

○ EDITORIAL

One of the surprises of *The Bible and Critical Theory* has been its geographical reach. As we approach the second year of publication – the serious business of volume 2 – we have subscriptions from Hong Kong to Amsterdam, contributions from New Zealand, Africa and Switzerland, to name but a few of the various global locations. But I must confess that I am guilty of a slip in the first sentence, a manifestation of what Australians often call the ‘cultural cringe’. It is the feeling that somehow, in some way, all that is worthwhile culturally, intellectually and politically happens elsewhere, in the centres of global power. All we can do in the Antipodes is catch up, keep abreast of developments, tug the forelock and gape in awe. Or at least we used to think so, not so long ago... last week maybe. So I wrote that it was a ‘surprise’ that the journal should have generated interest in these and other places. Why a ‘surprise’? Is it because I unwittingly assumed that the major interest in the journal would be those centres of intellectual activity focused on the Atlantic?

But I should not have been surprised. For in my travels to places as far apart as Sofia and Vancouver, and in the various lively discussions and debates I have had in all the places in between I have found much interest in the sorts of things we do with the journal. That is to say, the intersections between the Bible and critical theory, whether that is postcolonialism, political theory, queer theory, psychoanalysis, film studies, feminism and so on – although of course I also want to ask why we have such an ever-increasing list of overlaid approaches to literary texts. And this has happened all over the place, running around the globe from Christchurch to Copenhagen, from Adelaide to Amsterdam, from... (fill in alliterative place names). Now I am not deluded into thinking that we are entering some glorious new age of decentred global scholarship, for that scholarship, our scholarship, is closely tied to patterns of global politics and economics. But I am encouraged by the way I keep coming across individual scholars, and more often small and sometimes even larger groups in different places, who are vitally interested in the new possibilities that keep opening up for biblical studies, who are often looking for opportunities to discuss their interests, to read and write and review and publish, who are often not aware of the global extent of interest in the things we do with the journal. Sometimes I like to think of these circles as myriad cells of underground activity that eventually breaks forth to change forever the way we read a text, do our disciplinary thing, overturn a political party, reconstitute a nation-state... Little risk, then, that biblical studies at least is going to throw the wagons in a circle and defend its ground with every drop of scholarly ink.

You may have picked up that I write this editorial while on the road. So I have pondered this issue of the journal while pedalling the reaches of southern Jutland and the midnight canals of Amsterdam, and while walking the mountains near Asenovgrad in Bulgaria. And I have also pondered the context that enables me to do these things and the way I have generated such an image... But it has turned out that this issue represents a distinct geographical diversity. Milena Kirova is from Bulgaria, Alan Cadwallader and Mark Manolopoulos from Australia (although Mark’s parents hail from Greece), Susanne Scholz an American with German background and Jin Hee Han comes from Korea to New York Theological Seminary.

The geography and geopolitics may be diverse, but the focus of this issue is on the most significant development in biblical studies in the last half century, namely, the critical wealth and

scope of feminism. But since this journal operates in the intersections between biblical studies and critical theory, we are interested in new theoretical angles on feminism rather than what has become established in feminist biblical criticism. Thus, in the first essay from Milena Kirova, one of the most significant literary voices from Bulgaria, and head of the department of Bulgarian Literature at the University of Sofia, we have a literary and psychoanalytic reading of symbolic harlotry in the Bible. Apart from bringing a distinct literary sensibility (and remember, the article has been translated by Milena from Bulgarian), what I find most intriguing about this paper is the ambiguity of woman-as-harlot, namely the way woman becomes the place-marker of humanity and then immediately becomes a trope for salvation: abasement becomes the basis of salvation in what is very much a masculine logic.

Alan Cadwallader brings what is the first piece in biblical studies on 'ethology' in order to read the story of the Syrophenician Woman in light of the over-riding characterisations of dogs. With such a reading, the connections between gender, irrationality and the beast stand out in sharp relief. But then there is a profound disjunction between the woman as dog and woman as speaker of *logos*. I leave you to follow the intriguing intricacies of Cadwallader's argument, but what draws my attention in this paper is the way he engages critically with what is a deeply socio-biological discourse, namely 'ethology'. One can only wish for more of this sort of work.

Susanne Scholz addresses the impasse over rape laws in the Hebrew Bible in light of the disjunctions between legal scholars, empiricist-positivist assumptions, pedagogical concerns, ethics and postmodernism. In a thorough examination of the ancient Near Eastern context of such laws, the notable feature of Scholz's article is that she resists the overwhelming urge to offer a resolution of her argument with all of the loose ends neatly tied up and then down. Rather she points to the basic divide between modernist and postmodernist readings of rape laws, or what she characterises as the essentialised universality of one type of reading (rape is rape in all times and places) and the contextualised locality of the other (rape is a distinct social construct of certain societies). And she refuses to resolve this impasse, suggesting that it may not be resolvable.

The remaining two papers, by Jin Han and Mark Manolopoulos, move in the related but different realms of postcolonial criticism and phenomenology, although they are united by underlying political questions. The first addresses the bearing on biblical studies of the postcolonial work of Homi Bhabha, while the second broaches the role of the Bible in the whole debate within phenomenology concerning the gift. Jin Han offers us a sensitive and sensible reading of Bhabha's promise and limits for biblical studies: what are the political implications, on the ground as it were, of Bhabha's literary readings? Manolopoulos blends a biblical foray into the arcane world of phenomenology with a distinct green political agenda, closing with a very similar question to that of Jin Han from a rather different beginning.

Finally, the feast of book reviews continues: this time we have reviews of works by Athalya Brenner, Terry Eagleton, Pamela Tamarkin Reis, Alice Keefe, Mary Shields, Tod Linafelt, Daniel Boyarin, Judith McKinlay and Khiok-khng Yeo, among others.

Roland Boer, Editor, October 2005

Cite this article as: Boer, Roland. 'Editorial'. *The Bible and Critical Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2005. pp. 33.1–33.2. DOI: 10.2104/bc050033.