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deconstructed, including Sherwood's. The author's exposure of various oppositions, both in the text and in critical scholarship on it, reveals an opposition on which her own reading depends, namely, consistency/inconsistency. In order to maintain a consistently feminist position throughout the volume, Sherwood relies on an inconsistent use of method (*bricolage*). Like the scholars on whose work she metacommentates, therefore, Sherwood must do some selective reading, only hers is performed on theory rather than on biblical texts. However, Sherwood's reading is brilliantly executed, and if one shares her ideological perspective, one will appreciate the reading(s).

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People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture. **By David Lyle Jeffrey. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996. ISBN 0-8028-3817-0. Pp. xx+396.**

Though the importance of the Bible to the evolution of Occidental culture has rarely been put into question, the more specific repercussions of a faith tradition, like Judeo-Christianity, so closely bound to a particular "text," has long been a matter of debate, within and without the tradition itself. Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, was neither the first nor the last to question Judeo-Christian reliance upon the written Word (as opposed to the Qur'an, the ultimate and distinctively "oral" revelation). What are we to make of a history of devotion focused on what is, whatever its origins, a decisively "literary" text—the Book of Books itself (a term that refers, significantly, not to the incomparability of the Bible, but rather to its collated, anthological character; i.e., as a book made up of books)?

David Lyle Jeffrey, professor of English literature at the University of Ottawa and renowned figure in the burgeoning field of literature and religion, addresses Mohammed's concern in *The People of the Book*. Jeffrey uses the Prophet's dual-edged term—showing the close ties of the Abrahamic faiths, as well as the disjunction of the first two with the third—in order to suggest, from the outset, the complexities surrounding Western (and specifically Christian) identity and literary culture. What follows can be read as an attempt to justify the ways of Christian writers and readers over the course of the last two millennia.

Jeffrey's burden rests on the suggestion that, contrary to postmodernist tendencies to relegate the entire history of Western religion (with philosophy and literature) to the dustbin of "logocentrism," this multiform history has been, in Levinas's words, an attempt to "admit the action of literature on men." The very application of the derisory term "logocentrism," Jeffrey argues, smacks of post-Romantic reductivism, especially when applied to the vast and diverse Christian legacy. It is, to borrow another term from postmodern parlance, a "misreading" of egregious proportions. To be Logos-*centered*, which the People of the Book (and Christians in particular) unequivocally are, is not, in itself, to be logo-*centric*. Con-

trariwise, "what centers Christian discourse is...a profoundly mediated theory of the 'meaning of persons' to which language is functionally subordinate, merely tropic, merely indicative" (10).

Jeffrey, following dissident postmodern critics such as Harold Bloom and George Steiner, suggests that the recognition of polysemeity can result in hypertrophy, not atrophy, of meaning, given a singular (in this case, transcendent) focus. To Christians—lay believers and scholars alike—this states the somewhat obvious case: devotion to the word is not quite the same as Devotion to the Word. Indeed the fundamental issues of the Christian literary tradition have never been framed in terms of either a dearth or plenitude of meaning, but rather, of "responsible reading," the "ethical" prerogative incumbent in Christian "aesthetics."

This, in a nutshell, is Jeffrey's thesis, but many other issues are raised along the way. Is there, he asks, such a thing as a Christian literary theory? In other words, can a literary theory, developed explicitly to confront issues of revelation, deal with other "products of the writerly imagination—secular scripture?" (xix). It is in addressing such questions that the author confronts the primary one: whether contemporary theoretical models "explicitly defined over and against Christian as well as Jewish tradition" have "greater explanatory power for [their] hallmark texts than hermeneutical principles developed within the tradition itself" (353–4).

Through a diligent and largely chronological excursus through some of the high points of "Christian" literature, Jeffrey lets the "facts" speak for themselves, and in calling to the stand an impressive slew of witnesses to "the non-monolithic character of historical Christian thought" (xiv), provides suitable grounds for a characteristically Christian approach to a reader-response hermeneutic. Though coincident in many respects with the contemporary literary school of *Rezeptionsästhetik*, Jeffrey's proposed hermeneutic sees as its spokesmen, not Iser and Jauss, but such unlikely figures as Wyclif, Chaucer, and Bunyan.

Despite the risk incumbent in such a compendious work of missing the forest for the plethora of trees, *People of the Book* concludes forcibly, pointing towards a much broader issue than merely the significance of "the Book" to the Abrahamic faith traditions. Jeffrey suggests that within this tradition we see writers and readers grappling with a new sort of text, one that requires a different hermeneutic—an alternative mode of reading to classical as well as contemporary, postmodern ways of reading. This new hermeneutic involves a serious engagement with a critical "dialectic of sin" to supplement the "dialectic of speculation"; a concomitant recognition of the "legitimate dominion" or authority of the primary text; and an awareness of the fact that, in interpreting the text, the text, when read accountably, *interprets us*. Within the Book of Books, itself a compendium of "ethically powerful texts," *new story* is generated out of the old—binding up the "broken hearted" and healing "the crushed in spirit" (373).

People of the Book brims with careful scholarship and erudition, encompassing ancient and mediaeval history, biblical studies, as well as the development of literary theory from Christian and pagan sources. The occasional weak point—such as the somewhat simplistic (and dated) reading of Nietzsche as an "instructive foil for radical Christian ethics" (103)—does not mar the overall diligence. More-

over the most important service rendered by Jeffrey's text may be his application of the "hermeneutics of suspicion" to those who invented the very term.

This may well be the timeliest of all timely books for anyone interested in the convergence of literature and religion, aesthetics and ethics: the world and the Word. Christian scholars and theologians have of late been getting it from all sides—charged, on the one hand, by post-structuralists and their ilk with regressive logocentric longings, and on the other by neo-Romanticists like Colin Falck, for being unwilling to marshal their spiritual resources against the sterility of postmodern criticism. David Lyle Jeffrey and the *People of the Book* answer both challenges.

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***Eyewitness to Jesus: Amazing New Manuscript Evidence About the Origin of the Gospels*. By Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona. New York: Doubleday, 1996. ISBN 0-385-48051-2. Pp. xvi+206.**

In its attempt to popularize scholarly research on gospel origins, *Eyewitness to Jesus* seems to have successfully stimulated the interest of readers who are not specialists in the field. It was one such "layperson" who encouraged me to review the work. And indeed I found in *Eyewitness to Jesus* a spirited and entertaining introduction to the field of New Testament studies and an initiation to important issues of papyrology (the study of papyrus manuscripts). The work's sensational claims about the history of the gospels and of their transmission constitute its most important—and problematic—element. The following evaluation will concentrate on these claims, their importance, and the argumentation from which they stem.

The issue behind the provocative title of the publication is the recent effort by papyrologist C.P. Thiede to redate the Magdalen Papyrus, an assortment of three manuscript fragments displaying verses from chapter 26 of Matthew's Gospel, found in Egypt around 1900 and stored since 1901 in the Library at Magdalen College, Oxford. While contemporary scholarship has settled on an approximate date of 200 C.E. for the production of the Magdalen manuscript (also called p64 by specialists), Thiede claims that he can make an irrefutable case for an early dating to approximately 66 C.E.

The authors use this result to affirm that Matthew certainly wrote his gospel within a *context of eyewitnesses* to the living Jesus. If Jesus died c. 30 C.E. (as a majority of scholars would agree), the Gospel of Matthew, which contains an account of his death, would have had to be written after 30 C.E. and well before 66 C.E., that is, within some thirty years of the crucifixion. Moreover Thiede and D'Ancona contend that if this "eyewitness context" for the composition of Matthew is proven, the entire history of gospel origins as understood by most scholars today will have to be rewritten. This would challenge the commonly held premise that the authors of the four New Testament Gospels can provide us with no guar-