

THE WORD IN THE PICTURES: THE ART OF PETER WEIR

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'You worry about the words - I'll worry about the pictures': cameraman Kwan to journalist Hamilton in Peter Weir's film of Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously*. Words and pictures are also the subject of Jacques Ellul's *The Humiliation of the Word*.¹ Ellul argues that word and image, hearing and sight are radically out of balance in modern technicised society. Words - even the divine Word - are marginalised, 'humiliated'; the image and the visible fact prevail; ours is an idolatrous world in which film and television constantly reinforce our addiction to images. Stressing the iconoclastic strand of Judeo-Christian tradition, Ellul problematises any attempt to show that tradition on screen. Nevertheless, in so far as it can be done, I think that Weir has done it.

If we know Ellul we are intrigued when in *Year of Living Dangerously* - a film that insistently juxtaposes words and pictures - Weir fixes on Koch's gospel text (Luke 3.10, 'What then must we do?') and hammers it home. Moreover, book and film turn on another - unspoken - text. Matthew 18.9, 'it is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.' Guy Hamilton sacrifices an eye to join his lover on the last flight out of chaos. Unless we 'hear' Matthew behind the story we miss half the force of the ending. And *Year* isn't unique. Ignored by mainstream critics, Biblical texts resonate through *Witness*, *Mosquito Coast*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Green Card* and *Fearless*. Ellul's 'humiliated word' is present and potent within Weir's world of cinematic images.

Take *Mosquito Coast*. Its 'text' is Deuteronomy, nowhere mentioned by Theroux. Fox finds that the missionary Spellgood has left on his landing papers that read 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: Deut 4: 26'. Heaven and earth: the ominous landscape shots that punctuate the action. Yes, this verse expresses Spellgood's ill-will. But it does more. Verse 26 follows a warning against idolatry. It goes on to tell the idolators that they 'will soon utterly perish from the land which you are going over the Jordan to possess; you will not live long upon it, but will be utterly destroyed.'² *Mosquito Coast* - Weir's plainest film³ - tells a story of idolatry. Fox's sons learn that their idolised father is a liar and destroyer. Allie, 'a lie,' 'all lie', is a modern-day idolator with his mechanical temple/ god, the ice machine.⁴

Deuteronomy fits in other ways. Chapter 13 warns that even if someone - like Fox - promises and performs wonders he is a false prophet if he tells them to reject God⁵ (Fox does). Spellgood mixes up his references; should we remember a similar text which also follows a warning against idolatry? Deuteronomy 30.19, 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live'. Fox chooses spiritual death - rejecting God and common human charity - and nearly kills his family. Deuteronomy tells Israel that if they repent God will hear; Fox, an apostate Moses, won't give up, give in. At last, having burned down a church and attacked his wife, he dies. The idol-maker perishes. The apostate is killed. Deuteronomy comes true.

The Word looked so feeble. Fox steps on a paper; the camera shows us handwritten text, trodden underfoot. Compare the monstrous ice factory, symbol of Fox's 'superior civilisation'. Here is what Ellul was talking about: the humiliated word and the worship of 'technique'.⁶ Where else is the word? The ineffectual Spellgood? 'Gospel' reversed, elementary word, he embraces modern idol worship, preaching not in person but on video. Still, just once, we hear a word that haunts us. The hymn 'Saviour, like a shepherd lead us', with its refrain 'Blessed Jesus',⁷ offers the fulfilment of Moses' Deuteronomy promise that God would send another prophet-leader.⁸ Added by the film-makers, it traces a thread of sound across the water to the wretched Foxes whose self-proclaimed 'saviour' has nearly killed them. 'I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life?' Deuteronomy, flagged by one verse in a fool's mouth, explodes within *Mosquito Coast* like a depth charge.

The same thing happens in *Dead Poets Society*. After Neil Perry kills himself, in the classroom Keating lifts from Neil's desk the 'holy book', *Five Centuries of Poetry*. We see beneath it the title of a chemistry notebook: Laboratory. Keating's 'experiment' has blown up in his face. He reads the title page with the words of Henry David Thoreau and begins to weep. Then we hear, from another anthology, the voice of another David: 'Goodness and mercy all my life...' Cut to the chapel and Neil's friends singing.

[Goodness and mercy all my life]
 ...Shall surely follow me.
 And in God's house for ever more
 My dwelling place shall be.

Several times, earlier, the camera lingered on lake and lawns. They shimmered in the background as Keating re-founded the religion of poetry, the Dead Poets Society. Suddenly, in the chapel, those earlier shots become the 'green pastures' and 'still waters' of the 23rd Psalm.

Psalm 23 re-echoes through this coldly dazzling film in which even Shakespeare, the greatest English poet, cannot save. Against a winter of despair the too-familiar phrases burn like fire. Neither tyranny nor suicide, but a life-giving, liberating authority - 'the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want'. Order 'in the paths of righteousness' and Dionysian excess, 'thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.' Not 'seize the day' (for tomorrow we die); but 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.' The psalm illuminates the film; the film defamiliarises the psalm. Divine word and human words. Who has the words of life? 'It's not the Bible' says Keating, telling the boys to rip out the introduction to their poetry books. But neither - *pace* Matthew Arnold⁹ - is the rest of the book. That's the tragedy.

'God helps those who help themselves', said Benjamin Franklin. Weir lets this 'Hollywood theology' play out to the end, over against Deuteronomy and Psalm 23. 'Self-help', whether using machines or verse, kills. What then? Trust - not control. Humility - not power. Gift - not desert. 'God helps those who know they cannot help themselves'. This is what emerges from *Witness*, *Green Card* and *Fearless*. Weir, no believer, is not pointing morals; he's telling stories. But what stories!

Witness begins with grass blowing in the wind. Western cliché, perhaps. But listen to Psalm 103. 15-18:

As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear
him and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.

Now Isaiah 40. 6-8.

...All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely
the people is grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever.

'Surely the people is grass.' Out of the grass emerge the Amish; through it they pass to a funeral;¹⁰ wind again, and hay being cut. During the funeral we hear John 11.25. I am the resurrection and the life (saith the Lord our

God); he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live [and he who lives and believes in me shall never die]'. At the opening of a film about sight we contemplate the invisible. Wind in the grasses, *ruach* or breath of God, the spoken self-revelation of the Word.

If we recognised the gospel and know that the word 'witness' marks the Johannine writings, we will read the riddles we meet in Philadelphia. The old Hassid, the name 'Jerusalem', an angel statue, ritualistic murder - not stabbing or strangling but bloody throatcutting. The murderer says, 'just washing my hands'; we blink, recalling the Passion narratives. A policeman named John Book. A book called 'Philadelphia, City of Champions'. Where else do we find an elder, Jerusalem, a great angel, a 'slain lamb', and Philadelphia - commended for faithfulness? In Revelations, traditionally linked with the Apostle John. John's book. John Book.

Revelations dominates *Witness*. Like his biblical namesake - John evangelist and visionary - John Book in exile sees the heavenly Jerusalem, *Jeru-shalom* 'foundation of peace',¹¹ holy city, bride of God. Remember the barnraising? Even without John Hostetler's *Amish Society*¹² - which says that the Amish sometimes worship in their barns - we feel we are on holy ground. We hear the crooked police chief: 'Can you see John at a *prayer meeting*?' Next scene - John among the Amish ascending the hill to a building site. In another scene Eli Lapp recited 2 Corinthians 6.17 to support Amish principles. 'Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing'.¹³ The phrase 'come ye out' echoes Isaiah 52.11 (the restoration of Jerusalem) and parallels the word to the church in Revelations 18.4. For Eli the separatist Amish are the one true church. But we may take them also as type or sign. If we know that 2 Cor. 6.16 calls the church 'the temple of the living God' we catch our breath in shock to see the half-built barn alive with people. There in front of us is St. Paul's definition.

As the barn rises John goes with it, up a golden ladder to heaven while the soundtrack ascends like a Bach fugue. He moves through this sequence with the face of a man seeing visions. So he is; so are we. 'Jerusalem', Corinthians and Apocalypse illuminate the festal cliches: the newlyweds whose barn is built, the feast, the prayers, the hymn as day ends. In Revelations the holy city is a bride, songs are sung and the faithful summoned to a wedding feast. These Amish Christians gather on a hill to enact a vision of the future, the new Jerusalem.

In the very next scene 'Jerusalem' is Rachel, whose biblical namesake traditionally signifies Contemplation.¹⁴ Rachel at her bath looks in the

mirror. There reflected is John at the half-open door. 'Now we see in a mirror dimly.' Slowly, in silence, she turns to meet his gaze. 'But then face to face.' (1 Cor. 13.12). For one second we see her through his eyes - a woman in a lit doorway glowing like the Shekinah.

At the heart of *Witness* is Jerusalem of the Apocalypse, city and woman. Apocalyptic, too, are the extremes of light and darkness; sudden violence, death and judgement. Corn like fiery rain overwhelms a murderer. A bell summons a 'cloud of witnesses' (cf. Hebrews 11.12). Beneath their gaze John's persecuting boss Paul (like his namesake in Acts) is confronted, surrenders and drops to his knees. And Revelations 3.7-12, advice to the Angel of the church in Philadelphia, oddly parallels Book's experiences.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens.

I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut; I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie - behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you.

Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth.

I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

This Philadelphia policeman, representative or 'angel' of his city, encounters opened doors and people who 'say they are Jews but lie' (false or apostate policemen). He is faithful and endures, survives an hour of trial, his enemies fall at his feet. In the barnraising and in Rachel's arms he becomes part of a temple. And when he leaves he is marked or inscribed - remember, his name is Book! - with the name of the holy city or community; Eli warns him as if he were an Amishman, 'You be careful out among the English'.

Certain moments in *Witness* show us that Harrison Ford has the face of a Byzantine icon. *Witness*, overarched by Revelations, is an icon; it makes visible - in John and Rachel dancing, their mutual adoration and embrace - a sign or promise of the eschaton. 'Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other' (Psalm 85).¹⁵ Lion and Lamb, action and contemplation are reconciled; word and image, truth and sight, city and garden. But the glory hides itself; the presence withdraws;

there remains only the way, and the memory of vision. I don't think Weir had Dante in mind but he has caught the exact quality of the Vita Nuova. 'Io vidi la speranza de' beati/ I have seen the hope of the blessed.'¹⁶

John holds Rachel's gaze and - standing in the light - turns in silence toward the road. How many people saw the double bluff that Weir achieves? The chaste country girl is not the only god-bearer. John both discovers and enacts his name, 'GOD [YHWH] is gracious/ grace of GOD.'¹⁷ Through Rachel he experiences grace. But Rachel, loving him whose full name suggests both Gospel and Apocalypse, also faces a choice - law or grace? Her Amish suitor Daniel - 'God is judge'. The unsettling and now absent stranger, John - 'Grace of God'. Maintain ritual purity¹⁸ - or follow grace, out among the Gentiles? Like the close of the Apocalypse, the glories and terrors disappear leaving us in suspense. If Rachel chooses John she will do it by faith and not by sight.

Green Card likewise sets up an interplay of presence and absence. Making zabaglione (New York 'screwball' comedy) Weir uses vodka (the eroticism of Canticles). Think. A bride in a gorgeous greenhouse with a fountain. 'A garden locked is my sister, my bride; a garden locked, a fountain sealed...a garden fountain, a well of living waters, and flowing streams from Lebanon.' Canticles 4.11, 12, 15. Then, the other images. Georges regards Bronte through cafe window, greenhouse gate, apartment door. Canticles 2.9 'Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice'. Hand in hand Bronte and Georges run toward the camera, out from under the trees of Central Park; she stumbles and he supports her. 'Who is this coming up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?' (7.5).

Traditionally the lovers in Canticles are God and the soul, God and Israel or the church. Who are Bronte Parrish and Georges Faure? Bronte's nickname is Bee, as if she were Beatrice.¹⁹ Georges miscalls her Betty, captions a photo - 'beatiful Bronte'. Beata - blessed. And Georges? With the numinous authority of the Lover in Canticles he enters the locked garden. 'George' means 'farmer, gardener'. Bronte's surname is Parrish; a pun with 'parish', spiritual garden? Facing forced separation they re-enact their marriage. A gospel-type lovesong on the soundtrack insists 'don't be dismayed' and 'keep your eyes on the prize'. Cf. Isaiah 41.10 'fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God.' Or Philippians 3.14 'I press on toward the goal for the prize...'. The passion of their embraces matches Canticles 8.6, 'set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm'. Then, absence and longing. 'I will write every day, and the letters will

always say, 'when are you coming, *cherie*?' says Georges. Canticles 8.13-14: 'O you who dwell in the gardens, my companions are listening for your voice; let me hear it. Make haste, my beloved...'

A marriage 'in name' becomes visible, 'under the law', then re-enters the realm of promise. 'Everything is going to be all right', but not yet; beyond the final frame. We who have journeyed through Advent and Christmas ought to recognise the pattern. Green in Christian tradition signifies hope - the keynote of this film. Renouncing a 'Hollywood ending', Weir forces us beyond sight; fittingly, in a film about hope, for 'hope which is seen is not hope.'

Fearless begins where Kieslowski's *Red* ends. A group of people walk away from catastrophe. San Francisco architect Max Klein has a 'near death experience' during a plane crash. It leaves him 'fearless', addicted to risk. He won't come back to earth, to ordinary life, his marriage. 'Fearless', he can do what is needed to free fellow-survivor Carla from blaming herself for her child's death. But the same act exposes his own danger. 'I can't get back' he says. Yet he does. How?

The answer is a riddle. After the crash Max showers in a motel, tells himself 'You're not dead'; cut to desert, wind, parked car, Max sitting on the ground. The camera floats across the distant hills; then back to Max's face and hands as he spits in the dust and shapes it between his fingers. When I first saw this compound image of mountains and shaping hand Psalm 121.1-2 wrote itself across the screen. 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills; from whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. (King James Version).' *The question in Fearless is - who can help? who can save?*

Other clues resonate with the psalm. Gorecki's intense affirmations. A waitress's nametag 'Faith'. Jesus' name on Carla's door. As Carla circles a woman and child in a mall, carol tunes evoke the words for 'God rest you merry, gentlemen' and 'Hark, the herald angels'. When Carla breaks down she prays the Hail Mary. The divine Eye and a heart loom from a graffiti-painted wall. Analogues of the seven Catholic sacraments²⁰ chart Max's journey back to life .

Max, 'the good Samaritan', saved fellow-passengers and frees Carla but can't save himself. His 'near death experience' traps him between body and soul, heaven and earth, unable to connect or relate. Encountering analogues of the sacraments he also three times encounters 'forbidden fruit', strawberries; before the crash he was dangerously allergic. Twice he eats, courting death. Nothing happens: is he already 'dead'? Then we enter the

final sequence. Reflecting the disjunction of image and word, body and soul there are two scenes, original to the film, one about pictures, one about words. Max's wife Laura leafs through his portfolio. Sketches of the crash precede Doré's engraving of the celestial rose (illustration to Paradiso 31.1-2) and Bosch's painting of the soul's angel-guided ascent to God. Max reads his son Jonah's scrapbook of news reports on the crash. In a scene that jolts us like Augustine's *tolle, lege* 'take and read' his finger moves across the page, spelling out the word 'saves'. Jonah 'dove/messenger' precipitated Nineveh's eleventh-hour repentance; Jonah's book gives Max the word he needs. He goes to Laura and says 'I want you to save me'. Unlike Fox in *Mosquito Coast* Max finally knows and admits he needs help. Almost at once he signals his helplessness by eating strawberries a third time, and collapsing. Laura, like Dante's Beatrice, rushes to the rescue. She calls him back, breathing into him the breath of life. Earlier she danced with a troupe of little girls, representing wind. Her name is the laurel of inspiration or victory, but also perhaps a pun with *l'aura*, air/ breath. Hebrew *Ruach* 'breath' is feminine. Holy Spirit? The sound of breath or wind rushes through *Fearless* from beginning to end.

Now at last we get Max's memory of impact. Images of disaster become a near-death vision. Drifting down a lit tunnel toward death Max hears his name, hears Laura say 'No!'. He stops, turns round, turns back, awakes. 'I'm alive!', he cries; they embrace. In Yglesias's book Max needs an adrenalin shot as well as resuscitation; in Weir's film he is restored by the word/ breath of his wife alone. His return to life is like a Dantesque allegory of salvation.

The *Cinema Papers* reviewer, arguing that 'perhaps it is impossible to pursue inner life within a love relationship' and that therefore Max and Laura's embrace celebrates life but 'not the convention of marriage',²¹ completely misses the point. Marriage - relatedness - IS the point. Within the Catholic and Christian tradition that Weir has allowed to dominate the words and images of *Fearless* marriage reflects truth. 'Your life and your death are with your neighbour'. *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est..* God is in relationship; God *is* relationship. Further, the saving Word becomes flesh. Three simple, even childish little words appear on the screen at different points. 'Faith'. 'Jesus'. 'Saves'. Eucharist or 'thanksgiving' is the central sacrament represented; Christmas - incarnation - hides at the heart of *Fearless*; the camera dwells on Max's wedding ring. Marriage signifies what Christmas and Eucharist both remember and expect - salvation. The

triumphant coming-together of heaven and earth, word and action, hearing and seeing, spiritual and bodily reality.

This paradigm - flowering out of the names, the words, the riddling images, the scripture quotes - explains why *Witness*, *Green Card* and *Fearless* are such very adult love stories. Why John and Rachel are summoned to terrifying acts of faith; why Bronte and Georges must discover the meaning of hope; why Laura can save Max. It - and perhaps it alone? - guarantees the promise that we hear in each of these films, 'everything is going to be all right'.

How conscious is all this? I don't know. How did the scripture quotes get in? Irony? They felt right? Sounded right? Did the words attract the images, the images the words, or the stories themselves attract both? Again, I don't know. The effect is extraordinary. These five films - even *Fearless*, with its doomed aeroplane - begin as conventional Hollywood scenarios. Then we recognise the hidden 'words' and they startle us like parables or an Orthodox icon. Parables don't preach; they conceal as much as they reveal. But for 'those with eyes to see and ears to hear' they induce astonished recognition. Icons anticipate a future - guaranteed by the news of incarnation, transfiguration, crucifixion, resurrection - in which image and word, visible reality and invisible truth are reconciled. In Weir's later films the Word is hidden in the pictures and the pictures, the images, are paradoxically governed and transfigured by the hidden or 'humiliated' Word.

REFERENCES

¹ *La Parole Humilíe* (Paris 1981, trans. Joyce Main Hanks 1981, Eerdmanns, Michigan 1985, 1988).

² Verses 23-26 in full read as follows: 'Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a graven image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. 24. For the LORD your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God. 25. When you beget children, and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a graven image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger: / 26. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you are going over Jordan to possess; you will not live long upon it, but will be utterly destroyed.' All citations in this paper are from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise indicated.

³ In an interview in *Film Comment* (1985-86) Weir said, 'I've attempted to eliminate my own style as much as possible... I have consciously eliminated it from this picture.' He offers the reason that because the material contradicted mainstream American film-making, he felt 'the form and shape of it should be very conventional.' Of the opening sequence, he said, 'It has some of the plainest opening images I've ever had... I shot another opening at the same time... Originally, I shot a very mysterious Peter Weir-style opening... I thought it might be too close to *Witness*; but I decided it was just my style. At the dailies everybody was impressed, 'Wow. This is really you at your best. That music you played over those images - wow! it blew me away.' I thought about and thought about it and dropped it all. It was a

symbolic gesture, but it did echo on throughout the film.' It's appropriate that in this film about idolatry both Weir and Harrison Ford systematically destroy the public idols of themselves. The master of seduction-by-pictures renounces his magic; the man who created Indiana Jones and John Book portrays an abusive father slipping over the edge into madness.

⁴ Keith Connolly remarks that it 'stands out of the jungle like a latter-day Tikal or a king-size version of the 2001 obelisk' (*Cinema Papers* 61, Jan. 1987, p. 35). Spellgood is right to identify Fox with Pharaoh. Again, compare Ellul, *Le Bluff Technologique* (Paris, 1988).

⁵ Deut. 13: 1-5, 'If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'let us go after other gods' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams...But that prophet...shall be put to death because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God...'

⁶ Ellul remarks on the Word which is 'refused by a humanity that thought it could do so much better with its machines' (*Humiliation of the Word*, p. 68). Compare the scene early in the film where Fox refuses to accept a copy of the Bible, itself humbled/ commercialised by being bound in blue denim.

⁷ The complete text of this hymn occurs as no. 609 in *The Methodist Hymn-book For Use in Australasia and New Zealand* (London, 1933). It also appears in the Revised Edition of the *Scottish Psalter and Church Hymnary* (London 1929) Both sources name the author as Dorothy Ann Thrupp and date the piece to 1836.

⁸ Cf. Deuteronomy 18.15-19 and Acts 4. 22-23.

⁹ 'More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry... 'our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy... what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge: The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them... the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge' offered to us by poetry.' 'The Study of Poetry' in *Matthew Arnold: Selected Poetry and Prose*, New York, 1967, pp. 299-300.

¹⁰ Verses 15-16 of Psalm 103 are among the suggested texts in the Australian Anglican and in the Catholic burial service

¹¹ This 'folk etymology' goes back to Midrashic tradition.

¹² Baltimore, 1963, pp. 52-57.

¹³ Cf. King James Version, 'Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing'.

¹⁴ (Cf. Dante, *Purgatorio* 27.104-8). The names of other major characters are equally rich with meaning. All three men (Jacob, Daniel, John) associated with Rachel in the film bear the names of Biblical visionaries. Jacob saw the golden ladder with the angels, Daniel is known for apocalyptic visions, and we've already discussed the significance of John. Rachel's son Samuel bears the name of a boy prophet; his grandfather Eli the name of the high priest who reared the biblical Samuel at a time when Israel had fallen away from God. John's sister is Elaine (= Helen, 'light/ brightness') - a good name for someone whose brother enacts the part of John the seer. John's faithful sidekick is Milton (should we think of the seer/poet John Milton?). The apostasy of the city is epitomised when John is shot by his fellow policeman/ brother-in-arms, James McFee - the apostles James and John were brothers. John's ex-mentor, the crooked police chief, is Paul: like the biblical Paul, he sets out to hunt down and kill the righteous but repents when challenged. A further subtle irony: on the surface John as policeman represents Law/ Justice but his name means 'the LORD (YHWH) is gracious'; Daniel's name means 'God is my judge'. I have no idea whether these names were in the original script or whether they originate with Weir; they are so exactly right that it is hard to believe they were chosen at random. For the meanings of names see Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges, *A Dictionary of First Names* (Oxford, 1990), also E G Withycombe *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names* (Oxford 1977); Biblical names may be double-checked in *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Hastings, Grant and Rowley, 1963), also the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992) and the *Macmillan Illustrated Dictionary and Concordance of the Bible* (1986).

¹⁵ The Hebrew here gives us *hesed* and '*emet*, *zedek* and *shalom*; rendered by the Vulgate as *miseriordia* and *veritas*, *justitia* and *pax*. *The Interlinear Bible*, ed. and trans. Jay P. Green (Michigan 1976-83); *Biblia Sacra iuxta Latinam Vulgatam Versionem* (Rome 1953).

¹⁶ Dante, *Vita Nova*, Canzone XIX 'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore', ll.27-28.

¹⁷ This name is very formally introduced. Samuel asks Rachel, in German, 'What is his name?' John asks, 'What did he say?' Rachel answers, 'He asked, Who you are? What your name is.' The reply: 'John. John Book.'

¹⁸ In their passion for purity the Amish risk legalism and separatism; a point silently made when at the railway station Samuel mistakes a black-suited Hassid for an Amish elder. Amish = Jew?

¹⁹ She is named after the literary Bronte sisters. But it's unlikely Weir knew that the surname Bronte is a variant of the Irish Prunty, itself an anglicised form of 'the Gaelic O Proinntigh - descendant of Proinnteach, a personal name meaning 'bestower' (originally a by-name denoting 'a generous person'). Or that the surname Parish/ Parrish, though it purrs with 'parish', originates from the name Paris as applied in England to someone from Paris! Cf. Patricia Hanks and Flavia Hodges, *Dictionary of Surnames* (Oxford 1988).

²⁰ Baptism, confirmation, matrimony, eucharist, penance or reconciliation, holy orders and last rites. Baptism - Max emerging from a shower post-crash. Confirmation - Max and Carla visit a church, he takes the taper with which she lit her candle and lights one himself, she verbally re-affirms her faith. Matrimony - Max and his wife on opposite sides of a coffee table discuss their marriage, she takes his hand between her two hands and says 'do you remember our marriage?'. Eucharist or 'thanksgiving' - Thanksgiving dinner, wine and bread. Penance or reconciliation - Max and Carla buy Christmas gifts for their dead, Carla confesses that she feels she caused her child's death. Holy orders - Max hears Carla's confession and releases or 'absolves' her; Carla and Laura discuss his role as 'angel' or agent of God. Last rites - in flashback Max aboard the doomed plane reassures/ blesses the terrified passengers; in the present Laura offers life to Max (extreme unction originated as a rite of healing).

²¹ Scott Murray, *Cinema Papers* no. 100, p. 67.