt at stylistic pyrotechnics or diletantism. *God, Literature and Process Thought* is an exploratory venture, after all — a series of essays which open up a potentially very fruitful and interesting area of inquiry. As such, perhaps needless to say, it is a very good start.

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