

**Review of Melissa C. Stewart, ed. *Simulating Aichele: Essays in Bible, Film, Culture and Theory.*  
*Bible in the Modern World*, 69.  
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For several decades, George Aichele has worked tirelessly to push the boundaries of biblical scholarship. His provocative monographs, essays, and edited volumes have explored the relationship between the Bible and popular culture, helping us to rethink the relationship between the two and offering a model for analysing the dialogue that continues between these disparate sources. The essays in this volume offer a fitting tribute to Aichele, always with surprising creativity and insight.

After a brief introduction, the first section of the volume consists of a quintet of essays under the simple heading of “Bible.” Yvonne Sherwood’s essay discusses “Kanu and the Book,” a folktale found among the peoples of Sierra Leone that transforms the story of Jacob and Esau into an anti-colonialist parable. In this retelling, “[i]t seems that the triumph of the Europeans and the Jacobs is accidental,” Sherwood writes, “against the will of the father and the gods” (25). Sherwood’s example demonstrates that the canon is not as closed as much of Western Christianity would like to pretend. Richard Walsh’s fascinating essay employs Aichele’s idea of the “canon machine” to read the gospel of Mark, suggesting that we would read the gospel very differently if we did not have the other three gospels in mind. Read on its own terms, Mark tells a bleak tale of a savior who is unable to deliver on his promise (31). Instead, Walsh finds a closer parallel to Mark in Kafka’s short story “The Penal Colony,” in which a capital punishment machine which is supposed to bring revelation at the moment of death does not lead to “the promised redemption” (36). Tina Pippen’s essay is also centered on the gospel of Mark, with a focus on the fantastic elements of Jesus’ baptism. Pippen finds the “crack” to be the unifying image that runs through Mark’s gospel (51-52), a rift through which the fantastical can enter into the narrative. This is followed by Gary Phillips’s essay, which offers the contours for a Levinasian reading of Luke. The essay is long enough that it provides a strong introduction to Levinas’s theory of ethical reading, which then leads into a re-reading of the story of Mary and Martha. Phillips makes the provocative suggestion that we need to do a better job of listening to Martha than Jesus does, as “Jesus fails to take responsibility for Martha’s humanity” (103). For Phillips, this is a place where “Luke’s self-contained, standard maieutic teaching comes up short” (112). But in this failure, Phillips still finds a charge for us to determine “our response and responsibility as readers” (113). In the section’s final essay, Scott Elliott uses 1 Cor. 9:19-23 as a means of exploring Paul’s mythologization by biblical scholars and how the text itself resists this. Drawing on Roland Barthes’s ideas of myth and the Neutral, Elliott argues that conventional interpretations of this passage rest upon the mythological construction of Paul as a consistent, stable figure, whereas Elliott would instead prefer to see it as evidence of

Paul's "resistance to deciding between any two options" (136); Elliott thus sees Paul's self-designation as "weak" as a "culminating stroke of the Neutral" (137).

The three essays in the next section, "Film," all offer creative readings of films that are not usually thought of as biblical. Robert Seesengood and Jennifer Koosed's essay discusses three recent films centred on the destruction of the world: *Melancholia*, *4:44 Last Day on Earth*, and *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World*. While these films are of disparate genres, they all conclude with the world, in fact, ending. Seesengood and Koosed find in these films different approaches to the "transformation of apocalypse/apocalypticism" into a "model for secular, post-Christian postmodern posthuman mythology" (156). Fred Burnett offers an essay on *The Big Lebowski*, focusing on the characterization of the Dude as slacker and how this identity is constructed in opposition to the film's female characters. While tipping its hat to some elements of the Dude's philosophy that seem reminiscent of Epicurism, Taoism, or even Jesus' wisdom sayings (such as Matt. 6:25-28), the essay mostly sidesteps the traditional concerns of biblical studies. Instead, Burnett is interested in exploring the Dude's identity as "slacker archetype," who cannot be "won over by 'normal', domesticated society" (189). While the Dude sometimes succumbs to the temptation of "maintaining an erection" (187-88) through the course of the film, by the end he has realized that his true purpose is to simply "abide." This section's final essay, from Erin Runions, reads Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* as a complex text intended "to show the problems of attempting to apprehend reality via self-understanding" (197). In its tangled plot of drug addiction and surveillance technology, the film presents a challenging, pessimistic view about "the possibilities of meaning in life" (207). Runions finds both the film's depiction of the promise of drugs and its use of scripture to be examples of the "cruel optimism" (citing Lauren Berlant) of late stage capitalism; the false hope for an unreachable knowledge (208).

The theoretical concerns that have been background become foreground in the final section. Roland Boer builds his essay on the biblical allusions employed by Vladimir Lenin. But as usual, Boer frustrates readers' expectations by not providing a detailed analysis of these allusions, instead weaving together the numerous allusions scattered throughout Lenin's speeches into a single, newly composed speech, comprised entirely of biblical allusions. The volume concludes with Stephen Moore's essay on postmodernism in biblical studies, focusing in particular on postmodernism's fortunes in the last decade. As postmodernism became more and more situated within the academy it "lost its novelty ... its ability to defamiliarize, to energize, to surprise" (233). For Moore, the term "postmodern" may have outlived its usefulness, but there is still a deep need for "[c]oalitions between those on the margins of the historical-critical enterprise" (242).

While the essays are wide-ranging, encompassing a variety of texts and approaches, they all share a commitment to the creative possibilities of biblical scholarship, a desire to travel beyond conventional ways of writing and thinking about the texts. As such, they offer a fitting tribute to George Aichele, one of the pioneers in this still-emerging field.



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