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George Aichele and Tina Pippin (eds). *Violence, Utopia, and the Kingdom of God: Fantasy and Ideology in the Bible*. New York: Routledge, 1998. Pp. xiv + 157. No Price Listed.

[1] The title of the collection of essays edited by George Aichele and Tina Pippin - *Violence, Utopia, and the Kingdom of God* - alerts the reader to one theme common to most of them, while its subtitle - *Fantasy and Ideology in the Bible* - tells its theoretical foundations. In a delightfully postmodern way, the essays themselves are playful forays into the realm of fantasy, making my reading experience, like fantasy itself, a "retreat from the alienating experiences in our lives" (xi). Let the reader beware, however. These romps will appeal most to those with imaginations limber enough to stretch into different positions of mental fantasy, those neither sci-fi- nor popular culture-challenged, and/or those - like this reviewer - whose desire for mental masturbation compensates for shortcomings in the first two categories. Although I was unable to appreciate fully the analogies drawn by several of the contributors among and between rock groups, science fiction, and religion, I was challenged - especially in the wake of the Littleton, Colorado shootings - to reflect on the relationship between violence and the Kingdom of God.

[2] A reader's romp into the imaginative world of the essays should begin with the editors' introduction that offers a necessarily brief overview of fantasy theory to acquaint the reader with several different approaches to literary fantasy used by the volume's contributors. One approach, associated with Tolkien, considers fantasy to be an act of "subcreation" that "reverses the normal understanding of reality" and provides consolation and hope (3). Jack Zipes, among others, advocates a second approach to fantasy theory that emphasizes the transformative power of fantasy literature, the Bible included, to offer the imaginary vision necessary to overthrow established beliefs and initiate the Kingdom of God. A third postmodern approach, based on the work of Todorov, maintains that "fantasy provides neither consolation nor revolutionary certainty but a questioning of fundamental values and assumptions" (4). Its most significant departure from earlier fantasy theory is that it privileges the fantastic over the real. In other words, we can know, or at least can imagine, the real by first appreciating the fantastic. None of the contributors limits themselves to one approach, and most acknowledge the mutual influence of reality and fantasy.

[3] Highlighting fantasy's reversal of normal understanding, Eric Rabkin traces the influence of a common subversive theme, which he calls the Eden Complex, in literature as different as Totem and Taboo, Frankenstein, and Rapunzel. They all prove that disobedience pays. Violating food prohibitions actually rewards its violators, like those in the primeval Garden, with the strength and knowledge necessary to tackle the problems of life. Eden also plays a role in Tina Pippin's essay about the Genesis 6 story of "interspecies marriage." Our desire to return to an Eden-like supernatural world, Pippin maintains, can be understood, in part, as a "desire to know the 'divine' more intimately and share divine powers" (48). Reversing the story's typical unhappy ending, Pippin offers alternative scenarios. She imagines, for example, that the daughters of humanity prefer mating with the sons of God. Not only do these supernatural males treat them better than human men who beat them and blame them for bringing sin in the world, but they also provide fantastic superhuman sex!

[4] Michel Desjardins focuses on human desire of a different sort. Reading Philip Dick's science fiction films with a gnostic lens offers an antidote to universal human longing for significance. Despite the presence of darkness and evil, the knowledge that other better realities exist provides the hope that they can replace what seems beyond repair. Since I am not familiar with Dick or his films, I could not appreciate the fantastic possibilities in his essay as easily as I could with Pippin's. Hence, the importance of socially located experience for ultimate enjoyment!

[5] The theme that characterizes most of the essays is the relationship between violence and the Kingdom of God. George Aichele, for example, shows that Mark's failure to use the word "violence" in his gospel does not prevent him from representing the necessary violence that Jesus associates with the Kingdom of God. Jorunn Buckley, combining the themes of food and violence, shows how Judas' betrayal of Jesus was the logical consequence of Jesus' earlier poisoning of Jesus. The double-layeredness in the gospel of John represents more than a physical-spiritual distinction. Rather, it symbolizes a collaboration of good and evil, God and Satan, that "allows sadism to emerge as a central point in the plan of salvation" (p. 61). Gene Doty likewise highlights the overly simplistic dualism in most apocalyptic stories and prefers those that offer an alternative in which the reconciliation of good and evil allow readers to experience the Ottoian "holy."

[6] Drawing on Bakhtinian carnival theory, Ronald Boer maintains that the carnival's subversive elements, like the anarchism characterized by Ezekiel and counter culture rock groups, "have distinct moments of destructive violence and the shape of a new world to come that is already in the midst of overturning the old" (34). The overt shock value and violence of an Ezekiel, or an Axl Rose, are often necessary to bring hidden hegemony to light and thus provide the possibility of its overthrow. His ability to describe the mutuality of dark fantasy and equally dark reality makes Boer's essay pretty scary reading!?

[7] Finally, in the essay that addressed this reader's often unconscious desire for relevance, William Doty suggests ways to bring the benefits of the alternative visions painted by good science fiction and fantasy into the classroom. He calls for imaginal education that shows the limits of traditional Western ideas about human consciousness and highlights instead the "potent resources of our culture toward fresher and more holistic visions" (111). After reading his essay, even this sci-fi-sceptic would consider including some of his suggested

reading in my religion classes so that my students and I might share a starting point for "imagining the future-possible."

[8] In sum, these essays intrigued me, disturbed me, and forced me to continue to question whether and why violence is often a prerequisite to the Kingdom of God.

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