"Unspoken Sermons": Christian Preaching in British Fiction, 1979-2004.

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of Doctor of Philosophy.

March 2007.

Dedication

In appreciation of George MacDonald,

the nineteenth century preacher, who found that fiction was a better pulpit than any provided by a Scottish church,

in memory of Jacqueline Dickinson,

with whom I shared my plans for this thesis on a walk around Buttermere, which will be an abiding memory for as long as I am able to control what I can recall,

and with love for Yvette,

who encourages me in all things.

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99,509 words.

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Abstract

Declining church attendance in pluralist Britain indicates that the Christian sermon, once a vibrant literary genre, has become an increasingly unfamiliar form to most readers and writers of fiction. Yet, as this thesis will argue, fictional sermons are still successfully used by novelists. The thesis examines sermons in three genres, and representing three Christian traditions, the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Free Church. The genres discussed are chronicles, as represented by Antonia Byatt and David Lodge, historical novels written by Geraldine Brooks and Jane Rogers and fiction by John Murray and Michael Arditti sited in specific religious, spiritual or ecclesiastical environments.

The thesis develops an analytical toolkit, based mainly on rhetorical narratology and cognitive poetics, to examine the current status of fictional sermons.

Five case studies follow. The first discusses issues of authority and inspiration in texts, preachers and preaching. The second considers how novelists communicate religious experience, particularly experiences of epiphany and conversion. The third describes contemporary novels' portraits of the troubled preacher. The fourth analyses the language used by novelists in their sermons and the fifth studies how sermons construct discourse communities and religious community.

The thesis concludes with a discussion of the significance of memory, imagination and embodiment as agents by which readers – and hearers of actual sermons – are enabled to respond to suasory speech and engage with its proposed alternative world.

The thesis is intended as a contribution to the study of religion and literature, to discourse analysis, to homiletical theory and practice and to criticism of contemporary literature.

Acknowledgements

Although my name stands alone on the title page and years of work on this thesis have included many solitary hours in the study, I am conscious of my indebtedness to many people without whose collaboration I would not have completed this research. Some have been with me throughout; others have made a singular contribution. From the point of view of those I am thanking, uniform gratitude must seem unfair – they must feel like vineyard labourers in the Matthean parable – but, from my point of view, the fact is that I am equally grateful to anyone who has helped me in whatever way.

Thank you to...

- the men and women who wrote the novels on my reading list, especially John Murray and Michael Arditti who discussed their work with me.
- Miriam Morgan who transcribed my interview with John Murray.
- librarians and other staff at Oxford Brookes University whose willingness to seek books from other libraries, to track and copy articles and to advise on practical matters has made being a part-time research student living and working more than fifty miles from the university a much less frustrating experience than I had expected.
- the Methodist Church whose Continuing Development in Ministry scheme has awarded a small grant to assist with fees since 2004. It might be possible to discern a Methodist perspective to this thesis: this is partly in acknowledgement of the Church's support, but it is also because I cannot avoid writing about the church I know best. I hope non-Methodists do not find this perspective an irritating bias.
- the preachers – ordained and lay – of both the London (Harrow) Circuit and the St Albans and Welwyn Circuit, whom I consulted both formally and informally at various stages of my research.
- members of the International Society for Religion, Literature and Culture with whom, at three conferences I attended while working on this research, I enjoyed many useful and stimulating conversations.

- Elisabeth Jay, my Director of Studies, who, as I encountered the ups and downs of research, gently showed me a clear path through the wilderness and made the rough ways smooth, and Rob Pope for his guidance as I worked on chapter 2.
- friends and family whom I may have bored with accounts of fictional sermons on many occasions, some of which were intended to be parties!
- and the congregations to whom I have preached.

These – and others I have inadvertently failed to mention – are the people who deserve any credit for anything that is good in this work, whilst I am responsible for its inadequacies.

Contents

Table of figures

Between pages 67 and 68 there is an illustration of John Millais's *Boyhood of Raleigh* and between pages 113 and 114 an illustration of Paul Gauguin's *Vision of the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel.*

Notes on usage and style

Except for Chapter 2 where they indicate sections and sub-sections of the analytical toolkit, bracketed numbers within the text of the thesis indicate page references in primary sources. Byatt's novels are distinguished from each other by using the following abbreviations: -

The Virgin in the Garden	VG
Still Life	SL
Babel Tower	BT
A Whistling Woman	WW

Not a devotee of capital letters in theological writing, I use an initial capital for 'church' and 'bible' only when referring to a particular denomination, such as the Church of England, or version of the Christian scriptures, such as the Revised English Bible. This is not only easier on the eye when reading, but also eases a discussion of authoritative and inspired texts.

1: Fictional Sermons

In an era of revolution in communications, the ancient art of preaching is in a critical state: its status in Christian culture is lower now than perhaps it ever has been, since its inception when Peter preached his Pentecost sermon to the last signs of a golden age when crowds still gathered in London to listen to Free Church preachers such as William Sangster, Leslie Weatherhead, Donald Soper and the American visitor, Billy Graham. This interdisciplinary study of fictional preaching addresses the pulpit crisis of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Britain which Christian ministers face as they labour over their Sunday sermons. It touches upon many theological themes including the psychology of religious experience, the nature of religious language, the creation of religious community, the question of authority and the difficulties of religious belief, but its main theological interest is in homiletics, a branch of theological studies much neglected in British seminaries and twenty-first century academia. Its literary and cultural interests are in the representation of preaching in the imagined world of popular novels. This chapter problematises contemporary preaching, describes the genre of fictional sermons and introduces the novels I have used as primary sources.

In a recent study of sermons in American fiction and culture Melody Seymour defined a sermon in fiction as:

> *"...a specific utterance, attributed to a particular character within a narrative and delivered to fictive listeners, who hear the discourse as purporting to give moral or religious insight or instruction in a speech formally set off from normal dialogue."*[1]

Her thesis surveys sermons in the fiction of Nathaniel Hawthorne, John Updike, Zora Neale Hurston and Herbert Melville, contextualising them with popular preachers such as Harry Emerson Fosdick, Billy Sunday, Billy Graham and Phillips Brooks. She demonstrates that sermons are foregrounded in American literature and, taking a cue for her imagery from Melville's *Moby-Dick*, says sermons in American fiction are in the prow of the boat. This can hardly be claimed for sermons in contemporary British fiction, where they are encountered as an even stranger genre than Seymour suggests American readers find them to be.

Late twentieth century North American novelists, including John Updike, Toni Morrison and Jane Rule, are no less reluctant to write fictional sermons than their early-twentieth-century or nineteenth-century antecedents, such as Zora Neale Hurston, Sinclair Lewis, William Faulkner, Flannery O'Connor, Nathaniel Hawthorne or Herman Melville.[2] Because this is an age of global reading, when travellers abroad can purchase novels in international airports before they are published in Britain, the market for a particular book may be less specific than it might once have been and novels have the capacity to cross over between cultures. Whilst it is difficult to conceive that an American novelist will write with an eye on the British market, a British writer will want at least a foothold on the much larger American market. Nevertheless, clear literary and cultural differences between American and British fiction can be discerned so, before I

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[1] Seymour, Melody D., "The Pulpit in the Prow: The Voice of the Sermon in the Fiction and Culture of the United States" (University of Southern California, 1990), p.11.

[2] Updike, John, *A Month of Sundays*. (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974). Morrison, Toni, *Paradise*. (London: Virago, 1999). Rule, Jane, *This is not for you*. (Iowa: Naiad Press, 1970). Hurston, Zora Neale, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*. (London: Virago, 1934). Lewis, Sinclair, Elmer Gantry. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1927). Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury*. (London: Vintage, 1931). Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Scarlet Letter and Selected Tales*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, orig. pub. 1850).

consider the form and function of sermons in British fiction, it is important to describe the context in which British novels are written and read. What is the nature of the culture to which the primary texts of my research and their readers belong?

Context

The term 'culture' can be understood in either a broad or a narrow way. This distinction, although maintained throughout Terry Eagleton's published work, is expressed most succinctly in *Ideology* where he distinguishes between the broad, anthropological and a narrower, artistic understanding of the term 'culture'.[3] The cultures with which I am concerned in this study belong to the former, understood by Eagleton as "the way individuals 'live' their social practices, the whole complex of signifying practices and symbolic processes in our society."[4] It would be easy to hive off sermons to the realms of 'high' or artistic culture, among "whatever artistic and intellectual work is of agreed value",[5] but in this study of sermons in contemporary fiction I am concerned with the effect of reading fictional sermons on that inaccessible creature, the average or common reader. This is especially important, for underpinning this thesis is a Tillichian model of theological method which sees anthropological culture as humanity's "creative self-interpretation",[6] and the raw data for the theological task.[7]

In the later decades of the twentieth-century the term 'postmodernism' has been offered as an expression of the objects and practices of contemporary culture,[8] but its adequacy has often been disputed and its helpfulness to this interdisciplinary project is debatable. In his introduction to theories of the contemporary, Steven Connor argues that, because different academic disciplines have expressed the postmodern in different ways, we should think of

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[3] Eagleton, Terry, *Ideology: An Introduction*. (London: Verso, 1991).
[4] *ibid.*, p.28.
[5] *ibid.*
[6] Tillich, Paul, *Systematic Theology Volume 1*. (London: SCM Press, 1951), p.63.
[7] Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane, "From Angst to Encounter: Nathan Scott's Journey in Theology and Literature." *Horizons*, 10:2 (1983), p.306.
[8] Connor, Steven, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theory of the Contemporary*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p.6.

postmodernities rather than postmodernity. For instance, he claims that the diversity of discursive practices and the inability of academic criticism to control what is published and read mean that literary critics' understanding of postmodernism differs from that of the critics of visual art and architecture where the academy has been more formative. Although the border between religion and literature is increasingly well-mapped, this lack of common cross-disciplinary definition sets up a problem for this project which tries to take account of the context in which theology is done, sermons are preached and literature is written. I use the shorthand 'postmodern' cautiously, for this contested term signifies something different in each of the disciplines informing this thesis: in literature it has the dual sense of a dominant set of ideas and cultural practices characterised by post-structuralism and deconstruction and a theory of a dominant mode of literary representation focused on self-reflexive and parodic practices;[9] in theology it refers to a variety of theological responses to the complex cultural logics of what Graham Ward calls 'where we are now', acknowledging both that theologians are never above or beyond the cultural situation in which they work and that their discourse indwells both its dreams and its actuality;[10] and in homiletics it refers to the abandonment of monologic hegemonic preaching in favour of the preacher's utterance of the many-voiced chorus of the bible, tradition, experience and human reflection on these, in whose dialogic sermons voices previously submerged and silenced are heard once more.

I have found it helpful to see the context of my study of Christian preaching in contemporary British fiction as a cultural situation in which four characteristics are particularly significant. These are the privatisation of religion, continuing interest in spirituality, religious pluralism and the rise of the 'religious right'. First, in the last twenty years of the twentieth century an ideology of individualism has tended towards the privatisation of religion and the secularisation of society. 'Secularisation' is, however, a disputed term among sociologists. First it assumes disengagement as religion withdraws from vital

[9] Connor, *ibid.*, p.129.
[10] Ward, Graham, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Postmodern Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, pbk. 2005), p. xxiv.

areas of social life such as politics, education and moral campaigns. Second it assumes differentiation as specialisms in society increase, disconnecting all-embracing concepts, including religion, from other areas of human life. Third it assumes decline in the appreciation and social celebration of mystical and supernatural qualities of life and implies that religion has become a matter of private feeling rather than something expressed in public worship or public morality. Peter Berger's classic study of this phenomenon,[11] whilst important, is now dated and less relevant to my thesis than Grace Davie's more recent British study in which she characterised religion in Britain since 1945 as 'believing without belonging.'[12] What Davie describes is disparity between religious practice and religious belief. The data she cites show decline in active membership of religious organisations, with nominal allegiance the most prevalent form of religious attachment and the vestiges of religious membership expressed only in the way many British people know which church they are not attending.[13] Although between two-thirds and three-quarters of the British population consistently indicate personal theistic belief,[14] their belief does not find expression in participation in corporate worship.

On the other hand, it finds expression in an interest in spirituality. This is the second characteristic of contemporary British culture significant for my research. Widespread interest in spirituality is expressed in many ways including, say, the provision of alternative remedies in many NHS surgeries, the recent introduction of a 'Body and Soul' section to *The Times* on Saturdays (whilst 'The Faith Page' remains in an entirely different section covering the activities of the royal family, social manners and society events), the publication of many books on subjects such as paganism, New Age movements and the occult, and the readiness of celebrities such as Madonna and Tom Cruise to announce without embarrassment their interest in esoteric spiritual matters. Some church commentators see this as a tension between longing and belonging

[11] Berger, Peter L., *A Rumour of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. (London: Allen Lane, 1970).
[12] Davie, Grace, *Religion in Britain since 1945*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p.96.
[13] *ibid.*, p.49.
[14] *ibid.*, pp.74-5.

that attracts people without formal religious allegiance nonetheless to pursue spiritual themes. In his contribution to a collection of essays on the current state of religious belief and practice, Martyn Percy, for instance, sees residual interest in spiritual matters as the *pentimento*, the original sketch beneath an oil painting, showing through as the painting ages and the paint falls away.[15] As a consequence, few of the arts fight shy of introducing and exploring religious or spiritual themes. Indeed, one of the most popular of recent exhibitions at the National Gallery was *Seeing Salvation*, which ran from 26th February to 7th May 2000, showing how the image of Christ has been depicted in western art of the Christian era. Nevertheless, it seems that many who are interested in spiritual matters find little resonance in the traditional language of confessional ecclesiocentric theology and the increased use of poetry at funerals, the greater number of church reading groups and the increased use of non-biblical readings in church services suggest that many turn to literature to help them explore religious and moral issues.

This burgeoning interest in spirituality contributes to the plurality which postmodernist theory identifies as an important aspect of contemporary culture and which I see as a third feature significant for my research. Since 1945 Britain has witnessed the appearance and establishment of religious pluralism so that, as David Klemm states, we now *live* it.[16] We no longer know only abstractly and intellectually that the world has a plurality of religious groups. Rather we interact daily with people of diverse religious backgrounds and commitments. Religious plurality, the flowering of a plurality of moral visions, and an awareness of the truth of relativism, as well as a postmodern sense of the absence of 'official approving agencies'[17] leave some people with an uneasy sense of society as something ill-defined and un-narratable, a perception Bauman intimated by his incorporation of the question, 'How can one narrate postmodernity?', in the subtitle of the introduction to his book. Religious

[15] Avis, Paul, ed., *Public Faith?: The State of Religious Belief and Practice in Britain*. (London: SPCK, 2003), p.117.
[16] Klemm, David E., "Introduction: Theology of Culture as Theological Humanism." *Literature and Theology*. 18: 3 (September 2004), pp.245f.
[17] Bauman, Zygmunt, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), p.xviii.

plurality leaves others, however, with a strong desire to celebrate the diversity and richness of human life. Either way, it means it is now difficult for any religious group, including the Christian church, to tell a monolithic story as public truth for all, rather than private opinion for individuals or common ground for the gathered community.[18]

However, there is a fourth characteristic of contemporary society which at first seems to conflict with its religious plurality. This is a phenomenon Grace Davie and other sociologists of religion have been quick to spot – the steady advancement of religious conservatism found in groups often characterised as 'evangelical' or 'fundamentalist'. In America it is seen in the growth in the religious, social and political power of the religious right, without whose support few politicians would seek high office. In Britain it is seen, for instance, in the popularity of the Alpha course, an introduction to Christianity from the evangelical wing of the Church of England. By fundamentalism I mean religious, political or cultural groups who regard truth as revealed and unitary, who set themselves in opposition to and demonise outsiders who are unable to understand them and who tend to be selective in the parts of their tradition and heritage they stress. There are, of course, degrees of fundamentalism to be found in many different religions, not to mention the most notorious form, so-called 'militant Islam'. In Britain fundamentalists may be found in almost all Christian denominations, from Roman Catholicism to extreme Protestants such as the Brethren. Such fundamentalist groups often depend heavily on male leadership who claim absolute inerrancy for their authoritative texts whilst choosing to be selective in their use of them in their dogmatic preaching. It is possible to account for the emergence and growing influence of some of these fundamentalist groups as responses to the uncertainty which tends to accompany postmodernity.

It seems to me that these four characteristics of contemporary British culture – the individualisation or privatisation of religion, the continuing interest

[18] Brueggemann, Walter, *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p.19.

in spirituality, the religious pluralism in which we live and the rise of the 'religious right' – have resulted in a decentred church and contributed to a distorted perception of preaching.

Callum Brown's controversial analysis of the current religious condition of Britain from his perspective as a social historian introduced the concept of 'discursive Christianity' and demonstrated how the church has moved to the margins.[19] Earlier in his book he had identified four forms of Christianity: 'institutional Christianity' which may be measured by people's adherence to church; 'intellectual Christianity' which is evident in the influence of religious ideas on society at large; 'functional Christianity' by which he means the role of religion in civic society and 'diffusive Christianity' by which he means the social significance of religion. Each of these may be a marker to indicate the condition of Christianity in contemporary Britain. He then argues that underlying all these is 'discursive Christianity' prescribed or implied in discourses, such as the official discourse of clergy, the public discourse of the media, the community discourse of ethnic groups and the private discourse of homes and families. The vibrancy of these discourses, he argues, is a more accurate marker of a religion's vitality. Whereas churches are accustomed to examining religious decline by looking at what is happening in and to churches, discursive Christianity is a better guide. His conclusions are, however, no more optimistic than those of sociologists of religion, for he concludes that although popular religiosity was robust throughout the industrial era between the 1750s and the 1950s, from 1800 it became "located in femininity".[20] Since 1960 this feminised religiosity has crumbled rapidly with changes in the common perception of the nature of womanhood. As a result, Christianity as a discursive reality is vanishing rapidly. Brown expresses his conclusion quite quirkily:

> *"Before 1800, Christian piety had been a 'he'. From 1800 to 1960, it had been a 'she'. After 1960 it became nothing in gendered terms. More than this, the eradication of gendered piety signalled the decentring of Christianity – its authority and its cultural significance."*[21]

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[19] Brown, Callum, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800 -2000*. (London, Routledge, 2001), p.12.
[20] *ibid.*, p.195.
[21] *ibid.*, p.196.

Brown is not the first to associate the decline of British Christianity with changes in perceptions of womanhood. In 1953, G. M. Young wrote of the social transformation that occurred when women's education was improved and extended, by which women became an "effective element in the articulation of the social mind."[22] Moreover, it is apparent that when a religion is located in a particular vision of the feminine, rebuttal of the picture of womanhood comes out as rebuttal of the religion.[23]

The combined effect of these characteristics of British culture is that, in a world where the official and unofficial discourses of Christianity have been pushed to the cultural margins, preaching is thought of as either incendiary, funny or without either purpose or effect. To preach is to waste words, to create laughter or to inflame.

There is a rare reference in popular culture to sermons among the songs of the Beatles, whose influence since the early 1960s, with world-wide record sales, has been far-reaching culturally as well as musically. One of the lonely people in *Eleanor Rigby*, a song released in 1966, is Father Mackenzie:

"Father Mackenzie writing the words
to a sermon that no one will hear.
No one comes near.
Look at him working
darning his socks in the night
when there's nobody there.
What does he care?"

At the end of the song he walks away from Eleanor Rigby's grave. No one else has attended her funeral – and no one was saved. Thus the generations who have listened to The Beatles since 1966 have been led to assume that sermon writing is a lonely and purposeless occupation, and that preaching sermons is equally purposeless because nobody listens.

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[22] Young, G.M, *Portrait of an Age: Victorian England.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960, orig. pub. 1953), p.157.
[23] See Jay, Elisabeth, "Introduction: The Return of the Culturally Repressed – Religion and Women" in *Nineteenth Century Studies*, 13:17 (2003), pp.1-12.

Popular culture also portrays preaching as comedic. In the 1960s Alan Bennett in *Beyond the Fringe*, in the 1970s the Irish comedian Dave Allen and in the 1990s Dawn French as *The Vicar of Dibley* and Rowan Atkinson as the vicar in both *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *Keeping Mum* have sustained a portrait of preaching whose humour often depends upon the utterance of ineffectual inanities or the expression of inept similes: as Alan Bennett said, "Life, you know, is rather like opening a tin of sardines..."[24]

Furthermore, in popular perception, preaching is readily associated with either the inflammatory promulgation of dogma by fundamentalist extremists and fanatics or the ruthless manipulation of vulnerable people by charismatic self-acclaimed healers and television evangelists. Some of these images have come from British news and documentary programmes, others from American pay-to-view television. These popular images have moved preaching away from the central pedagogical role it enjoyed in the centuries when people's experience of actual preaching nurtured the development of literary sermons to such an extent that the characteristic output of the print culture in the nineteenth century was sermons. According to Richard Altick, 'tradebooks' published in 1880 included 975 works of theology and sermons, not counting reprints and pamphlets such as individual sermons and tracts, but only 580 novels.[25] However, Simon Eliot's more recent research amends these figures and suggests that by the 1870s more fiction than anything else was published. Nevertheless he maintains that more books on religious subjects were published in the ten years between 1870 and 1879 than were published in the thirty-two years between 1814 and 1845.[26] Nowadays interest in religious matters has waned to the extent that preaching is no longer regarded as an important feature of society's discourse.

The current crisis in preaching within the contemporary church can be illustrated in several ways. In newlybuilt churches lecterns replace more prominent pulpits; in recent preachers' handbooks, sections are devoted to the

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[24] Bennett, Alan, *The Complete* Beyond the Fringe. (London: Methuen, 1987), p.104.
[25] Altick, Richard, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p.108.
[26] Eliot, Simon, *Some Patterns and Trends in British Publishing 1800-1919*. (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1994), p.47.

use in preaching of computer software devised for business seminars such as Powerpoint; in many preachers' minds lurks a nagging doubt whether the sermon they have laboured over will make any difference when it is preached; in a world where radio stations devoted to talk such as BBC Radio 4 are rarely univocal for sustained periods of time, preachers are uncertain about the effectiveness of the monologue as a communication tool; and, when the emphasis in religious education has shifted from 'education for Christian discipleship' and fewer churchgoers attend anything other than Sunday services, the emphasis in preaching is, troublingly, shifting from kerygma towards pedagogy.

Within the western Christian Church, preaching is undergoing many changes. Walter Brueggemann recognised the impossibility of hegemonic preaching in a decentred church because such a church is unable to voice the kind of certitudes that sustain hegemony.[27] Consequently there has developed in recent years what some, since 1987, have called the New Homiletic, in which sermons are seen as 'creative events' rather than 'delivered messages' and preaching is representational rather than propositional.[28] This has encouraged creative styles of preaching taught by several, mainly American, homileticians whose work is described by Mark Barger Elliott in *Creative Styles of Preaching.*[29] It has also increased congregations' receptivity to sermons offering alternative interpretations of the Christian story – from, for instance, feminist perspectives with the increase in women preachers and from black, Third World and other non-European perspectives with the presence of ministers from abroad through the World Church In Britain Programme. All of this is 'funding the imagination', as Brueggemann calls it, rather than telling people what to think; it is 'showing' rather than 'telling'.

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[27] Brueggemann, Walter, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p.40.
[28] Vos, Cas, "The Sermon as a Work of Art." *The Expository Times*, 116:11 (August 2005), pp.371-373.
[29] Barger Elliott, Mark, *Creative Styles of Preaching*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

Moreover, more people hear women preaching than ever before. Although there have always been notable exceptions to the general rule that women should be denied a pulpit voice, such as Hildegard of Bingen, Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena, these usually relied on male patronage.[30] Whereas mainstream Christianity was once 'malestream', nowadays women's voices introduce dissonance to the church which is a masculinist community of practice:[31] they decentre 'man' from what Ann-Janine Morey sees as the essentially patriarchal order of androcentric ecclesia.[32]

The main exception to this general rule of silence was among radical groups of the Reformation and early Methodism. In the case of Methodism, John Wesley used every available subterfuge and artifice to find ways to interpret away the frequently-cited scriptural ban on women preaching in 1 Timothy 2: 12. The class system, which encouraged Methodists to meet to share testimony and prayer, encouraged women, as well as men, to speak about their religious experience. These class meetings proved to be a training ground for evangelists and preachers and many women felt called to preach. When they sought scriptural warrants for their vocation they cited the stories of Deborah, Queen Esther and Sarah as well as the Pentecostal promise in Acts 2: 17 that both sons and daughter will prophesy.[33] George Eliot's fictional depiction of Dinah Morris in *Adam Bede* is in fact based on one such woman preacher, Eliot's aunt, Elizabeth Evans. So good was the portrait that the equation between the fictional Morris and the actual Evans became a firm folk-belief written into the Primitive Methodist record.[34] Nevertheless there was a clear gender hierarchy of preachers in the biographies printed in *The Arminian Magazine.*[35] Soon after John Wesley

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[30] Waters, Claire M., *Angels and Earthly Creatures: Preaching, Performance and Gender in the Later Middle Ages.* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
[31] Walsh, Clare, *Gender and Discourse: Language and Power in Politics, the Church and Organisations.* (London: Longman, 2001).
[32] In Middleton, David, *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism.* (London: Garland Publishing, 2000), p.261.
[33] Krueger, Christine L., *The Reader's Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers and Nineteenth-century Social Discourse.* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
[34] Cunningham, Valentine, *Everywhere Spoken Against: Dissent in the Victorian Novel.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.153.
[35] Hindmarsh, D. Bruce, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual autobiography in early modern England.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p.238.

died in 1791, the editor of *The Methodist Magazine*, Jabez Bunting, routinely excised from women Methodists' obituaries any references to their preaching and the Conference of 1802 formally banned women from Methodist pulpits.

In the twentieth century women's voices were heard once more in pulpits. Currently, in contemporary Britain there are more women preachers than ever before. In the Church of England female priests were first ordained in 1994 and only twelve years later it is expected that more women than men will be ordained in 2006.[36] In the British Methodist Church, of 2363 presbyters 666 were women in September 2003, but each year more women enter the ministry than men with the result that it could be argued that the contemporary mainstream Protestant church in Britain is witnessing a feminisation of the ordained ministry. In the case of lay preachers in the British Methodist Church, the ratio is even more striking: about 40% of local preachers in 2000 were women.[37] This is not surprising given the continuing disaffection of men with organised religion: it reflects the demography of the contemporary church.

Historians, sociologists, theologians and cultural theorists all agree that however it is measured, organised religion, with only a few exceptions, is in decline in Britain. Because participation in the formal and collective rituals and worship of organised religion in contemporary Britain is declining, popular experience of these changes is limited. Furthermore, the future of preaching, either in the church or in fictional form in novels, is threatened, for it means the experience of both preaching and listening to sermons is less well-known and less well-documented. Novelists and readers therefore increasingly depend upon a remembered genre, which belongs to a former age and may not best reflect the style and content of current preaching.

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[36] Morgan, Christopher, "Women priests take ordination lead over men." *Sunday Times*, London, 5th September 2004.

[37] Anon., Methodist Local Preachers in Great Britain: A Millennial Profile, The Methodist Church Local Preachers' Office, (2002), pp.1-47.

Hybridity

Quite apart from this cultural dissonance, there is a literary strangeness about fictional sermons. Like Seymour, I think of sermons in literature as hybrid creatures, so there is a basic assumption underlying my study that the combination of four characteristics of preaching problematises sermons when they are within fiction. Each of these characteristics is implied in Seymour's working definition of fictive sermons.[38] Expressed simply, they are, first, that sermons have a particular rhetoric and that fictional sermons are embedded within novels whose rhetorical strategies are different, second, that they are intratextual performances, third, that their orality has been transferred to literary texts and, fourth, that they are avowedly attitudinal.

In recent years there has been renewed interest in the study of rhetoric and an increasing acknowledgement of the role played by preaching in the development of rhetorical theology. George Kennedy's book[39] about the use of rhetoric, the science of suasory discourse, begins by asserting the near-ubiquity of rhetoric: telephone directories, but not *The Yellow Pages* which is a rhetorically nuanced interpretation of a directory, may be one of the few exceptions. Later he suggests that Christian preaching was originally proclamation rather than persuasion. For instance, Stephen's martyrdom speech in chapter 7 of *The Acts of the Apostles* is akin both to Jewish homily and to Joshua's speech reported in the final chapter of *The Book of Joshua* (24: 2-15) and Paul, as he struggles to explain why some people respond to God whilst others do not, sometimes called the 'scandal of particularity', argued in chapters 9 and 10 of *The Epistle to the Romans* (9: 30-33 and 10: 11-17), that the Christian message is proclaimed rather than proved, persuasive only to those whom God calls. Nevertheless, Kennedy identifies four major forms of preaching in the early church. The first of these is what he calls the missionary sermon. Examples of these are to be found in *The Acts of the Apostles*, the first

[38] *op. cit.*
[39] Kennedy, George A., *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Traditions from Ancient to Modern Times.* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

of which is Peter's Pentecost sermon in 2: 14-36 and there are others by Paul, among which the sermon preached in Athens in 17: 22-31 is distinctive for the manner in which the preacher adapts his material to accommodate Greek hearers' thought-forms. Then there are examples of prophetic speaking such as that found in *The Second Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, the work of an anonymous author dated no earlier than *circa* 140CE and wrongly attributed to Clement who died *circa* 99CE. The third form, which Kennedy calls 'homily', was intended to interpret scripture and exhort hearers to live in accordance with its teaching. These homilies tended to project scripture's eloquence rather than the preacher's. Finally, from the fourth century onwards, there developed panegyrical or epideictic sermons. In relation to these Kennedy pointed out that some of the Latin Fathers, most notably Jerome, warned against using Ciceronian rhetoric in the service of Christianity which, it was argued, did not need to resort to secular techniques, but it was Tertullian in *De Praescriptione Haereticorum 7* who phrased the famous question, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?"[40] Ironically, Tertullian was himself an expert in rhetoric and a preacher of renowned burning eloquence.[41] Kennedy suggests that persuasion only came to be seen as one of the purposes of preaching in the fourth century when Augustine of Hippo refashioned the teaching of Cicero for the Christian preacher and, in *De Doctrina Christiana,*[42] suggested that the duties of a preacher are to teach, to please and to move. For much of Christian history there has been at best an on-off romance between the study of rhetoric and preaching, an uneasy relationship expressed as "God's altar needs not our polishings" in the *Bay Psalm Book*, the first book published in English in America in 1640.[43]

Kennedy's book was followed in 1990 by David Cunningham's polemical argument for the use of rhetoric in Christian preaching, which takes its

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[40] From *De Praescriptione Haereticorum 7* quoted in Kennedy, George A., *op. cit.*, p.147.
[41] Dunn-Wilson, David, *A Mirror for the Church: Preaching in the First Five Centuries.* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), pp.36,37.
[42] See Robertson's translation of Augustine: Robertson, D. W., *St Augustine on Christian Doctrine.* (New York, 1958), IV, xxv, 55, pp.161-2.
[43] Bragg, Melvyn, *The Adventure of English: The Biography of a Language.* (London: Sceptre, 2003), p.162.

lead from Augustine's encouragement for preachers to equip themselves with rhetorical tools. For Cunningham, preaching is an integral part of theology. He argues that, because theology is always an act of proclamation, preaching is not a theological sideshow after 'real' theology has been done; rather, both 'textbook theology' and rhetorical theology are proclamatory and suasory.[44] I have depended on the structure of Cunningham's book, based on the conventional four-fold division of classical rhetoric into *pathos, ethos, logos* and *praxis*, for the shape of the analytical toolkit I will be using to analyse the fictional sermons at the heart of this study.

More recently, in books of homiletical theory and practice for general preachers, Lucy Rose in *Sharing the Word*[45] and Lucy Lind Hogan with Robert Reid in *Connecting with the Congregation*[46] have cautioned against overemphasising the role of persuasion in preaching as there is a danger of creating a gap between preacher and congregation. Stressing the rhetor's authoritative and persuasive voice establishes an inappropriate hierarchical model of preaching. There lies the opportunity for unscrupulous manipulation and abuse.[47]

Don Compier, however, took encouragement from Cunningham and used an assessment of the classical rhetorical tradition to develop his concept of 'rhetorical theology'. As he understands it, rhetorical theology accepts the influence of postmodernism because it is always contextual. Rhetorical theology is based on practical methods and public discourse. It is 'wholistic' [*sic*] and inevitably expresses opinions and takes sides in argument. Whilst Hogan and Reid had suggested that contemporary discontent with the homiletical task was due to most preaching being *logos*-centred and had suggested that recovery for preaching may come through a rediscovery of *pathos*-centred, that is audience-focused, preaching, Compier is aware that rhetoric is always in danger of

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[44] *op. cit.*, p.202.
[45] Rose, Lucy, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).
[46] Hogan, Lucy L. and Reid, Robert, *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).
[47] *ibid.*, p.109.

courting the audience so much that it merely reaffirms the hearers' existing values without altering them.[48] My own view, underlying much of both my theorising and practice of preaching, is that the pulpit is a proper place for forging theology, inasmuch as sermons are common sites for both believers and agnostics to engage with the intersection of the quotidian world and classical faith, what Theo Hobson calls "an ongoing argument between the voice of God and the voices of the world."[49] One of the preacher's tasks is to bring the worlds of belief and experience together in meaningful and change-permitting discourse. This confessional theology is "a discourse of rhetorical performance" in which the preacher employs rhetoric and its powers of persuasion. [50]

When sermons occur in novels the disjunction between the rhetoric of the sermon and the rest of the novel is usually apparent. This is not to say that rhetoric is absent from the main body of the fiction, for, more than forty years ago, Wayne Booth demonstrated that rhetoric in fiction is inescapable. Booth pointed out that it is often assumed that, in the writing of fiction, 'showing' is more artistically subtle than 'telling', so the author is often encouraged not to be intrusive, but the author is unable to disappear entirely.[51] Just as the reader cannot claim that s/he is not reading a novel, so the reader grants the author permission to know what s/he is writing about.[52] So, when we read, we allow some signs of an author's presence, telling us things we could not otherwise know, such as a character's motives and, in the case of fictional sermons, insight into the preacher's self-perception. Despite disjunction between the rhetoric of fiction and the rhetoric of preaching, the suggestion put forward by Brueggemann, that preaching is an act of imagination by which hearers are invited, encouraged or persuaded to consider the plausibility of alternative scripts that enable them to tell their lives differently,[53] shows that there is nonetheless an

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[48] Compier, Don H., *What is Rhetorical Theology? Textual Practice and Public Discourse*. (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press, 1999), p.73.
[49] Hobson, Theo, *The Rhetorical Word: Protestant Theology and the Rhetoric of Authority*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p.37.
[50] *ibid.*, p.200.
[51] Booth, Wayne C., *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p.20.
[52] *ibid.*, p.53.
[53] Brueggemann, Walter, *Cadences of Home*, p.35.

interesting correlation between the purpose of fiction to show and the purpose of preaching to show and tell. Like sermons, novels enable readers to imagine alternative versions of their world. There is, however, a rhetorical difference. In the case of sermons there is what Brueggemann calls rhetorical 'density'. This density is the product of a dense text, 'dense' hearers and a dense subject. Like any other text, sermons are subject to intertextuality; this makes them thick texts. Like the hearers or readers of any text, those who listen to sermons listen with multidimensional memory; this gives both individual listeners - and the church as a collective listener – what we might think of as breadth of listening. Moreover, unlike some other texts, sermons usually claim the 'density' of pointing beyond themselves to what (or who) Brueggemann calls the 'Primal Character', a divine being. Novels need not be theistic whereas sermons usually are, although one of the stimuli that launched me on this research was Peter Conradi's claim, first made in 1989 and repeated more recently, that Carel's sermon in Iris Murdoch's *The Time of the Angels* is an atheistic anti-sermon.[54] In conducting my examination of sermons in fiction, therefore, I have had to contend with this aspect of the strangeness of sermons and have needed to assess how successfully authors can establish the rhetorical 'density' of sermons as distinct from novelistic intertextuality, as well as to what extent they can represent sermons as convincing discourses.

The second feature of fictional sermons that makes them strange is that they are performances. The verbs most usually associated with the delivery of sermons are 'give', 'deliver' and 'preach', whilst 'perform', though rarely used, may be as appropriate because preaching is a reluctantly-recognised category of performing art. The performative aspect of preaching, such as necessary rehearsing to hone the artistry and effectiveness of preaching, is played down because performance has come to suggest the spectacle of theatricality which foregrounds the actor rather than the word. Thomas Hardy's short poem *'In*

[54] Conradi, Peter J., *Iris Murdoch: The Saint and the Artist*. (London: Macmillan, 1989). Conradi, Peter J., *The Saint and the Artist: A Study of the Fiction of Iris Murdoch*. (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), p.177.

Church[55] gives succinct expression to this. In the first stanza a preacher concludes his sermon and makes his way to the vestry as "each listener chokes" and "emotion pervades" the aisles. In the second stanza, once he has closed the vestry door behind him, the preacher thinks he can no longer be seen, but, as the door swings ajar, a Bible class pupil is able to see her idol re-enact in the vestry mirror

> *"Each pulpit gesture in deft dumb-show*
> *That had moved the congregation so."*

Hardy offers no judgement of the preacher's behaviour in the vestry; instead the poet leaves the reader to see the ironic contrast between the child's adoration of her idol and his deft dumb-show. His preaching is practised show so we are left doubting his sincerity; his performance is dumb, emptying and silencing the Word which should be central.

Nevertheless, as Judith Butler's work on gender demonstrates, performativity cannot be avoided. She argues that gender has no pre-existing identity,[56] rather it is performatively constructed by 'expressions' of gender.[57] In other words, gender is not a noun, but a doing. Broadening out these observations beyond discussions of gender, it can be asserted that performativity is an aspect of human personality, societal role and individual identity. We 'perform' who we are. Preachers 'perform' preaching. Indeed, preachers are defined by their performance of preaching. The problem is that people are also defined by other attributes such as age, race, education and social class so the 'fit' can never be perfect. As Bakhtin observed, our language is never unitary but stratified in several ways - generically, professionally, socially and historically[58] - so there are many strata to a preacher's discourse. Preachers are constructed as both more than and other than their preaching and this study of fictional preaching will confirm our suspicion that it is in this area of excess and

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[55] In Wright, David, *The Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.121.
[56] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (London: Routledge, 1999), p.180.
[57] *ibid.*, p.33.
[58] Bakhtin, Mikhail. M., *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) ET: Michael Holquist, pp.288-291.

discrepancy that trouble lurks. Ricoeur discussed this at some length in his *The Rule of Metaphor* in which he argued that we must not lose sight of Plato's condemnation of rhetoric which is often seen as "belonging to the world of the lie, of the 'pseudo'".[59] Citing Plato's *Gorgias*, he further argued that rhetoric is a performance, "cosmetic flattery, a simulation of art".[60] This perception of rhetoric has resulted in performance phenomena being rarely understood as 'truthful' or authentic among preachers.[61] Thus, in my own appreciation of the art of preaching I feel compelled to distinguish between performativity, which is unavoidable, and 'theatricality' which is when performance has become hyperbolic. For instance, it is his theatricality, rather than his self-consciousness as a performer, that arouses our suspicions about the preacher in Hardy's poem and it is the Pardoner's theatricality that distinguishes him from the Parson in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.* Each of their messages is worthy but the Pardoner's is compromised by the histrionics that draw our attention from the message to the messenger, whereas Alain de Lille's contemporaneous handbook for actual preachers, *Ars Praedicandi*, argued that performance should be used to deny the suggestion of acting.[62]

In his study of verbal art as performance[63] Richard Bauman cites the example of Wolof kings who always speak hesitantly because fluency would be unbecoming for someone in their position. Fluent, rehearsed speech, in Wolof culture mainly in Senegal, implies 'spin' or dishonesty. In contrast, in our culture we usually look for indications from a speaker that he or she has command of the material. Although there continue to be some traditions within Protestant Christianity which see greater sincerity in extemporary prayer and preaching rather than scripted liturgy and sermons, we usually expect preachers to give polished performances.

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[59] Ricoeur, Paul, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary studies of the creation of meaning in language.* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p.11.
[60] *ibid.*, p.324, n.6.
[61] Ward, Richard, "Performance turns in homiletics: wrong way or right on?" *The Journal of Communication and Religion.* 17:1 (1994), p.2.
[62] Waters, Claire M., *op. cit.*, p.49.
[63] Bauman, Richard, *Verbal Art as Performance.* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1977), p.31.

Nigel Fabb accentuated this positive side of performance when he argued that many literary works have two modes of existence, one as text, the other as performance.[64] I find it helpful to consider this observation in the matter of the relationship between books and audio books. For instance, Martin Jarvis's reading of a Dickens novel – both in the ephemeral form of a radio broadcast and in the more permanent form of a compact disc – differs from the way we customarily encounter a Dickens novel, as a bound book of printed pages, although it is in keeping with Dickens's own presentation of his work in his public readings. Yet even when privately reading a book, there is an element of performing to an audience in that words on the page 'come alive' when the reader becomes his or her own audience in silent reading. In the case of an actor's recorded performance of a text, the words have been said in particular ways, in a particular place and time and performed to an (imagined) audience, probably in a cultural context and perhaps accompanied by (unseen) gestures. Clearly, this is more than merely text on the page; it enhances, and offers an interpretation of, the text. In performing the text, what Fabb calls "a contractual relationship between performer and audience based on shared knowledge" has been established.[65] This shared knowledge includes interpretative guidelines, often described as performance frames, which I will discuss in chapter 2 when I justify their inclusion in my analytical toolkit.

In the meantime, I note that in the case of sermons their performance suggests situated behaviour in a compact between the preacher who performs and the audience to whom the performance is presented.[66] This situated behaviour involves interplay among many factors such as setting, sequence and the ground rules of performance. According to Leith and Myerson, the smallest of details in these and other factors at play in a text may be significant to an audience when a text is performed.[67] Furthermore, displacement of the performed text from its setting – and the consequential alteration of its performance frames - leads to

[64] Fabb, Nigel, *Linguistics and Literature*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p.221.
[65] *ibid.*, p.240.
[66] Bauman, Richard, *op cit.*, p.27.
[67] Leith, D. and Myerson, G., *The Power of Address: Explorations in Rhetoric*. London: Routledge, 1989), p.4.

what Dell Hymes called "performance in a perfunctory key", by which he meant a truncated or summarised form of the text.[68]

This perfunctory performance is, I suggest, the second problem for sermons in fiction in two respects: first, that the sermon on the page is always other than, and usually less than, the actual sermon in performance and, second, that self-conscious and well-prepared performances within novels too readily imply the meretricious (and this may be especially so in a discipline where practising what you preach is proverbially expected). In her study of women preachers, Frances Lee Smith intimated that performing a text means creating the impression that one has put oneself into the occasion;[69] in other words, performance enables people, including the performer as well as audience members, to appear to be caught up in the event.

However, John Searle's research demonstrated the risk of theatricality:[70] through examination of a *New York Times* article and an extract from an Iris Murdoch novel, both containing discrete and recognisable illocutionary speech acts, Searle showed that we react to them differently. When we recognise that someone is 'pretending' (or 'performing'), we suspend our response to the force of the illocutionary speech act. The loss or reduction of any of a speech's performative elements puts the text at risk. This is to say that removing any of the traditions associated with the sermon genre may mean that the discipline either loses its *raison d'être* or becomes devalued as merely part of the residual culture.[71] This is a critical issue for the survival of the art of preaching in post-Christian, postmodern times.

In making a critique of sermons in contemporary British fiction, I have therefore needed to assess how authors convey a sense of preaching as

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[68] Hymes, Dell, *Foundations in sociolinguistics: an ethnographic approach.* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1974) quoted in Fabb, *op. cit.*, p.225.
[69] Smith, Frances Lee, "The Pulpit and Woman's Place: Gender and the Framing of the 'Exegetical Self' in Sermon Performances" in *Framing in Discourse*. Tannen, Deborah, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.150.
[70] Reported in Lose, David O., *Confessing Jesus Christ: Preaching in a Postmodern World.* (Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), p.161.
[71] Bauman, Richard, *op. cit.* p.48.

performance and how they use sermon performances to indicate the reliability or otherwise of the preacher. I have also needed to assess how novelists attempt to avoid perfunctoriness, when the insertion of sermons in a novel inevitably tends towards their being played in a perfunctory key because they have been displaced and the conditions for appropriate or full performance no longer prevail.

The third characteristic I want to highlight is that, despite the availability of some published sermons, their most usual form both in pre-literate and contemporary Britain is oral. In the nineteenth century people's familiarity with sermons was in both oral and written forms, for they attended preaching services on Sunday mornings and evenings then read published sermons as a devotional exercise on Sunday afternoons and during the week. This did not always have the desired effect: in a well-known episode in *Wuthering Heights*, the young Catherine and Heathcliff use the devotional texts they have been given to lighten a wet Sunday afternoon to hit one another.[72]

In his analysis of spoken and written sermons in Victorian Britain,[73] Robert Ellison categorised sermons oxymoronically as 'oral literature', that is to say that in the nineteenth century they belonged to both oral and written traditions. Ellison's study of three nineteenth-century preachers reveals the coexistence of three different traditions or techniques: Spurgeon, a Baptist, preached extemporaneously; John Henry Newman, an Anglican turned Catholic, preached from a manuscript; and George MacDonald, a Congregationalist preacher with a dual vocation, wrote his sermons in novels. Ellison suggests that sermons are in the centre of the orality-literacy continuum. He calls Spurgeon's preaching ministry 'secondary literacy' in that he cultivated spontaneity but his sermons were later transferred from extemporaneous public speaking to print.[74] Newman, meanwhile, demonstrates what Ellison called 'secondary orality' in that his oral performance in the pulpit was grounded in writing beforehand and in

[72] Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*. (London: Heron Books, William Collins Sons & Co Ltd., 1847), pp.20-21.
[73] Ellison, Robert H., *The Victorian Pulpit: Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth-century Britain*. (London: Associated Universities Press, 1998).
[74] *ibid.*, p. 76.

print afterwards.[75] George MacDonald was the most unusual of the three in that his 'primary literacy'[76] circumvented or excluded the oral element of preaching. As his career as a novelist flourished he appeared less frequently in the pulpit, so many of his sermons were preached only to those who read his books, some of which were in effect sermon-novels. He also published three series of sermons entitled *Unspoken Sermons* which I have taken as the title for my thesis: many of his sermons remained 'unspoken sermons'.[77] It remains true, however, that both before and after this 'golden age of the sermon', that is the nineteenth century and the few decades each side of it, sermons are usually regarded as part of oral culture.

Ellison's study is indebted to Walter Ong's contribution to orality-literacy studies.[78] In this important book Ong argued that writing is artificial whilst the spoken word is full of vitality, a matter also discussed by David Olson and Nancy Torrance in their *Literacy and Orality.*[79] When speech is put on a page this is governed by the contrived rules of an interiorised technology.[80] When speech migrates from orality to literature, Ong reckons that words inevitably lack their full phonetic qualities, they lose intonation and the reader is unable to hear the speaker's tone of voice.[81] As Bakhtin indicated, even when grammatical intonation exists in an utterance, there is no expressive intonation in a sentence written on a page.[82] Ong further argued that the development of the art of rhetoric was the product of writing and the subsequent publication of textbooks showing how rhetoric's techniques could be put to better use. What Ong's arguments demonstrate for the subject of my research is that when sermons are

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[75] *ibid.*, p. 126.
[76] *ibid.*, p. 113.
[77] MacDonald, George, *Unspoken Sermons Series One.* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1867). MacDonald, George, *Unspoken Sermons Series Two.* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1885). MacDonald, George, *Unspoken Sermons Third Series.* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1889) These are available as e-texts from Johannesen Publishing and Printing at www.johannesen.com.
[78] Ong, Walter J., *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.* (London: Routledge, 1982).
[79] Olson, David R. and Torrance, Nancy, *Literacy and Orality.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[80] Ong, *op. cit.*, pp.82f.
[81] *ibid.*, p.101.
[82] Bakhtin, Mikhail M., "The Problem of Speech Genres" in *Speech Genres and Other Essays.* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), ET Michael Holquist, p. 60.

placed in a novel, they have migrated from an oral culture to the chirographic world of a literary construct; they are set within the novel as an inserted, embedded or ingested genre. Thus there is an inevitable tension between the original, imagined, spoken form of the speech and its final written form. This is indubitably a third problematic area for sermons in fiction. In Ong's terms, sermons in literature are fictively oral but actually literary. In Ellison's terms, sermons in literature are either 'secondary literacy', in that, if there is an actual historical sermon on which the inserted sermon is based, it has moved from speech to print, or more usually they are 'primary literacy' in that, while purporting to be spoken, they have circumvented any actual oral element.

The fictive sermon is but one of many inserted genres in the polyvocality that contributes to what Bakhtin saw as a novel's distinguishing feature – its heteroglossia.[83] The sermon in fiction is but one of several diverse voices which organise themselves into a structured artistic or linguistic system within novels. Everybody – even the most linguistically primitive individual – lives in several language systems, so our language is always stratified and heteroglot. The example Bakhtin cites is that of a peasant who lives within at least four language systems, namely those of prayer, song, familial discourse and 'proper' forms of address when speaking to the lord of the manor. Novelists exult in, and even intensify, this heteroglossia, which readers both accept and expect. According to Michael Kearns, this is one of the ur-conventions that govern how an audience processes a text. He suggests that readers expect novels to embody many voices, to be heteroglot.[84] In the case of 'speech-on-the-page', a character's speech is likely to have several strata: a speaking character's discourse is not merely transmitted, but also represented, by authorial discourse. Finding an instance outside the contemporary scope of this thesis, I might take, for example, Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*.[85] This can be read as the story of the aftermath of a sermon. Although Slope's sermon is important to the narrative, Trollope declines to provide a verbatim report. As author he intervenes and reports the

[83] Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination*, p.263.
[84] Kearns, Michael, *Rhetorical Narratology*. (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) p.97.
[85] Trollope, Anthony, *Barchester Towers*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, original publication 1857).

sermon, thus allowing him to interpret for readers the preacher's intentions. Through discourse analysis of Trollope's report of the sermon it is possible to distinguish the heteroglot layers of the sermon, hearing the preacher's voice as well as the author's. There is, however, a word of caution served in Bakhtinian theory for novelists wishing to include sermons in their work verbatim: Bakhtin suggests that it is impossible to represent fictively discourses that are externally authoritative, because they always become dead quotations.[86]

I have needed, therefore, when analysing sermons in recent British fiction to find ways to assess how novelists maintain the sermon's vitality, how they represent orality when the sermon is presented in written form, how the sermon is reported and how the prospective tension between the preacher's authority and the author's authorship is handled. I have also needed to consider the influence on the sermon of authoritative texts, such as the bible, the creeds and writings of the Church Fathers, as well as assessing the sermon as an authoritative text in itself.

The fourth problem with fictional sermons is that part of the cultural coding of sermons is the assumption that they are attitudinal. This is to say either that they give religious or moral insight or instruction[87] or that they are committed to an acknowledged outlook.[88] Most preaching is associated with confessional theology which typically begins with the symbols, narratives, creeds, hymnody or dogmas of a particular church tradition, then expresses either the church's faith or the preacher's own place affirming, or dissenting from, that tradition. Bakhtin suggested that sermons are often heard as the voice of ultimate authority and ultimate reality; for Bakhtin, sermons were monologues that claimed to be the last word on their subject matter, although I add that any sermon will have many voices including the preacher's voice, the voices of the preacher's predecessors, the voices of the listeners adding their understanding and incomprehension or resistance to the sermon's text and the absent sacred

[86] Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination*, p.344.
[87] Seymour, Melody, "The Pulpit in the Prow", p.11
[88] Merrill, Thomas, *Christian Criticism: A Study of Literary God-talk*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1976), p.186.

voice. Furthermore, when sermons are put into novels the number of these voices swells to include characters' voices, readers' voices and the voices of the literary tradition to which the novel belongs. Over and through all these voices there runs the assumption that the preacher's voice has 'attitude'; unlike the novel itself the preacher within it adopts and presents a confessional stance.

This, I suggest, brings sermons into a conflict of intentionality when they are put into novels. In a recent introduction to the modern novel, Jesse Matz argued that Booth's distinction between showing and telling has become important to modern novelists for whom didacticism is the mortal enemy and mimesis a holy grail.[89] He cited Ford Madox Ford's advice, "Don't be viewy," and argued that the problem with intrusive explanatory telling is that it so readily becomes *preaching* [his italics]. When an author's voice, opinions or creed are too obvious or too audible in a novel, the accusation of 'preachiness' is often expressed. When sermons are placed in novels this is a potential fourth site of collision: preachiness may be avoided in novel writing, but how can it be excluded from preaching? Do sermons in novels give authors an excuse to tell rather than show? Do sermons in novels provide authors opportunity to intrude into the narrative? Are they 'cheap tricks' which let authors express their judgement or their own philosophy?

Sermons in modern novels sometimes bolster a traditional model of Christianity. For instance, John Murray's *John Dory* contains a sermon preached in an evangelical gospel hall which seeks to affirm the conventional conversion-to-Christianity narrative.[90] At other times sermons in modern novels trouble Christianity, often by showing preachers who are wrestling with problematic aspects of religious belief. These include the parish priest in David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* preaching shortly after the coal mining waste tip fell on the school in Aberfan[91] and the curate in Michael Arditti's *Easter* struggling with his sense of vocation to priesthood as a gay man.[92] At other times, sermons in

[89] Matz, Jesse, *The Modern Novel: A Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.44.
[90] Murray, John, *John Dory*. (Hexham: Flambard Press, 2001).
[91] Lodge, David, *How Far Can You Go?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980).
[92] Arditti, Michael, *Easter*. (London: Arcadia Books, 2001).

novels are used to subvert Christianity. This subversion is often achieved by the portrayal of disreputable preachers attempting to manipulate their audience or by the depiction of inadequate preaching which fails to engage with issues of contemporary life because it is shallow, fraudulent or cliché ridden. Any of these forms of sermons in contemporary fiction may represent the intrusion of the authorial voice; in such circumstances the author's attitude is expressed in the attitude of the sermon.

In conducting my analysis of sermons in contemporary fiction, therefore, I have needed to assess to what extent authors use their characters' preaching to propagate their own views, to what extent the aims, voices or interests of the author and the fictional preacher are in conflict, and to what extent the character is aware of either toeing the party line or struggling with personal doubts in the sermon. I have needed to assess whether the preachiness of preaching is made 'acceptable' to readers, who usually dislike preachy texts, because the reader is in some way led to question the preacher's reputation.

Scope of study

None of these four potentially problematic sites of collision – the disjunction between the rhetoric of the sermon and that of the novel, the reduction to perfunctoriness of the sermon's performance, the migration of an oral construct to a chirographic medium and the conflict between a sermon's attitudinal telling and a novel's showing – has prevented the development of a long literary tradition of both straight and satirical sermons in British literature with which Judaeo-Christian readers have become familiar.

Because readers work intertextually, employ schemata to give meaning to texts and always work either within or against a tradition, I acknowledge that both straight and satirical sermons have become familiar to readers of British literature even when their contact with actual preaching in churches has been lost. Within two hundred years of the publication of Alain de Lille's *Ars*

Praedicandi,[93] which has been called the most significant contribution in British culture to the development of literary preaching,[94] literary preaching was present in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* whose debt to sermon traditions is discussed at length in Volk-Birke's *Chaucer and Medieval Preaching.*[95] Furthermore, Chaucer's contemporary, Langland, was preaching both directly and through his characters in *Piers Plowman.*[96] The traditions of straight and satirical literary sermons were combined in George Eliot's *The Sad Fortunes of the Rev Amos Barton*[97] and employed in the novels of both Anthony Trollope and Charles Dickens, most notably in *Barchester Towers* and *Bleak House.*[98] Almost a century earlier, a straight sermon constituting chapter 29 had not felt unnatural in Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield.*[99] And in the early years of the twentieth century the traditions of straight and satirical literary sermons were still strong enough for both Evelyn Waugh and James Joyce to use them.[100] Christine Krueger has contributed an important study of nineteenth-century women preachers,[101] Ian Ker has noted the irony of Waugh's portrait of the ineffectuality of Anglican preaching[102] and both Louise Bentley and David Seed in separate studies have thrown light on preaching in Joyce's work.[103]

It seems that this long literary tradition was easily sustained because it was embedded in the presupposition that the majority of readers would have been

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[93] Alan of Lille, *The Art of Preaching*. (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1981), translated with an introduction by Gillian R Evans.

[94] This is the view expressed by David Lyle Jeffrey and Ronald B Bond in their entry on 'Preaching' in the Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature: Jeffrey, D. L., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1992).

[95] Volk-Birke, Sabine, *Chaucer and Medieval Preaching: Rhetoric for Listeners*. (Tubingen, 1991).

[96] Salter, Elizabeth and Pearsall, Derek, *Piers Plowman*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1967) and Salter, Elizabeth, *Piers Plowman: An Introduction*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963).

[97] Eliot, George, *Scenes of Clerical Life*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1858).

[98] Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, orig. pub. 1853).

[99] Goldsmith, Oliver, *The Vicar of Wakefield*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982, orig. pub. 1766).

[100] Waugh, Evelyn, *A Handful of Dust*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1934) and Joyce, James, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1916).

[101] Krueger, Christine L., *op. cit.*

[102] Ker, Ian, *The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961: Newman, Hopkins, Belloc, Chesterton, Greene, Waugh*. (Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p.173.

[103] Bentley, Louise, "Beyond the Liturgy: An Approach to Catholicism as Genre in the work of James Joyce." *Literature and Theology* 12:2 (1998), 159-169 and Seed, David, "The Voices of the Church: A Dialogical Approach to the Retreat Sections of Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist." *Literature and Theology*, 9:2 (1995), 153-164.

educated in the traditions of Christianity and would have attended church, but this presupposition can no longer be held. As a result there is an important literary question to address: in a multicultural society with a different understanding of religious education and in which fewer people attend religious services, how much longer can this literary tradition survive?

This thesis examines the condition of preaching in British fiction between 1979 and 2004, but it is unable to predict its life expectation. For most of the thesis I will be using the terms 'preaching' and 'sermons' interchangeably, but I have chosen to use the term 'preaching' in its title because I feel this term conveys the dynamism of the preaching experience which is lost in the more static term 'sermon'. Whereas the term 'sermon' tends to be confined to the text of preaching only, 'preaching' conveys a sense of more than the text and includes the preacher, the occasion, the audience and the experience as a religious or spiritual event. Although both sociologists and historians tend to date the decline of churchgoing to the immediate post war years and the onset of rapid decline to the 1960s, I have chosen to study novels in the quarter-century from 1979. I have made this choice because the year Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister of Britain was the beginning of a cultural shift, in which the Church was no longer seen primarily as a place for personal spiritual succour, but a site of social challenge to the received political wisdom which denied the existence of society and encouraged pursuit of one's own wellbeing. 1979 was also the year of the rise to power in Iran of militant Islam personified by the Ayatollah Khomeini, for many our first awareness of the political power and threat of fundamentalism, a point made by the novelist Julian Barnes in his *Letters to London, 1990-1995.*[104] Furthermore, Philip Tew suggests that this was also a time when there was "a specific shift in the cultural milieu" which was signalled by a change in the focus and cultural emphases of British novels, for which the shift from Iris Murdoch to Salman Rushdie as Booker Prize winners in the space of only three years, 1978 and 1981, is cited as evidence.[105] Throughout these

[104] Referred to in Brown, Malcolm, *Faith in Suburbia: Completing the Contextual Trilogy.* Edinburgh, Contact Monograph No. 15, (2005), p.5.
[105] Tew, Philip, *The Contemporary British Novel.* (London: Continuum, 2004), p.32.

years formalised religion has continued to be in sharp decline. Nevertheless, the artificiality of 1979 as a starting point becomes apparent when authors included in case studies were writing in the 1960s or 70s and so, where their earlier work is relevant, reference will be made to their earlier novels.

This thesis reports a study of the preaching in Michael Arditti's *Easter*, Geraldine Brooks's *Year of Wonders*, Antonia Byatt's four Frederica novels, David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?*, John Murray's *John Dory* and Jane Rogers's *Mr Wroe's Virgins*.[106] Other novels, including many in section B of my bibliography, suggested themselves for inclusion in the thesis, but I have selected those I feel best support case studies analysing the function sermons serve in fiction: this is not a survey of post-1979 novels containing sermons, but a focussed analysis of fictional sermons narrowed down from a much wider reading list.

The novels have been selected on the basis of four criteria. First, I have chosen mainly British authors writing in a British context because this is an examination of the condition of literary sermons in an age of churchgoing decline in Britain. So I have not included Christopher Brookmyre's *Not the End of the World*,[107] which in several respects, not least its presence in airport lounges and its portrayal of terrorising religion, would have been an interesting study, because it is almost exclusively set in America. On the other hand, I have included the Australian-born novelist Geraldine Brooks because her novel *Year of Wonders* was written for the British market and is set, in all except a brief epilogue, in seventeenth-century Britain. All the selected novels can be said in some way "to reflect, to fathom or ... to redeem modern life"[108] and reflect the

[106] Brooks, Geraldine, *Year of Wonders*. (London: Fourth Estate, 2001), Byatt, Antonia S., *The Virgin in the Garden*. (London: Virago, 1978), Byatt, Antonia. S., *Still Life*. (London: Virago, 1985), Byatt, Antonia. S., *Babel Tower*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1996), Byatt, Antonia. S., *A Whistling Woman*. (London: Virago, 2002) and Rogers, Jane, *Mr Wroe's Virgins*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).

[107] Brookmyre, Christopher, *Not the End of the World*. (London: Abacus, 1998).

[108] They therefore qualify as modern novels in Matz's terms: Matz, Jesse, *op. cit.*, p.7.

plural understandings of Britishness evident in both Philip Tew's and Patrick Parrinder's examinations of novelistic Britishness.[109]

Second, all these novels have been reviewed in one or more of the principal daily or weekly British newspapers, so these novels are, to a greater or lesser extent, in the reading public's consciousness. It could be argued therefore that the preaching in these novels is formed by, and conversely forms, a common understanding of the nature of preaching in its style and content.

Third, the preaching in these novels is representative of the main divisions of Christianity in Britain. There are Roman Catholic sermons in Lodge's novel, Anglican sermons in Byatt's, Arditti's and Brooks's novels and non-conformist preaching in Murray's and Rogers's novels.

Fourth, in each of these novels, sermons are significant features of either the structure, theme or style of the work. In *John Dory*, for instance, a sermon comprises a fifth of the novel, whereas in *Easter* there are nine sermons preached by each of the three main characters. Other popular fiction representing contemporary religion turned out to be self-excluding because references to sermons within these novels are brief and illustrative, and in one case,[110] because the novelist, in an unrecorded interview, told me, her minister, that "[she] would not presume to write" her eponymous character's sermons.

I need to explain how I will be treating these novels, especially when my approach has been either unorthodox or contrary to the expressed intentions of the authors. To do so now will minimise the need for general discussion of the texts in following chapters.

A. S. Byatt's tetralogy, often referred to as 'the Frederica novels', was written and published over a period of twenty-five years, almost synchronous with the span of my research. The first, *The Virgin in the Garden*, was published in 1978 and the last, *A Whistling Woman*, in 2002. Compared with most of the

[109] Tew, Philip, *op. cit.* and Parrinder, Patrick, *Nation and Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[110] Shaw, Rebecca, *The New Rector*. (London: Orion, 1994).

novels on which this thesis is based, these – the self-conscious products of an academic - have attracted much critical and academic appraisal. Four of the characters who occupy the imagined world of these novels are clergymen, the presence of only one of whom is sustained throughout the quartet. This is Daniel Orton, whose vocation to priesthood had been aroused by the oratory of an unnamed member of a High Anglican religious community preaching at a Civics Week in Sheffield. Daniel's career path takes him out of conventional parochial ministry into practical ministry as a Listener in a fictionalised version of the Samaritans. He preaches in none of the novels and in *The Virgin in the Garden* dismisses preaching as "Words, words" (47). The other clerics in the novels are Daniel's first vicar when he is a curate, Mr Ellenby, who is replaced by Gideon Farrar in the second volume of the quartet, *Still Life*. In *A Whistling Woman* there is a fourth clergyman associated with the religious community that Gideon Farrar establishes. He is Canon Adelbert Holly. There is a fifth religious leader, exercising a priestly role (WW, 400) though not ordained, who emerges within the community. He is Joshua Lamb, also known as Joshua Ramsden, a lay member of the community with a charismatic personality, who rivals Gideon Farrar for effective leadership of the Joyful Companions.

Although Byatt resists this reductive description of her work, I read the Frederica novels principally as a chronicle of the 1950s and 1960s. Here I am following both Kumo Schuhmann, who used *The Virgin in the Garden* as a case study in his examination of the nature of Englishness in recent novels,[111] and Stevie Davies whose review of *A Whistling Woman* described it as a novel which anatomises the sixties.[112] In his review of the fourth book, Jim Barloon also suggested that Byatt was attempting to "encompass much of English cultural and social life in the late 1960s".[113]

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[111] Schuhmann, Karl, "The Concept of Culture in some recent English novels." *Anglistentag*, J. Husler, ed. (1983) pp.111-127.
[112] Davies, Stevie, "A Whistling Woman by A S Byatt". *The Independent*, London, 7 September 2002.
[113] Barloon, Jim, "Byatt's latest lacks literary inspiration." *Houston Chronicle*, Houston, 28 March 2003.

In *The Virgin in the Garden* there are three sermons preceded by an earlier allusion (39) to a sermon the young Bill Potter wrote in anger when a Congregational minister burnt his copy of *Jude the Obscure.* The first is the sermon that persuades Daniel Orton by its "mesmeric incantation" to pursue vocation to priesthood (68). A silent, lonely child, fat, ponderous and a burden to his widowed mother, Daniel's inarticulacy and outsider status render him susceptible to admiration for a powerful orator; in the absence of his deceased birth-father, this Father promises Daniel that he can be an effective contributor to the society to which he longs to belong. Apart from speaking briefly at a funeral, Daniel's own preaching is never reported in the Frederica novels. The second sermon in *The Virgin in the Garden* is that preached at Easter by Ellenby. In its choice of subject, "decomposition ... reversed" (202), and its accent on the barbarity and blood of Easter there is dissonance between the sermon and the schemata of 'English' Easters with their association with the arrival of spring, a dissonance that disturbs Stephanie (200). Readers of the novel may find themselves asking what is composed or constructed in this discourse on composition and I will return to this question later in the thesis. The remaining sermon of this novel is also preached by Ellenby at Daniel and Stephanie's wedding. Ellenby's attempt to accommodate both Stephanie and Daniel by weaving into his sermon allusions to Spenser and Milton for Stephanie's benefit, and Genesis and the ordination service for Daniel's, is represented as only partially successful.

In the second volume of the quartet, *Still Life*, there are two sermons. The first is Bill Potter's anti-sermon on the folly of belief in the Virgin Birth, none of the content of which is reported to the reader although we are given to understand that he was arguing against the historicity of supernatural elements in the gospels. Bill's intimidating style robs all potential colour, light and warmth from the liberation promised by his atheism. Reference to Bill's anti-sermon is followed by a description of the Church nativity play as "a believed fairy tale" (50), in which Herod occupies the pulpit. This incongruous juxtaposition of anti-sermon and nativity play makes both Bill Potter and Herod disturbers of the peace and usurpers of the pulpit. The other sermon in this novel is Gideon

Farrar's sermon on personhood preached when he first arrives in the parish as incumbent (158-9). It has the preacherly convention of a three-part discourse on aspects of Person: the Trinity as three persons, the parson as person and personal relationships. In affirmation of my reading of these novels as a chronicle, this sermon's depiction of emergent new understandings of the parson's role, in which the parson represents Church in society rather than representing the people as *persona exemplaris* before God, reflects something of Byatt's preception of the changing role of parsons in post-war Britain.

There are no sermons in *Babel Tower*, although its exploration of religious language as metaphor contributes to our understanding of language in preaching, the subject of chapter 6 of this thesis. I will reserve my introduction to the six sermons in *A Whistling Woman* for chapter 7 when they will be significant for a discussion of sermons and religious community.

Only one other novel among the primary texts for my research is equally Anglican in its field of interest: this is *Easter* by Michael Arditti. According to one reviewer, the author regards *Easter* as an attempt to integrate sexuality with spirituality;[114] it consequently attracted interest from reviewers in both the gay and religious press and caused quite a stir, both of approval and disapproval. On the one hand, it was highly recommended by the recently retired Bishop of Edinburgh, Richard Holloway, well known for his liberal views;[115] on the other hand, a reading of excerpts scheduled for a Hampstead Church was cancelled at short notice and without full explanation.[116] One of the difficulties faced by reviewers was how to classify the book. With both explicit theology and explicit sex featuring in the novel, it could equally well be found on bookshop shelves of gay and lesbian fiction or general fiction shelves where booksellers had categorised it as a religious novel. Reviewers suggested it can be read as allegory, parody, satire or chronicle; as comedic farce, tragedy or tragicomedy;

[114] Mowbray, Tim, "Write This Way". *Time Out London*, London: 103, 10–17 April 2002.
[115] Thompson, Damian, "Even the 'messy bits' are made in His image." *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 April 2000.
[116] Gulliver, John, "The reading will be from Michael." *Camden New Journal*, 20 April 2000.

as comic fantasy or as having serious intent; as liturgy, drama or a verbal triptych.

There is a strong sense of the allegorical about *Easter* in its retelling of the Easter story. Arditti saw his character, Blair Ashley, curate at St Mary's in the Vale, as a contemporary Christ figure, both gay and HIV positive. In an interview with David Smith, in which he stated that the novel began as a meditation on a Matthias Grünewald triptych,[117] Arditti implied that his character Blair Ashley was inspired by his observation that the Christ figure in this famous triptych was covered in pustules, perhaps because it was painted during the Black Death. It is Blair who washes the feet of a tramp in a cemetery which doubles as the Garden of Gethsemane, he who drives the money-lenders out of the Temple when he disrupts the Queen's distribution of Maundy money, he who shares a prison cell with Barry (which could be a diminutive of Barrabas) and he whose subsequent crucifixion by the press and church authorities sends him on a spiritual journey which culminates in his own rebirth in the faith. This, suggests Peter Stanford, makes the novel "a contemporary allegory of Easter."[118] There are further elements of allegory in the novel: the Queen is an amalgam of Pontius Pilate and Herod, Blair is betrayed by a spotty adolescent Judas and when the Archdeacon of Highgate is abandoned in a mock crucifixion sex scene his mother helps him down in a manner which lampoons the Pièta.

The novel is carried forward through a series of sentences laid out like the rubric for a church service, supplying bare bones which the reader must animate, a liturgy the reader must celebrate.[119] For Mary Loudon the novel is a theatrical romp,[120] in which we read the rubric as stage directions and, indeed, we are encouraged to do so by the *dramatis personae* in which Arditti introduces the cast list for his novel. If the novel is primarily satirical, the object of the satire is

[117] Smith, David, "Sins of the Fathers." *Gay Times*, London: April 2000, pp.17-18.
[118] Stanford, Peter, "A Hampstead crucifixion." *The Independent on Sunday*, 2 April 2000.
[119] Pickstone, Charles, "A Row of Plaster Saints." *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 April 2000, p.27.
[120] Loudon, Mary, "You wonder what they gave up for Lent." *The Times*, London: 6 April 2000 p.2/15.

in question: for Maitland it is the church's tangle about bodies and sex,[121] whilst for Arditti himself[122] it is fundamentalism as personified in the novel's bishop and for *The Daily Express*'s reviewer[123] it is liberalism as personified in the vicar with his hand-wringing liberal response to his curate's homosexuality. Because many of the responses made by the ordained characters to events in the novel are given in the form of sermons, which some critics such as Barnacle see as an unsubtle way to set out the novel's themes,[124] and because many of these sermons serve satirical purposes, directing attention to the sermons highlights the role of *Easter* as satire.

There are three preachers and nine sermons in *Easter* – a bishop who preaches twice, a vicar who preaches five times and a curate who also preaches twice, all in the course of *Easter*'s Holy Week. The vicar's five are a short sermon at the donkey procession on Palm Sunday, an address given at Daisy and Joe's wedding, the sermon at Julian's funeral and sermons given at the Maundy Thursday footwashing and Good Friday's Celebration of the Lord's Passion. The bishop preaches at a healing service on the Monday of Holy Week and again on the morning of Maundy Thursday when he addresses the clergy of the diocese at a Eucharist with the Blessing of Oils. The curate, Blair Ashley, also preaches twice, in the side chapel at Alice and Dee's lesbian wedding and outside the burnt-out church on Easter Day. Most of these sermons are reported in full and they constitute a significant proportion of the book, but, because of the triptych form of the novel, they are not presented chronologically (see fig. 1). For instance, Arditti reverses the order of the bishop's sermons and places them far apart with the earlier sermon preached on Holy Monday coming almost two hundred pages after the later sermon supposedly preached on Maundy Thursday.

[121] Maitland, Sara, "Sex, religion and a curate called Blair." *Daily Mail*, 7 April 2000.
[122] Braid, Mary, "The Archdeacon, the rent boy - and the gay novelist." *The Independent*, 27 April 2000.
[123] Sandys, Sebastian, "The perils of parish life." *Daily Express*, 1 April 2000.
[124] Barnacle, Hugh, "High Church, Low Farce." *Sunday Times*, 2 April 2000.

Chronological Order		Narratival Order
1	Vicar on Palm Sunday	1
2	Bishop at healing service	7
3	Vicar at wedding	2
4	Curate at lesbian union	8
5	Vicar at funeral	3
6	Bishop on Maundy Thursday	4
7	Vicar on Maundy Thursday	5
8	Vicar on Good Friday	6
9	Curate on Easter Day	9

Fig. 1 Sermons in *Easter*

The novel's tripartite structure mirrors the structure of its inspiration, the Grünewald triptych: it is a first person narrative preceded by an initial account of Holy Week from the point of view of the unenlightened and followed by a final account of the same week through the eyes of the more enlightened. This is represented in fig. 2.

	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3
Palm Sunday	Procession # Stations of the Cross	Blair's First Person Narrative from Maundy Thursday to early Sunday morning	Procession Stations of the Cross Prayers for Julian
Holy Monday	Holy Communion PCC Meeting		Confirmation Class Healing Service §
Holy Tuesday	Wedding #		Lesbian union *
Holy Wednesday	Funeral #		Burial
Maundy Thursday	St Paul's Cathedral § Westminster Abbey Eucharist #		St Paul's Cathedral Eucharist
Good Friday	Passion #		Vigil
Holy Saturday	Seder Vigil *(Part 1 ends)*		Vigil Vigil at St Saviour's
Easter Day			Eucharist in the churchyard *

\# *Huxley Grieve, the vicar, preaches*
§ *The Bishop preaches*
* *Blair Ashley, the curate, preaches*

Fig. 2 The Narrative Triptych Structure of *Easter*

Arditti's and Byatt's preachers are the only contemporary Anglicans among the preachers in this study. The other twentieth-century preachers are nonconformist or Roman Catholic. The solitary Roman preacher among the twelve in this study is Father Austin Brierley in David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* As a voluntary Roman Catholic chaplain to one of the constituent colleges of London University, Brierley is the pivotal character in a novel following the fortunes of eight Catholic students who form the congregation at the Mass in February 1952, with which the novel begins.

In my view, this is primarily a Catholic novel. Although Lodge has gained a reputation both as a literary theorist and as a stylist who is both capable of writing convincing parodies of other writers' styles, most notably in *Thinks...*[125] and capable of switching narrative techniques,[126] he is often named a Catholic writer. Critics, among whom we can include Bergonzi, Parsons, Ker, Crowe, Salwak, Streichsbier, Wheeler, and Woodman, are not of one mind either about the status of Catholic novels in the twentieth century or about Lodge's place among Catholic writers. Ker reminds us of Newman's contention that the creation of a nineteenth-century canon of Catholic literature in Britain was impossible[127] yet he concluded his survey of a Catholic revival in English literature from Newman onwards by claiming that Catholics have now succeeded in forming a tradition of Catholic literature.[128] Furthermore, Lodge self-consciously places himself in this Catholic tradition. Unlike Waugh and Greene who both converted to Catholicism, Lodge was born into a Catholic family and was given a Catholic schooling. Whilst this may lead us to expect his novels to be more grounded in Catholicism, we might also expect him to be less accepting of its assumptions. Although long before the publication of *How Far Can You Go?* Lodge had suggested that the Catholic novel was a thing of the past,[129] he frequently alludes to Graham Greene, popularly regarded as the master of the

[125] Lodge, David, *Thinks...* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000).
[126] Crowe, Marian E., "Intimations of Immortality: Catholicism in David Lodge's *Paradise News*." in *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature*, 52:2 (Winter 2000), p.148.
[127] Ker, *op. cit.*, p.1.
[128] *ibid.*, p.205.
[129] Bergonzi, Bernard, "A Conspicuous Absentee: The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Novel." *Encounter*, 55:2-3 (1980), p.48.

English Catholic novel,[130] as if the novel is attempting to establish for its author a place within the tradition and genre of Catholic fiction. For instance, in *How Far Can You Go?* two of the characters, Michael and Polly, discuss their favourite novels; these are Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* and Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, and they rejoice that *The Observer* has dubbed these authors the best English novelists going - "...that's one in the eye for the Prods," they say. (21)

The confusion may originate in differing understandings of the nature of Catholic novels. When Lodge dismissed Catholic novels as things of the past he was thinking of them as presentations of a "monolithic, unified and uniform (Catholic) view of life",[131] whereas Bergonzi asserts that Catholic novels do not, and need not, dramatise Catholic theology *in toto*. Rather they are characterised by the possibility of intervention of grace at the novel's heart and the action and characters of the novel being informed, and sometimes governed, by the mores and customs, pieties and practices of Catholicism.[132] To this extent it seems to me that a body of Lodge's work can be classed as his 'Catholic novels'. These include *The Picturegoers* in which Father Kipling preaches a sermon railing against the cinema in reaction to a film featuring the actress Amber Lush,[133] *The British Museum is Falling Down*,[134] *How Far Can You Go?*, *Paradise News*[135] and *Thinks...* Unlike Waugh, whose characters are Catholic aristocrats, and unlike Greene, whose eccentric Catholic characters are tested *in extremis*, Lodge's characters are 'ordinary' Catholics wrestling with the quotidian problems associated with being Catholic in an environment of plurality and permissive liberalism.[136] They are cursed – or blessed – with what Treglown called " a plague of moral uncertainty".[137]

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[130] *ibid.*, p.54.
[131] *ibid.*, p.48, quoting Lodge.
[132] *ibid.*, p.46.
[133] Lodge, David, *The Picturegoers*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin: 1960), pp.105-107.
[134] Lodge, David, *The British Museum is Falling Down*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).
[135] Lodge, David, *Paradise News*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991).
[136] Salwak, Dale, "Review of *Souls and Bodies* by David Lodge." *Magil's Literary Annual*, (1983): 761-763, p.762.
[137] Treglown, Jeremy, "Where shall wisdom be found?" *Times Literary Supplement*, London, 2 May 1980, p.487.

What makes *How Far Can You Go?* useful for my research is that, in that it has a more sociological frame of reference than the novels of Waugh and Greene, it becomes what Woodman called a compassionate account of changes in Catholicism in Britain in the 1950s, 60s and 70s:[138] it does for Catholicism what Byatt's tetralogy did for Anglicanism. The strong sense of verity that Salwak identified in the novel's chronicle of English Roman Catholicism makes the novel's title poignant: how far can Catholics go without destroying their Catholicism? Indeed, how far can modern fiction go in accommodating a religion with a strong sense of ending with Lodge's vision of lack of closure in postmodernity?

The sole representative of contemporary nonconformity among the selected novels is Ken Wright, whose sermon comprises a fifth of John Murray's *John Dory*. Although Murray's novel received short reviews in *The Times, The Independent on Sunday* and *The Mail on Sunday* as well as longer reviews in *The Spectator,*[139] *Literary Review,*[140] *The Observer*[141] and *The Independent,*[142] Murray is a regional writer, for most of his career to date published by a small Northern Arts sponsored publishing house. He sees his writing, including some of the comic vignettes in *John Dory,* as a development of the oral Cumbrian folk story tradition, but this novel also houses greater ambitions. Murray sees *John Dory* as a didactic novel attempting to communicate to its readers the reality of spiritual experience and to convince his readers of the 'power' of Christianity. I read it as being within the genre of life writing.

The novel concerns the spiritual journey of an ice cream salesman, George Singer, beginning with an encounter with a smiling turbot in a local aquarium and culminating in the narrator's listening to a sermon in a nonconformist chapel. At the beginning of chapter 6, at about the midway stage

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[138] Woodman, Thomas, *Faithful Fictions: The Catholic Novel in British Literature*. (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), p.41.
[139] Taylor, David J., "Messages from Magic Fish." *The Spectator*, May 2001.
[140] Segrave, Elisa, "The Drunken Chickens Were Mistakenly Plucked." *Literary Review*, May 2001, p.57.
[141] Mars-Jones, Adam, "It all began when I was smiled at by a turbot." *The Observer*, 2 April 2001.
[142] Arditti, Michael, "Satisfying scenes from provincial life." *The Independent*, 5 May 2001.

of the novel, its narrator announces "Now we get to the heart of the matter, meaning the validity or otherwise of a spoken as opposed to wordless message" (100). If we accept this as the novel's *crux interpretationis*, this colours Singer's narration of a series of comic episodes from his life in which he seems to have been surrounded by a succession of eccentric characters, each 'real-life tale' prompted by a strange epiphany. These epiphanies include shimmering Christmas trees, a seahorse labouring in childbirth, spilt whisky spreading over the kitchen floor, swinging coal buckets and the eponymous John Dory – a smiling fish that George thinks speaks when he turns away. The novel prompts us to ask whether it is any more credible that God might communicate through farcical wordless epiphanies than through a sermon whose preacher claims to express the word of God.

In the early part of the novel Murray buries its Christian theme with repeated references to George's scepticism and the portrayal of his mother's outright hatred for Christianity, but in the later part of the book the sermon becomes a tool for Murray to make more explicit the Christian message he has been trying so far to keep from his predominantly non-churchgoing readers. The preacher's forthright expression of Christian belief is foregrounded for the reader both by the unrealistic length of the sermon and by its end placing. Both Murray and his reviewers see the sermon as a novel-within-a-novel, although many reviewers saw the sermon as problematic: for instance, David Taylor in his *Spectator* review suggested that the novel loses its narrative path in the "spectacular amateur preacher's harangue at the local conformist chapel". Once the sermon has ended, only six pages, in which the sermon's effect on the novel's narrator is uncertain, remain. Readers are left searching for clues as to whether or not the power or truth of Ken Wright's 'conversionist', evangelical Lutheran version of Christianity has convinced George Singer. Some readers will find evidence that the novel is "a parable of pleasure and repentance" as Arditti feels the author intended,[143] whereas others will be unconvinced.

[143] Arditti, "Satisfying Scenes".

The dominance and serious intent of Wright's sermon in the novel – in its endplacing, its lengthy narration, as the only unmediated voice in the novel and as the most detailed of many epiphanies in the novel, most of which are put in question by their comic narration - imply that Ken Wright's sermon serves as commentary on George Singer's story of spiritual pilgrimage and spell out for the reader the nature of the novel as a conversion narrative. Novel-within-a-novel, Ken Wright's preaching is also sermon-within-a-sermon.

Overarching the entire novel – and, of course, the sermon within it – is the epiphany Murray recounts in the italicised prologue, which in real time is the final, odd experience recounted from George Singer's story. It is the epiphany of a seahorse in the labour of birth which Singer sees when he makes his return visit to the aquarium after listening to Wright's sermon. The curious well-known fact about *hippocampus fuscus* is that it is the male of the species who incubates the eggs and gives birth to the young. This gives Murray the opportunity to write the improbable sentences: *"He was pregnant, God bless him. He was carrying his child. I mean his young"* (12). This image within the prologue implies that this is a book about men giving birth, disturbingly for current times, cutting women out of the process. Such gender issues become something of a repetitious theme in many of the novels in this study: gender discussions continue to challenge a patriarchal church and the presence of women preachers in many branches of the contemporary church stimulates both a critique of the traditional Christian narrative and its re-expression. A chapter on religious experience will discuss these epiphanies more closely and the final chapter of the thesis will return to the issue of gendered preaching.

I read the other two novels selected for this thesis as historical novels fictionalising historical events and featuring fictionalised accounts of actual preachers. These are Prophet John Wroe in Jane Rogers's *Mr Wroe's Virgins* and the Reverend William Mompesson in Geraldine Brooks's *Year of Wonders*. I have specifically chosen to include novels of this genre in the study because, as David Cowart suggests, the affinity between history and fiction, linguistically expressed in that in several European languages the words for 'history' and

'story' coincide, obscures the distinction between veracious and imagined narrative and blurs the distinction between the objectively scientific aspirations of historians and the fictive character of historical reconstructions.[144] I anticipate that this blurring of the edges between veracity and the imagined will illuminate aspects of the practice of preaching. According to David Higdon, a common fascination with the past among many post-war British novelists has been expressed in three principal ways: first, the creation of retrospective dialogue in novels with characters confronting their own pasts, second, the writing of fiction that self-consciously imitated earlier fiction and, third, authors' interest in the past as a way of playing with the contents and values of contemporary culture.[145] The last of these - a 'mirroring' of the present expressed in a fascination with the past in novels - which Margaret Drabble memorably expressed as "the present also throw[ing] its shadow backwards",[146] is one of four categories of historical novel that Cowart identifies, namely those depicting the present age in the distant mirror of the past, those that attempt to recreate the past as vividly as possible, those that project a future based on the conventions of fictions of the past and those focussing on an historical turning point and showing how the present became what it is. Works centred on turning points, of which *Year of Wonders* is one, utilise what Frederick Holmes called the radical discontinuity of history.[147] Although humanity has a powerful urge to idealise the past, the sore truth is that continuity with a desired past has been severed,[148] with the effect that setting novels in the past is a defamiliarising technique that enables authors to explore themes at some remove from the immediacy of the reader's surroundings, even when these themes impact on contemporary life.

Furthermore, historical novels are capable of dealing with the divergence between events in the past and narrative discourse about those events, whether

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[144] Cowart, David, *History and the Contemporary Novel.* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), p.14.
[145] Higdon, David L., *Shadows of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction.* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp.9-14.
[146] *ibid.*, p.135.
[147] Holmes, Frederick M., *The Historical Imagination: Postmodernism and the Treatment of the Past in Contemporary British Fiction.* (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1997), p.12.
[148] *ibid.*, pp.52f.

contemporary or subsequent.[149] Indeed, all novels are capable of articulating struggles over the authority or legitimacy of the characters' power to narrate. These are struggles in which the respective narratival privileges of characters, narrators and focalisers are disputed and resolved by readers as they engage with what Robert Holton calls 'jarring witnesses'.[150] David Price asserts that history is not a univocal what-really-happened but a polyvocal competition of discourse, languages and points of view[151] and that historical novels have the capacity to serve as meditations on this polyvocality, this relationship between history as acts in the past and history as a narrative about those past acts.[152] Price also argues that the primary concern of historical novelists is for the future and that their interest in the past is driven by a desire to interrogate accepted versions of the past in order to create a new possibility for the future and promote new values. Moreover, historical novels can present counterhistories, re-present forgotten histories, present histories experienced by a character or narrator or investigate mythic grand narratives in history. Fictionalising history thus enables novelists to legitimise the testimony of marginalised groups, express victims' voices, recover suppressed history and re-evaluate events that have always been value laden – all to improve understanding of the present and to create possibility for the future.

Year of Wonders offers a minority reading of the history of England's Great Plague and is also a study of the interfaces between religion and superstition and between religion, disease and health. It tells of the plague's effect on the Derbyshire town of Eyam, whose rector William Mompesson is credited with saving neighbouring towns from the plague by placing a strict quarantine on Eyam throughout 1665, a story which also intrigued Arditti in his first novel, largely, he said when I interviewed him, because he saw the plague as a useful parallel with AIDS.[153] Not to sully William Mompesson's *post mortem*

[149] Holton, Robert, *Jarring Witnesses: Modern Fiction and the Representation of History*. (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p.251.
[150] *ibid.*, p.253.
[151] Price, David W., *History Made, History Imagined: Contemporary Literature, Poesis and the Past*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p.9.
[152] *ibid.*, pp.219 and 301.
[153] Arditti, Michael, *The Celibate*. (London: Minerva, 1993).

reputation, Brooks calls him Michael Mompellion in the novel. The credit for saving the neighbourhood is shared amongst the fictional rector and several wise women, chief of whom is the novel's narrator Anna Frith. She is the only woman in Eyam, apart from the rector's wife, who knows the truth of Mompellion's marriage and is perhaps the only woman in Eyam who knows him as a sexual predator. Except for a prologue and two concluding sections, one of which shares its title with the prologue, the novel is a straightforward narrative of the plague town.

There are six sermons in the novel although only one is reported at length. They are: the announcement of the closure of the church and the full occupancy of the churchyard (168f.); a sermon in the Delf where the rector likens their situation to both Golgotha and Gethsemane (217); a sermon at John Gordon's funeral, at which point the narrator remarks that the rector is finding it increasingly difficult to raise his spirits sufficiently to continue composing encouraging sermons (227); the instruction to burn all clothes which Mompellion believes is a direct instruction from God (239); a two line summary of a sermon on enduring life (254) and the sermon reported at greatest length, the novel's turning point – the event of salvific significance for neighbouring parishes – Mompellion's sermon in which he persuades the people of Eyam to set a clear frontier of demarcation around their town (99-107). Whilst Pepys in London was writing in his diary that the plague made us "as cruel as dogs one to another", the people of Eyam were persuaded to self-sacrifice by the suasory powers of Mompellion's rhetoric, before he descended from the pulpit and moved among his people like Jesus in Galilee.

The facts that this is fictionalised history and that the preacher is based on an historical figure mean that there is potentially an actual anterior speech position to this fictive sermon, an actual sermon on which Brooks could have based this fictional one. In fact, none of Mompesson's sermons is extant, although two letters, one to his patron when Catherine Mompesson died and the other to his children on their mother's death, are still available to visitors to the Eyam parish church. It is known, however, that Brooks consulted seventeenth-

century medical texts, books on herbal remedies and midwifery, the journal of a country rector and numerous sermons of the period for a sense of the linguistic style, theological assumptions and culture of the period.[154]

In the case of *Mr Wroe's Virgins* copies of John Wroe's sermons are still available.[155] These were published as a guide to the people surnamed Israelite for their preaching. They reveal the real life Prophet Wroe as a millenarianist with a preoccupation with the work of Satan, as for instance in his sermon on the story of Esther in which he casts Haman as Satan.[156] Set in nineteenth century England this novel concerns the founder of a sect known as the Christian Israelites, now debased into a group with racist and fascist tendencies known as British Israelism, claiming two million followers in Britain and the USA. In response to Wroe's request that his congregation provide him with seven virgins with whom God wanted to comfort him, his congregation gave him seven of its daughters who spent nine months in community with him until accusations of indecency and the ensuing trial brought the household to its end. In clearly-titled sections four of these women - Joanna who is most sympathetic to Wroe, the sceptical Hannah, Leah and the particularly vulnerable Martha – narrate these months.

Apart from Joanna's brief report of a sermon in response to which people rushed into the river for baptism (25) and her comment that Wroe preached by day and received communication from the Lord by night (57), most of the preaching in the novel is reported by the sceptical Hannah, as a result of which we read about Wroe's preaching with a hermeneutic of suspicion. Although she knows he is a self-conscious performer, she is unable to deny the effect of authority in his preaching, whether it is attributable to God or not (211). Later, Hannah is confused when, after confiding that his ministry is fantasy and charade, Wroe says he simply has to be convincing to convince (226). This gives

[154] Steinberg, Sybil, "Life and Death in Eyam." *Publishers' Weekly*, 248:33, 13 August 2001, p.279.
[155] Wroe, John, *Sermons Selected from the Scriptures: Being a Guide to the people surnamed Israelites to preach the everlasting Gospel*. (Ashton-under-Lyne: Trustees of the Society of Christian Israelites, 1896), p.42.
[156] *ibid.*, p.16.

the reader one of the novel's questions: is Wroe a trickster capable of using oratorical skills to manipulate people for his own ends, or is he a wronged and misunderstood religious leader genuine in his intentions?

The sermon reported at greatest length in the novel is preached in Huddersfield marketplace (80-84). The last thing Wroe does before he begins his sermon is to wink to Hannah as an invitation for her to watch what he can do with the crowd. This knowing wink, intended to be seen only by the person to whom the gesture is directed, draws her into the conspiracy of manipulating the audience and introduces an element of unreliability to the entire episode. Readers doubt the sincerity of his intentions. At this point he is like Geoffrey Chaucer's disreputable but oratorically gifted Pardoner who invites his listeners to look at what he can do. Nevertheless, Wroe's sole agency is questionable: is he the only one making things happen? There is a definite air of expectation about his preaching: Hannah has given her account of the journey to Huddersfield a brooding ominous element with her description of the blackness of the night, shooting stars and low skies hanging over a bleak place. Handbills have announced Wroe's arrival. The reader asks what it is people have come to see – a religious meeting or a freakshow. By the time Wroe lifts his arms above his head and, like Moses, lifts a rod over the people to command their attention, readers are expecting quite a performance in which Wroe will play with his audience's emotions with as much skill as he controls his household.

It is clear that both Brooks and Rogers attempt to recreate the preaching styles of former times in these historical novels; indeed, it is likely that they are using these fictional sermons to assist in the cultural and historical placing of the novels. In relation to the study I have conducted this means, first, that Mompellion's and Wroe's fictional sermons set a standard against which we can measure changes in religious language and, second, that they establish conventional norms of homiletical style and technique against which the expectations of a remembered genre by contemporary readers can be assessed. But a word of caution must be sounded: historical novelists like these too readily labour under a presumption of linear evolution, what the historian Herbert

Butterfield, writing in the years of World War II, famously called "the whig [*sic*] interpretation of history", a complacent view of history as steady progress.[157] Tending to write in this tradition, historical novelists write of simpler folk living in less complex times and risk preventing the modern reader's acceptance of what their credulous characters do. They also risk giving the impression that such persuasive oratory only works because it is used with simpler people.

In chapter 2 I will describe an analytical toolkit suitable for a creative exposition of the issues raised by the sermons' presence in fiction. This toolkit, informed by the techniques of discourse analysis and the principles of rhetorical narratology, has been supported by consultation with local preachers in the Methodist circuits I have served and by interviews with John Murray and Michael Arditti. I chose to interview these authors because less is known about them publicly than more established novelists such as Lodge and Byatt, whose views have been published elsewhere. Byatt, for instance, even contributed an essay, entitled *True Stories and the Facts in Fiction*, to a collection of essays on her own fiction.[158] However, interviews added little to a critique of Murray's and Arditti's work which was less about intentionality and more about effect, so I abandoned quests to interview the more elusive Rogers and Brooks.

The raw data obtained by systematically applying this toolkit to fictional preaching have been processed to result in five case studies. The first of these considers religious authority in fictional sermons and is focused mainly, but not exclusively, on the preaching of the rector of Eyam in Brooks's novel, John Wroe in Rogers's and the bishop in Arditti's. The second, focusing mainly on the testimony-style preaching of Ken Wright in John Murray's novel, assesses how fictional sermons express religious experience. The third begins with the Catholic priest's response to the Aberfan disaster in Lodge's novel and focuses on other troubled or 'naked' preachers such as Arditti's vicar and curate. The fourth, drawing on the textual analysis of all the sermons studied but, because of her expressed interest in language, focusing especially on the preaching in

[157] Parrinder, *op. cit.*, p.295.
[158] Alfer, Alexa and Noble, Michael J., eds., *Essays on the Fiction of A. S. Byatt: Imagining the Real.* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp.175-200.

Byatt's tetralogy, examines the language of fictional sermons. The fifth case study, focused mainly on Byatt's and Rogers's novels, considers how fictional sermons construct community. Taking up recurring themes in the case studies, a final chapter will discuss the significance of memory, imagination and embodiment as agents by which readers, and hearers of actual sermons, are enabled to respond to the rhetoric of preaching and engage with the alternative worlds sermons propose.

2: Analysing fictional sermons: a methodological toolkit

Because of the hybrid nature of sermons in fiction – and because a study of them is properly literary, cultural and theological – I have developed for the purposes of this study an analytical toolkit, which draws on several academic disciplines such as rhetoric, discourse analysis, homiletics and various branches of literary criticism. Its main sources are rhetorical narratology and cognitive poetics. In this chapter I will describe and justify the toolkit which suggests a procedure for critical analysis of sermons in fiction.

The toolkit is in the form of a checklist in four sections, after two introductory questions about the aims and structure of the sermon. In creating the checklist I have made several assumptions. These are mainly to do with 'sermon as genre'. If Mary Gerhart's claim that genre has now replaced authorial motivation and intention as a key to understanding texts is correct,[1] then it would be foolish to ignore the status, condition, shape and repertoire of the sermon-genre in this study. As well as being a useful tool for classification of texts, genre is at the core of interpretation because, as Gerhart following

[1] Gerhart, Mary, *Genre Choices, Genre Questions*. (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), p.3.

Hirsch claims,[2] meaning is always 'genre-bound' in that genre 'makes up' or constitutes meaning. Although it is debatable whether genre is quite so determinative as Martin Amis suggested when he wrote, "Genre really does determine outcomes,"[3] it seems that one of the most common 'mistakes' when interpreting a text is to misidentify its genre. On the positive side, however, Gerhart indicates that misreading a genre may open space for a different, and often critical interpretation of a text.[4]

At this early stage in this chapter, it is appropriate to note that Gerhart identifies three different theories of genre identification and testing. The first is what she calls the traditionalist view that understands genres as heuristic devices enabling us to handle texts. Theorists who subscribe to this view argue that, whatever similarities there may be between genres, it is the differences between them that determine their identity.[5] The second theory of genre that Gerhart identifies is the ideological view built on the tension between texts and social contexts.[6] This view resists attempts to define various genres, arguing that as they are in constant flux, genres are indefinable and not static. Then Gerhart discusses the deconstructionist view which shifts the focus of critique away from social structures to the language of the texts. Unlike traditionalist critics, deconstructionists unravel genres and leave them 'unboundaried'.[7] In this view, rather than belong to a particular grouping or genre, texts permit themselves to relate to each other and, as Derrida argued in his examination of the nature of 'genericity', because no text can be genreless, texts inscribe or demarcate themselves within, or to, a genre-designation or designations.[8]

Common to all three views is a relatedness of texts, although the strength of the bond of relatedness is a matter of dispute among critics belonging to each of the three factions that Gerhart identifies. Furthermore, the definitiveness of

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[2] Hirsch, E. D., *Validity in Interpretation*. (London: Yale University Press, 1967), p.76.
[3] Duff, David, ed., *Modern Genre Theory*. (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p.1.
[4] *op. cit.*, p.17.
[5] *ibid.*, p.104.
[6] *ibid.*, p.108.
[7] *ibid.*, p.113.
[8] Derrida, Jacques, "The Law of Genre." in *Modern Genre Theory*. Duff, David, ed., (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p.230.

the boundaries between genres, therefore the purity or particularity of the genre, are also disputed. Nevertheless, it is widely agreed that genre consciousness is an important factor when making meaning from or in texts. "To 'read' a statement", says Gerhart, "it is necessary to know how to read its genre."[9] It follows from Gerhart's insistence that the genre of a text is known before meaning can be derived from it, that the texts under scrutiny in this thesis require special treatment, for as chapter 1 established, they are 'cross-generic'. They have migrated from the oral world of truth claims within a faith community to an embedded location in the literary world of fiction.

I have, therefore, made three genre-associated assumptions when devising my analytical toolkit. They are, first, that when we read sermons in fiction we read them somehow differently from when we either hear them in church or read them in devotional literature, second, that they have been displaced from their native discourse community and, third, that the boundaries of the sermon genre are soft enough to have allowed this migration without loss of their 'readability', by which I mean that the reader's capacity to make meaning of the text has not been compromised.

As a minister working in the Methodist Church, I have often found the concept of discourse community useful when reading how churches express themselves in their official publications, preaching, statements of belief and theological expressions. Discourse communities, according to Jim Swales, have the following characteristics: they have broadly agreed common goals, they have shared mechanisms for communication between members, they use such mechanisms to provide information and give feedback, they use at least one genre in the furtherance of their aims, they have acquired a specific *lexis* and their members possess a threshold level of relevant content and discoursal expertise.[10]

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[9] *op. cit.*, p.124.

[10] Swales, John M., *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.25-27.

There is insufficient space within this thesis to explore in depth to what extent a church meets Swales's criteria for discourse community status, but, in short, it can be claimed that many faith communities seem to match most of the criteria. I have assumed, therefore, that when they occur in fiction, Christian sermons have been displaced from their native discourse community of church. In placing them into the novel's discourse community, comprised of readers and its author, something akin to the process of defamiliarisation has occurred. As a result of this defamiliarisation or 'making strange',[11] we see them anew.

In whatever way we think of this displacement – whether as relocation, migration, defamiliarisation or translation – it is made possible by the 'softness' of generic boundaries.[12] Swales's conclusion is that when the discourse communities have overlapping characteristics, when the direction of transfer is from the more rhetorically-accessible to the less rhetorically-accessible and when there is a perceived rationale for communicative behaviour within the genres, the boundaries between them can be soft enough to permit translation. Skills in reading within one genre may be transferred to reading within another, providing the reader acknowledges the transfer. It is my third assumption, then, that there is sufficient overlap between the sermon-genre and the sub-genre of 'sermon-in-fiction' to permit accessibility of both genres to their respective discourse communities.

Such insights from genre studies encouraged a Bakhtinian approach to my study of fictional sermons. Bakhtin took his lead from Voloshinov who had recognised and developed a critical appreciation of the strong social flavour of the word, in Russian *slovo*. In his groundbreaking essay *The Problem of Speech Genres* Bakhtin argued that all utterances comprise thematic content, style and compositional structure and he chose to call relatively stable and heterogeneous utterances 'speech genres.'[13] Genres, he argued, can be either primary or secondary, simple or complex. Primary genres include letters, diaries, quotidian

[11] This term is taken from Guy Cook's description of the cornerstone of Russian formalism *ostranenie* in his *Discourse and Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.131.
[12] *op. cit.*, p.233.
[13] Bakhtin, Mikhail M., "Speech Genres", p.60.

stories and speech genres, whereas secondary genres, formed by the combination of primary genres, are more complex. Bakhtin shifted critical attention to the relationship between primary and secondary genres[14] and saw novels as unique in their insatiable capacity to absorb or digest simple or primary speech genres. Furthermore, he argued that when a primary genre occurs within a secondary genre, say a letter within a novel, the primary genre is altered. I, similarly, have argued above that sermons in fiction are altered by their migration from orality to literacy. Bakhtin suggested that in each epoch certain speech genres set the tone for the development of literary language; these might include certain types of oral dialogue such as that of the salon.[15] In passing, I wonder about the extent of the contribution of sermons in setting the tone for the development of literary language in, say, eighteenth-century Britain. Answering this would be one way of testing Bakhtin's theory, but it is a task outside the scope of this thesis.

In an earlier work, Bakhtin had developed the concept of heteroglossia, which is related to his observation in this essay that all live utterances are inherently responsive.[16] This is to say that listeners are active participants in any speech utterance and speakers are also respondents because all utterances are links in a complexly organised chain of utterances. Consequently, even a single word or phrase can be multiply inflected in terms of resonance or response. In his essay *Discourse in the Novel* Bakhtin had claimed that novels, because they are multiform in style and variform in speech and voice, are distinguished by the heteroglossia that results from the incorporation of authorial speech, narrators' speeches, inserted genres and characters' speeches.[17] The subject under analysis in this thesis – the sermon in fiction – is a sub-genre incorporated within the novel thus contributing to and intensifying its heteroglossia. Like all else in novels, the sermon in fiction is potentially inflected by multiple voicings and meanings. I find Bakhtin's theory of speech genre and heteroglossia attractive for a critical appreciation of the form and function of sermons in fiction because it does not imply a radical questioning of the role of the author yet it privileges

[14] Duff, David, ed., *op. cit.*, p.10.
[15] *ibid.*, p.65.
[16] *ibid.*, p.68.
[17] Bakhtin, Mikhail M., *The Dialogical Imagination*, p.261.

the polyphonic novel in the foreground of the literary critique. Furthermore it accentuates the social nature of reading, of which Michael Kearns reminds us when, citing Rabinowitz, he asserts that the reading of narratives is governed by socially constructed rules.[18] Rabinowitz's rules include rules of notice which suggest to readers what counts as important in a text, rules of signification which suggest how to attach meaning to what we have noticed in the text, rules of configuration which suggest how we might pattern what we noticed and rules of coherence which suggest how we might combine details in the text to make sense. The analytical toolkit I used in this research observed these socially constructed guidelines for 'successful' reading. I hope the attraction of a Bakhtinian approach to a critical appreciation of the form and function of sermons in fiction, and why this is my preferred critical base, is apparent.

I will now set out the toolkit in its entirety without explanation before justifying its composition. Presented in four sections with numbered questions for easy reference and a two-part introductory question, the checklist I used for analysing fictional sermons was as follows.

> What are the **aims and purpose** of this sermon, as understood by both the author and the fictive preacher? Is the persuasive intent of the sermon that the listeners accept an explanation, that they value a particular world-view or that they act in such as way as to implement a policy?
>
> Outline the structure of the sermon, indicating optional and obligatory **shifts of narrative direction.**
>
> ***1. Pathos***
>
> 1.1 **Addressivity.** What indications in the text are there that the speaker is accounting for addressees? Who are the sermon's:
> - intratextual actual audience
> - intratextual implied audience
> - extratextual actual audience
> - extratextual implied audience?
>
> Is there a wider audience this fictional preacher is consciously addressing?

[18] Kearns, Michael, *op. cit.*, p.70.

1.2 What **schemata** are being relied on in the text? What background knowledge do the author and reader share? How are schemata preserved, reinforced or refreshed? If refreshed, are there examples of schema destroying, constructing or connecting and with what interpretative consequences?

1.3 Identify any **Face Threatening Acts** in the sermon. How are they mitigated? What positive and negative **politeness phenomena** are used?

2. *Ethos*

2.1 Note intratextual and contextual **performance frames** especially paralinguistic features such as pitch, pause and stress, formulae such as conventional openings and endings, appeals to tradition and the use and range of figurative language, as well as contextual features such as dress, place and time. Are there any performance frames which suggest that the preacher thinks (s)he is presenting the Word?

2.2 **Point of view**. Who conveys the sermon to the reader: is it a fictional hearer, a fictional preacher or the novelist? What value-laden expressions are used? Are there any indicators of the internal representation of the fictional preacher's thoughts or perceptions, such as verbs of perception and cognition, verbs related to factivity, modal verbs and adverbs related to factivity?

2.3 **Proxemics**. How is space used in this gathering? Is it formal, therefore sociofugal or is it flexible, therefore sociopetal?

2.4 **Preacher status.** What is the preacher's adopted role and tone – subordinate, peer or superior to addressees? Does the preacher construct a virtuous persona within the speech? How does the rhetor demonstrate competence, trustworthiness and dynamism? Is there any evidence, both within the sermon and elsewhere in the novel, to suggest that the sermon's capacity to persuade is compromised by the preacher's reputation? What contextual and textual indicators of the preacher's self-awareness are there? Is the preacher inspired, inspiring, doubting, speaking against or expressing the 'party line'?

3. Logos

3.1 What sort of **reasoning** is used in this oratory – practical (*phronesis*) or universal (*episteme*)? What supporting materials, that is to say data and warrants, are used in this sermon to support its aim? Note especially references to the Church Fathers, classical Christian doctrine, the prayerbook and theological authorities. In particular how is the Bible used?

3.2 **Intertextuality** and textual density. What are the texts behind, before, around and after this sermon? Identify explicit, implicit and inferable intertexts.

3.3 What **response-inviting techniques** are employed in these fictive sermons?

3.4 **Worldview**. What possible world does this discourse create? What elements of the dominant theology, residual elements from the old order and elements of an emergent new order are you able to identify within the sermon?

4. Praxis

4.1 **Speech forms**. Is the sermon narrated or quoted? Using the scale (where 'S' is speech and 'T' is thought)

NRA	NRS	NRSA	IS	FIS	DS
NRA	NRT	NRTA	IT	FIT	DT

note how the author uses direct, indirect and free indirect discourse. If there is an anterior speech position (that is, an actual sermon 'behind' the fictional one), consider how the author has changed the sermon when translating it into the fictional world of the novel, noting especially the occurrence of rhetorical figures in the text, their retention from the actual sermon by the novelist and their adjustment or elision from the written text.

4.2 **Lexis**. Is the vocabulary simple or complex, evaluative or descriptive, general or specific? What are the associations of any idioms in the text? Note any rare, archaic or specialised words? Apply the same test to syntax, using sentences, clauses and phrases as the structure of inquiry.

4.3 **Intonation**. How does the novelist communicate the expressive aspect of the sermon's language? Are there any tone-setting authoritative utterances?

4.4 **Pragmatics**. What direct and indirect speech acts are in the sermon? Note constatives (which may be implicitly performative) and performatives in the text. Is the intended effect achieved?

My commentary on this analytical checklist will progress numerically and where appropriate I will show the provenance of the questions used, explain any controversial concepts, indicate the relevance of the questions to this study, demonstrate what insights might be gained by using them to interrogate the texts and expand on and open out the individual tools in the kit.

The purpose of the introductory questions is simply to give the analyst a starting place. The first introductory question assumes that sermons, as suasory texts, have a function whilst the second task assumes that the text under scrutiny has form. In the first question it is important that the analyst tries to distinguish between how the fictive preacher understands the aim and purpose of the sermon and how the author understands them, as well as to recognise that what is apparent to the analyst at this initial stage may need to be revised in the light of what is revealed by the main body of the checklist. David Cunningham's contention that all theology is persuasive argument[19] made me conscious that this underpins much of my own thinking about preaching and theology as a practitioner. Wherever we write or speak theology we are not dealing with description or assertions of commonly-agreed truth; rather, we are dealing with argument and attempts to convince, in that theologians – both in the academy and the pulpit – are attempting to persuade their audiences. Karlyn Campbell in her study of rhetorical acts identified several different forms of persuasive intent:[20] to produce a virtual experience, to alter perception, to explain something that has happened, to formulate belief, to initiate action and to maintain action. However, for the sake of manageability (for no worker carries tools s/he is unlikely ever to use) I have followed the lead of Hogan and Reid who, in their application of rhetoric to the art of preaching,[21] streamlined this classification to three organising questions of fact, value and policy: when preaching a sermon, is the

[19] Cunningham, David S., *Faithful Persuasion: In Aid of a Rhetoric of Christian Theology*. (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), *passim*.
[20] Campbell, Karlyn K., *The Rhetorical Act*. (Belmont: Wordsworth Publishing Co., 1996).
[21] Hogan and Reid, *op. cit.*, p.116.

preacher intending to persuade listeners to accept a certain way of presenting the facts, to accept or reject the value of a particular worldview or to act in such a way as to implement a particular policy? Identifying the rhetorical purpose of the sermon in this way can be readily followed by a brief account of its structure, not however in the usual form traditionally employed by those who assess preachers in training, but using the categories employed by Michael Toolan for tracing the structure of narratives. Toolan spoke of kernels, the hinge points in narratives where the narrative can change direction, and catalysers, the narrative sections that fill between the kernels.[22] Whereas kernels are obligatory in narratives, catalysers are optional, even deletable. In the framing of the toolkit I have chosen to avoid Toolan's technical terms. Instead I have suggested that a brief outline of the structure might identify optional and obligatory shifts in narrative direction, concepts more familiar to homileticians. David Buttrick in his theory of preaching called these shifts in the plot of a sermon 'moves.'[23]

If preaching always has a persuasive intent, it is appropriate that the format of the toolkit relates to aspects of classical rhetoric, namely the rhetorical lenses of *pathos*, *ethos*, *logos* and *praxis*. These gave form to Cunningham's work and they are also useful ways to arrange the analytical tools I want to employ. Hogan and Reid had used only three of these and had suggested that, classically, *pathos* was understood to relate to a text's audience's ability to be moved, *ethos* was understood to relate to the character of the speaker and *logos* was understood to relate to the argument or rationale of the speech.[24] They had used the term 'rhetorical situation' to express what I believe Cunningham means by *praxis*, that is the working in concert of *pathos*, *ethos* and *logos*, the polyphonic coming together of all aspects of rhetorical technique in heteroglot texts.[25] In the case of fictional sermons, when expressed in the terminology of rhetorical narratology, *pathos* roughly equates with audience-narratee, *ethos* with the preacher-narrator, *logos* with the sermon-narrative and *praxis* with language.

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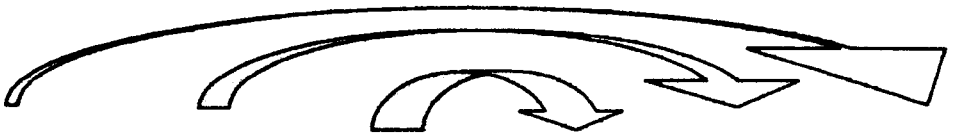
[22] Toolan, Michael J., *Narrative: A Critical Linguistic Introduction*. (London: Routledge, 1988), p.22.
[23] Buttrick, David, *Homiletic*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).
[24] *op. cit.*, p.15.
[25] Cunningham, David, *op. cit.*, pp.204f.

The first section of the toolkit invites the analyst to consider three aspects of the sermon: its addressivity (1.1), its schemata (1.2) and the incidences of face threatening acts and associated politeness phenomena (1.3).

First, addressivity (1.1). Cunningham's classification of the way theologians understand their audiences helps us understand how preachers take account of their audience.[26] He suggests that, in their writing, lecturing and preaching, theologians tend to construct their discourses on the basis of one of four ways of understanding their audience: they either intentionally specify the audience they are addressing (perhaps other academic theologians or new students of theology), make an empirical analysis of the audience and address the actual hearers, address an imagined pluralist composite audience or address an idealised universal audience as imagined by the addresser. Campbell also has four ways of understanding audience: the empirical audience which is that actually exposed to the rhetorical act, the target or ideal audience, the audience as an agent of change whose members have the power to do what the rhetor desires and the created or constructed audience. The successful rhetor courts the audience, so 1.1 of the checklist looks for signs within the fictive sermon that the preacher is taking account of the audiences. I acknowledge, however, that these audiences are the rhetor's constructs[27] and I am conscious that, as homiletics theory teaches that sermons have primary and secondary addressees because they are both 'church talk' and 'public talk,'[28] the preacher may also be addressing an even wider audience. Rhetorical narratology speaks of three audiences – a book's authorial audience who are the hypothetical corrupted readers with beliefs, values, reading practices and prejudices, a book's narrative or narrating audience who are the imaginary audience for whom the author is writing and a book's actual audience who are the people who actually read the book.[29] In the case of sermons within fiction at least three levels of audience can be conceived: the writer addressing the reader extratextually, the external narrator intratextually

[26] *ibid.*, pp.54-61.
[27] Cunningham, David, *op. cit.*, p.69.
[28] Brueggemann, Walter, *Cadences*, p.80.
[29] Kearns, Michael, *op. cit.*, pp.51-55.

addressing the narratee and the preacher in the intratextual fictional world addressing the congregation. The relationship between these audiences could be represented on a scale, thus, where the actual writer addresses the actual reader, the external narrator addresses the narratee and the fictional character addresses his or her audience:



Actual writer -- external narrator -- character -- audience -- narratee -- actual reader

Fig. 3 Audiences

The checklist, therefore, asks the analyst to identify four audiences – the intratextual actual audience, the intratextual implied audience, the extratextual actual audience and the extratextual implied audience.

The concept of schemata (1.2) was introduced by F. C. Bartlett in the early 1930s, although he credits an earlier researcher, Henry Head. He used the concept to explain, in terms reminiscent of the discussion of historical fiction in chapter 1 above, how we use our memories to carry information from one story to another, to help us make meaning of new and unfamiliar situations in stories.[30] The suggestion that, in an age when few people attend church, both writers and readers increasingly depend upon remembered forms of sermons when using them in fiction implies that analysis of the schemata functioning in the creation of fictional sermons will be illuminating. Mick Short explains that just as shared information and background knowledge enable us to behave appropriately in a variety of circumstances, so information and background knowledge shared by readers and writers enable us successfully to find our way around the scenes and scripts of texts.[31] For instance, although I have no experience of life in seventh-

[30] Bartlett, F. C., *Remembering.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), pp.199-201.
[31] Short, Mick, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose.* (Harlow: Longman, 1996), p.228.

century Ireland or England, I can use schemata, that is organised representations of background knowledge gleaned from history lessons, other historical novels and television programmes, to interpret the fictionalised account of the Irish princess Bega, who became a saint revered in Cumbria, in Melvyn Bragg's *Credo* and feel confident that I can follow the epic tale he weaves around actual events such as the Synod of Whitby. Non-church-going readers will also be able to engage with three sermons representing Wilfred's, Hilda's and Cuthbert's preaching that are included in the book.[32] Similarly someone who has never been to a contemporary church service may nevertheless engage with a novel's account of a Christian act of worship. Short reminds us that the literary critic should note that the schemata brought to a particular text are usually prompted by intratextual triggers, but the degree of schematic employment is reader-dependent.[33] Schemata may be preserved, reinforced or refreshed, although Cook contends that the primary function of most discourse is to effect a change in or 'refreshment' of readers' schemata.[34] Such refreshment has a prerequisite of disruption, although this usually cannot be total, as too drastic or too sudden changes tend to lead readers to reject the discourse. For instance, Carel Fisher in Iris Murdoch's *The Time of the Angels* never plucked up sufficient courage to begin a sermon as he often wanted with the words, "There is no God."[35] Schema disruption can result in the destruction of existing schemata, the construction of new ones or the establishment of new connections between existing schemata. Cook represents this diagrammatically:-[36]

[32] Bragg, Melvyn, *Credo.* (London: Sceptre, 1996), pp.216, 302 and 304.
[33] Short, Mick, *op. cit.*, p.231 and Cook, Guy, *Discourse and Literature.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.192.
[34] *ibid.*, p.191.
[35] Murdoch, Iris, *The Time of the Angels.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p.171.
[36] *op.cit.*, Fig. 7.3, p.191.

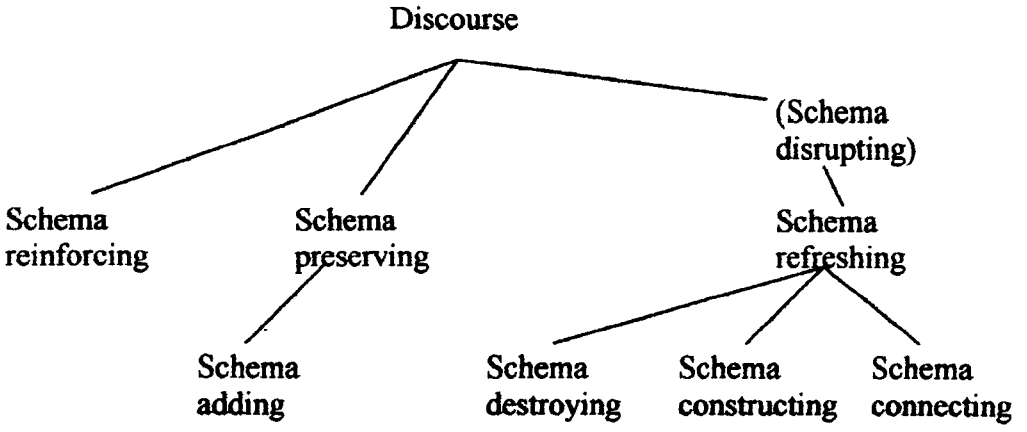


Fig. 4 Schema employment

Schema theory will assist the analyst of fictional sermons, to see how assumed 'norms', or mental typifications as Peter Stockwell calls them,[37] are established, parodied or challenged.

Subsection 1.3. Since Brown and Levinson's contribution to discourse theory,[38] the universality of politeness expectation and the way the impoliteness of Face Threatening Acts (FTA) is mitigated by techniques such as the speaker's indirectness, politeness markers and taking account of the other person's negative or positive face, have been widely recognised. Paul Simpson further suggests that there may be a mismatch between the strength of the FTA and the mitigating features employed by the speaker.[39] Because preaching can often be face threatening, careful listing of FTAs and politeness phenomena in the sermon can be indicative of the preacher's self-awareness as a prophetic voice, a challenger of preconceptions and a breaker of new theological, moral or philosophical ground.

The second section of the toolkit invites the analyst to consider the text under the heading of *ethos*. When Augustine revived *ethos* as a major rhetorical

[37] Stockwell, Peter, *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*. (London: Routledge, 2001).
[38] Brown, Penelope and Levinson, Stephen C., "Universals in Language Usage: politeness phenomena" in *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*. E.N. Goody, ed., (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp.56-289.
[39] Simpson, Paul, *Language through Literature: An Introduction*. (London: Routledge, 1997), p.176.

factor because he believed a speaker's life had a greater persuasive weight than his or her eloquence,[40] he widened the definition of *ethos* which Aristotle had confined to the virtuous persona established within the speech itself. Whether intentionally or not, Augustine was adopting the view of the Isocratic school of rhetoric which argued that virtue could only be reflected in speeches when the speaker was truly virtuous.[41] This is in apparent contradiction with New Criticism's critical approach to texts. New Critics dismiss what they call 'the intentional fallacy' with Michel Foucault's question "What matter who's speaking?"[42] whereas Cunningham offers pro-Augustinian evidence which suggests that the way theologians conduct their lives has some effect on how their message is received.[43] He discusses the cases of Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer and concludes that it is not character itself, but the audience's judgement of the speaker's character as communicated both intratextually and extratextually, that persuades. However, he acknowledges that the evidence is inconclusive, for different people judge differently. There is a further complicating factor which Lose explores:[44] it is that, if we recognise that someone is pretending or dissembling, do we respond in the same way? Using Fish to support his contention that a distinction between serious and fictional discourse cannot be upheld, Lose argues that what matters is not whether the text actually corresponds to reality, but rather that it asserts and believes that it does. So any pretence by the preacher need not compromise the preaching. This section of the toolkit focuses on the preacher and, by considering performance frames (2.1), point of view (2.2), proxemics (2.3) and preacher status (2.4), explores this complex relationship between the preacher, his or her reputation and what is preached.

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[40] See Robertson, D. W., *op. cit.*, Book 4, sections 4-26.
[41] Hogan and Reid, *op. cit.*, p.51.
[42] Foucault, Michel, "What is an Author?" in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews.* Donald B. Bouchard, ed., (New York: Cornell University Press, 1969), ET Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon, p.138.
[43] *op. cit.*, pp.108-9.
[44] Lose, *op. cit.*, pp.161f.

Among the many intratextual performance frames listed by Richard Bauman in his work on verbal art as performance[45] those that are likely to be most significant in the case of fictional sermons are paralinguistic features such as pitch, pause and stress, formulae such as conventional openings, conventional endings and appeals to tradition and the range of figurative language the preacher uses. Some of the extratextual performance frames mentioned by Nigel Fabb,[46] in particular dress, place and time, will be significant, too, because the preacher's attire, how the venue is arranged and the nature of the occasion will indicate some of the preacher's self-consciousness. Indeed, the toolkit suggests that a final consideration at 2.1 will be for the analyst to identify any indications that the preacher believes he or she is speaking on behalf of God. In other words, is the focus on the teller or on what the teller points towards? This is a question Toolan poses memorably when he uses a short critique of gaze in Millais's *Boyhood of Raleigh* to encourage us to assess where the observer's eye is focussed or the hearer's ear attuned.[47] We might think of these performance frames as constituents of the knowledge shared in a tacit contractual relationship between the preacher and congregation or, in Fabb's terms,[48] the performer and audience. If so, then we can see that one of the ways in which this 'contract' is threatened is when the performer performs to a different community or the community changes, as is the case with sermons placed in the fictional world of novels.

Second (2.2), because when we are reading we cannot forget that we are reading,[49] we are conscious that the narrative is focalised in that its narratival perspective is usually oriented through the point of view of a character or narrator. This is true, Kearns suggests,[50] even in the case of omniscient narrators, although we should exercise caution in using the concept of omniscience to describe narrators who are in fact narratively authoritative rather than all-knowing, telepathic in understanding another's inner thoughts, self-

[45] Bauman, Richard, *op. cit.*, p.21.
[46] Fabb, Nigel, *op. cit.*, p.224.
[47] *op. cit.*, p.3.
[48] *op. cit.*, p.240.
[49] Booth, Wayne, *op. cit.*, p.53.
[50] *op.cit.*, pp.108-9.

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reflexive as the shaper of a tale and almost superhumanly capable of sagacious reflection on events from several perspectives.[51] Focalising, a term borrowed from the art of photography perhaps to indicate where and how a narrator is looking, has, I feel, a better analogue in the photographer's use of filters for focusing, foregrounding and tinting: similarly narratives are filtered through someone's point of view. It can be inferred from Kearns[52] that fictional sermons will usually be filtered homodiegetically by a character in the text, perhaps directly by the preacher, or heterodiegetically by a narrator who is absent from the narrative. In either case, analysts should observe the presence of value-laden expressions and indicators of either the preacher's or the audience's perception of the sermon, as these will inflect the reader's reception of the text. These indicators are helpfully discussed by Short in his stylistics textbook.[53] As attitudinal discourses, sermons are particularly subject to the ideological plane of point of view discussed by Paul Simpson in *Language, Ideology and Point of View.*[54] The language of a sermon will encode a worldview, so the analyst looks for the preacher's, the narrator's or novelist's 'angle of telling' and shows how a mosaic of cultural assumptions, beliefs and institutional practices has shaped both the language of the sermon and the novel's report of it.

The next subsection (2.3) will encourage the analyst to assess the degree of formality and flexibility in the fictional preaching. British homileticians, such as Alec Gilmore,[55] as well as American homileticians, such as Jana Childers,[56] draw attention to some similarities between preaching and performing on stage. In particular, in both the theatre and church, distance creates an arena for something to happen.[57] In Bakhtinian terms the preaching act may be centrifugal, comparable to a play performed under a proscenium arch, or centripetal, comparable to the more flexible theatrical experience of a play in an intimate theatre in the round. However, to retain and emphasise a sense of the

[51] Culler, Jonathan, "Omniscience." in *Narrative*, 12:1, (2004), 22-34, p. 32.
[52] *op. cit.*, p.101.
[53] *op. cit.*, pp.264-276.
[54] Simpson, Paul, *Language, Ideology and Point of View*. (London: Routledge, 1993).
[55] Gilmore, Alec, *Preaching as Theatre*. (London: SCM Press, 1996).
[56] Childers, Jana, *Performing the Word: Preaching as Theatre*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).
[57] *ibid.*, p.45.

theatricality of preaching, for the sake of the toolkit, I have chosen to favour terminology drawn from drama theory, namely Elam's terms of sociofugal and sociopetal.[58]

Subsection 2.4 may be regarded as a summation of the preceding three in that the analyst is encouraged to make conclusions about the preacher's status and self-consciousness. An interesting study of the way men and women use language to create an authoritative stance in their preaching was conducted by the sociolinguist Frances Lee Smith.[59] She identified three forms of talk, ranging from the light authority of 'parenthetical embroidery' to the weightier authority of 'high talk', with a mean of 'hyper-smooth delivery'. She spoke of preachers' textual selves, which she defined as the person who seems to stand behind the textual statements in the discourse, and spoke also of 'textual self-footing' which she understood as the core alignment between the speaker and the audience.[60] She said that preachers typically display a textual self which is either exegeter *[sic]* (for which the conventional British term is exegete, but for a literary critical study of sermons I prefer the term 'hermeneut'), exhorter (for which I prefer either 'rhetor' or the more familiar 'orator') or illustrator (for which 'commentator' might be preferable). In any or all of these textual selves, preachers may 'self-foot' as mouthpieces, establishing themselves as instruments verbalising the divine will. Such preachers are likely to claim to be Spirit-led, or inspired. However, radical Christians such as William Blake long ago distinguished between mouthing scripture and allowing the texts to inspire; the first required memory and, perhaps, reason, whereas the other used imagination to re-mint biblical imagery so that what was true for previous generations was refreshed by hermeneuts who spoke in their own way in their own day.

By asking the last question in subsection 2.4, about what we might call the 'spiritual condition' of the fictional preacher, analysts can expect to be considering the relationship the preacher believes s/he has with his or her sermon. Some analysts might find it helpful to rephrase the question as: Does

[58] Elam, Keir, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*. (London: Routledge, 1980), p.64.
[59] Smith, Frances, *op. cit.*
[60] *ibid.*, p.147.

the sermon express personal views, the tradition of the church, the biblical tradition or is the preacher speaking 'beyond self'? Answers to this question, when used to interrogate sermons in fiction, are likely to fuel a discussion of the problem of religious authority, including the problem of inspiration, to which I will return in chapter 3.

The third section of the checklist invites the analyst to interrogate the text with four questions under the head *logos*. These encourage the analyst to look more closely at the rationale or argument of the sermon. A brief explanation of the theory behind subsection 3.1 will be helpful for those unfamiliar with the formal study of rhetoric, an academic discipline not automatically offered to preachers in training. In Aristotelian rhetoric the distinction between *episteme* and *phronesis* is central to an understanding of the nature of rhetorical argument. *Episteme* is formal logic, undisputed, universal and eternally applicable in all situations, whereas *phronesis* is related to practical reasoning and attempts to apply logic, which may be variable, to specific circumstances. Aristotle showed that rhetorical argument is like logical argument, except in that, whereas logical argument offers a major and minor premise which, if both are accepted, lead to a logically valid conclusion, rhetorical argument leaves out one of the premises (usually the major premise). Speaker and listener alike must assume this unstated premise if the argument is to be accepted. Stephen Toulmin expanded and amplified Aristotle's approach and described our everyday use of argument in what he called 'working logic.'[61] Many of the arguments we make in the pulpit, in the academy and in courts of law use *phronesis* (practical reasoning) rather than *episteme* (formal reasoning). Toulmin showed how when we argue we present a claim (C), which is supported by data (D) and backed by warrants (W). We can, after Hogan and Reid's simplification of David Cunningham's discussion,[62] present this in diagrammatic form thus:

[61] Toulmin, Stephen, *The Uses of Argument*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).
[62] Hogan and Reid, *op. cit.*, p.98 and Cunningham, David, *op cit.*, p.289.

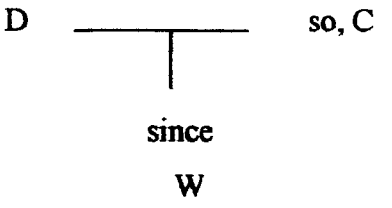

Fig. 5 Data, warrants and claim

It then becomes apparent that the movement from data to claim in an argument is dependent upon, or underpinned by, warrants. These are the underlying, usually implicit but crucial supports, on which the success or failure of a rhetorical argument stands or falls. According to Toulmin, warrants are crucial because they are often the points in an argument at which hearers disagree with speakers.

The analyst using my checklist is encouraged in subsection 3.1 to identify the data and warrants the speaker marshals in the sermon's rhetorical argument, noting particularly the preacher's use of authoritative texts. In actual preaching, especially in postmodern society that is suspicious of the authority of both scripture and preaching, the preacher's use of authoritative texts needs to be carefully considered. In examining the fictional sermons discussed in this thesis, it has been illuminating to uncover the fictional preachers' varied use of authoritative texts and their careful balancing of authoritative weight.

These authoritative texts – prayerbooks, bibles, the treatises of major theologians and the classical creeds – are part of preaching's intertexts, so in subsection 3.2 the analyst identifies the texts behind, before, around and after the sermon, as intratextual linguistic terms triggering evoked references for the reader, which is how Guy Cook describes the process of intertextuality.[63] It seems to me that a text's density is best established by groups of readers, for, whilst explicit intertextuality is usually part of the writer's self-conscious contribution to the text, some implicit and most inferable intertexts originate in the reader's contributions to the text. The strength of this intertextual drive is beyond authorial control. For instance, working with a group of preachers on

[63] *op. cit.*, p.172.

their response to Christmas sermons[64] taught me that one person's intertextual detour,[65] by which an allusion within a sermon took the hearer beyond self to another place with illuminating or cathartic effect, is sometimes another person's dead end. Because a text may remind one reader of another text, but another reader of yet another text, the never-finished web of intertextuality[66] is complex and unbounded; each new reader adds to it.

Whether the analyst spends much or little time beginning the endless task of tracing the intertextual web, the fictional sermon's relationship with the Christian tradition on the one hand and its contemporary culture on the other will become apparent. Of course, in the case of novels published some years ago, the sermon's contemporary culture may belong to two eras – that of the intratextual audience and intended readership, as well as that of the actual contemporary reader. The source of the preacher's allusions in the sermon will reveal the extent of the preacher's rootedness in either the Christian tradition or contemporary culture.

The next subsection (3.3) demonstrates the checklist's indebtedness to Bakhtinian literary theory, for it assumes that all speakers are respondents[67] and that all speeches are complexly organised chains of utterance. Bakhtin argued that a hearer's response to an utterance is permitted, or enabled, by the finalisation of utterances, which is signalled in particular by the semantic exhaustiveness of a theme, a speaker's speech plan and the use of typical generic forms. In asking where there are opportunities for response in the fictional sermon under analysis, the analyst will first discover the intended outcome of the preacher's rhetorical argument, then be able to assess whether hearers are indeed able to respond in the intended way.

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[64] Written up in my unpublished dissertation Dickinson, David, "Literature and Imagination in Postmodern Preaching: Constructing the Birth of Jesus in an Interpretive Community". Westminster College, diss. (1997).
[65] Worton, Michael and Still, Judith, *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), p.187.
[66] Pope, Rob, *The English Studies Book: An Introduction to Language, Literature and Culture*. (London: Routledge, 2002), p.247.
[67] Bakhtin, Mikhail M., "Speech Genres", p.69.

In its use of the term 'possible world' subsection 3.4 could be criticised for conflating two distinct theories – discourse world theory and text world theory.[68] To avoid confusion, it is important to observe that the significance of this subsection is derived from Raymond Williams's discussion of hegemony in *Marxism and Literature.*[69] He distinguished between dominant, residual and emergent worldviews. And I posit the opinion that sermons may include all three forms of worldview: they may create new meanings, new values and new practices that constitute an emergent world view; they may retain elements of an old order expressed in the conventional theological discourses of hegemonic Christendom (indeed, Williams criticised organised religion for being too attached to parent institutions and predominantly residual); and hegemonic preaching may seek to bolster the dominant world order or the archaic dominant Christian worldview, which, in Luke Ferretter's recent attempt to develop a Christian literary theory, was expressed as a 'U'-shaped curve of 'paradise - loss - restoration', which, according to Paul Fiddes, is in process of being replaced with a line of tension between human freedom and limitation.[70]

This subsection is likely to provide a useful tool. After all, it can be said that a preacher's task is to create an alternative world for the hearer to inhabit, to fund the Christian imagination to picture a world of kingdom values[71] and to let 'Kingdom-come'. In other words, sermons, like other rhetorical acts, attempt to move auditors from one place to another, or move them from subscribing to one thought form to another. Sermons attempt to change their hearers' minds. Identifying the worldviews within the text of the sermon will assist in assessing the viewpoint changes that the preacher intends for the audience.

The fourth section of the checklist encourages the analyst to engage with the sermon's language under the heading of *praxis*, in particular its speech forms (4.1), its *lexis* and syntax (4.2), its representation of intonation (4.3) and

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[68] Stockwell, Peter, *op. cit.*, p.93 and pp.136ff..
[69] Williams, Raymond, *Marxism and Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
[70] Ferretter, Luke, *Towards a Christian Literary Theory*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.170.
[71] Brueggemann, Walter, *The Bible and the Postmodern Imagination: Texts Under Negotiation*. (London: SCM, 1993).

pragmatics (4.4). Among the general points Short makes when he is discussing speech form is the important point that in novels most speech is made up; it is without an anterior speech position.[72] However, there may be exceptions to this general rule. Sermons in novels can be one such exception in at least two ways. In historical novels, actual sermons by historical characters may be used for cultural placing and, in any novel, authors may use sermons they have heard in churches as 'models' for the sermons they write. I have therefore introduced to this subsection of the analytical checklist the recommendation that the analyst traces any anterior speech position and compares the original sermon with its form in the novel.

Gérard Genette, discussed in Kearns,[73] suggested that there are three main speech states which he chooses to call 'narrated' (where the narrator's word and syntax are used), 'transposed' (where the narrator's syntax is used whilst some of the character's words are included) and 'reported' (where the character's words and syntax are used, whilst the narrator uses inquit signals). Kearns also discusses Dorrit Cohn's terminology for the same speech states: she spoke of narrated monologue, psycho-narration and quoted monologue. However, the convention is to distinguish between direct speech, where, as Toolan says,[74] the character speaks, indirect speech where the narrator speaks, and free indirect speech which, as Henry Gates says,[75] is both speakerly and speakerless. Free indirect speech is a literary bi-vocal language that no one could have spoken although the reader recognises its aspiration towards orality.

The scale of discourse representation set out in the checklist comes from Mick Short's guide to exploring the language of poems, plays and prose.[76] For most sermons in novels the analyst will be assessing the novelist's representation of speech, but I have included the representation of thought in the checklist, because there are a few instances where the novelist indicates what the preacher

[72] *op. cit.*, p.290.
[73] *op. cit.*, pp.153-5.
[74] *op. cit.*, p.125.
[75] Gates, Henry L., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp.209 and 215.
[76] *op. cit.*, p.325.

is thinking while speaking. These prove to be important in an assessment of how contemporary novelists use preaching and preachers, for they indicate the author's understanding of the preacher's motives and intentions.

Use of the checklist has also shown that, as well as comparison with a sermon's anterior speech position if there is one, setting the sermon against the backdrop of other speech forms used by the character elsewhere in the novel may also be illuminating. Short demonstrates this when he discusses the appropriateness of language[77] with the classic instance of a lay preacher who preaches both in and out of season, Dickens's Chadband in *Bleak House.*[78] Although this is an instance where the preacher uses only one speech form whatever the circumstances, in many other instances the analyst will discern how characters adapt their forms of speech when preaching.

Short's guide, which lists questions about both the *lexis* and the grammar of texts,[79] shows that the next subsection (4.2) is a standard aspect of close discourse analysis. However, it also pays homage to Barthian dogmatics and recognises that theologians, among whom preachers are frontline practitioners, are bilingual. In the book more accessible to non-theologians than many of his others, Barth distinguished between ecclesiastical language, colloquially referred to as the 'language of Canaan', and everyday language or 'the speech of Mr Everyman' and argued that, whilst the Church will necessarily have its specific language, preachers must also learn to translate from the distinctive specialised language of the Church, which is essential to the preservation of the church's distinctive identity, into the language of the newspaper.[80] Failure to do this, Barth argued, keeps the church in a snail's shell, unable to engage with the social, economic and political realities of the contemporary world. This was a stark warning, as, at the time Barth wrote, the German Church was emerging from its failure to engage with Nazism. When the analyst applies the questions of subsection 4.2 to fictional sermons, at the back of the analyst's mind is a more

[77] *ibid.*, pp.91f.
[78] Dickens, Charles, *op. cit.*, pp.409ff.
[79] *op. cit.*, pp.350-2.
[80] Barth, Karl, *Dogmatics in Outline*. (London: SCM Press, 1949), pp.30-34.

general question, which, when expressed in Barthian terms, is this: is this preacher using the language of Canaan or the language of the newspaper? Is the novelist depicting this preacher as an archaism or someone capable of relating Christian faith to contemporary life?

One of the problems of speech genres that Bakhtin discussed is the loss of words' full phonetic quality when expressed in written form, also recognised by Ong when speech is transferred into the literary world.[81] Although there is always an expressive aspect to all utterances, the expressive intonation tends to belong to the utterance rather than specific words within it. Nevertheless, Bakhtin was reluctant to abandon the notion that words have 'emotional colouring' or 'stylistic aura', so he argued that we select our words for their inherent emotional tone.[82] Some words may have typical expression; moreover, all epochs, social circles, families, faith communities and interpretive communities have what Bakhtin called 'tone-setting authoritative utterances,'[83] by which I understand him to mean typical utterances which set the standard, one might say neutral, tone conventional to that community, and on the basis of which the expressive element of an utterance can be established. For instance, it is normal in the Christian Church to describe the persuasive purpose of the four Gospels as *εναγγελίον* – the telling of 'good news' – but if I were to choose to describe it, as it is lexically legitimate to do, as 'propaganda', then my deviation from the tone-setting norm, or "accustomed speech,"[84] gives my choice of word an intonation or expressive element which can be 'heard' even in its written form. Subsection 4.3 considers how successful the novelist has been in retaining a sense of the sermon's orality and the intonation of the preacher's speech when set in the amber of literariness.

Subsection 4.4 puts the fictional sermon to tests suggested by speech-act theory. According to Dan Sperber with Deirdre Wilson,[85] speech-act theory

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[81] Ong, Walter J., *op. cit.*, p.101.
[82] Bakhtin, Mikhail M., "Speech Genres", p.86.
[83] *ibid.*, p.88.
[84] Soskice, Janet M., *Metaphor and Religious Language*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.69.
[85] Sperber, Dan and Wilson, Deirdre, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p.243.

grew out of a reaction to what was seen as an excessively narrow concentration on the informative use of language and Austin's suggestion in *How To Do Things With Words* that language can be used to perform various actions.[86] Austin distinguished between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts and identified five categories of illocutionary speech-act where speech is mostly clearly performative. Since Austin's day his heirs, such as Searle in *Expression and Meaning*,[87] have developed a more comprehensive taxonomy of performatives, including assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives, which are more fully discussed in relation to communication theory in Sperber and Wilson[88] and in the context of preaching by Lose.[89] The analyst's task is to consider the nature of the intended effects of the various speech-acts within the sermon. There remains one observation which qualifies the categorisation of speech acts in the texts under scrutiny. This is Short's observation that, in the way that certain felicity conditions must be in place for a speech act to function properly and as intended, so adverse or contrary contextual conditions have the capability of inflecting a speech act in an unintended or unexpected way.[90] For instance, in the case of a fictional funeral oration, a listener's or reader's contextual awareness of a preacher's dislike of the deceased is likely to compromise the intended assertion of admiration. On the other hand, we need to be aware that some performatives such as suggestions and threats do not require speakerly intentionality.[91] The analyst should also be aware both that constatives may be implicitly performative and that performatives can perform eccentrically.

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The 'finished' form of the analytical toolkit was achieved after revisions made in the light of its application to sermons in a range of late twentieth-century British novels. These included many outside the final selection for this thesis,

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[86] Austin, John L., *How To Do Things With Words*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1975).
[87] Searle, John R., *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp.12-20.
[88] *op. cit.*, pp.244ff.
[89] *op cit.*, pp.103ff.
[90] *op. cit.*, p.199.
[91] See Sperber and Wilson, *op. cit.*, p.245.

such as the preaching in Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*[92] and *Sexing the Cherry*.[93] It could also be applied in the analysis of fictional sermons in earlier eras.

In its final form, the analytical procedure was applied to all the sermons central to the case studies. However, the experience of frequent application of the checklist to sermons in fiction revealed that a further revision is desirable, in that it is better presented in diagrammatic form. It was discovered, for instance, that the introductory questions about the aims and structure of the sermons, which were preliminary to a more detailed analysis of the preaching, tended to suggest different starting points in the checklist for different sermons. There was no common entry point for the analyst.

To represent the checklist in diagrammatic form is, first, to retain a sense of the dynamism of the rhetorical act of preaching, second, to avoid the artificiality of sequencing analysis and the implication of priority within the analytical procedure and, third, provided the chosen entry point was suggested by the answers to the introductory questions and not by the whim of the analyst, to remove any implications that the analyst may have distorted the sermon in her or his critique of it. Furthermore, the diagram is reminiscent of Gadamer's image of the hermeneutic circle, in which a text's interpreter circles around the text, never able to interpret its end without understanding its beginning and never able to interpret its beginning without understanding its end, although always capable of achieving the interpretative stop of a fusion of the author's and readers' horizons.

The diagram shows a centrally-situated sermon orbited by four blocks of analytical questions. Answers to the overarching introductory questions determine the direction from which the analyst approaches the sermons under analysis. The analyst's entry point may be found in almost any subsection within any block, although in practice some are more commonly useful entry points

[92] Winterson, Jeanette, *Oranges are not the only Fruit*. (London: Vintage, 1985).
[93] Winterson, Jeanette, *Sexing the Cherry*. (London: Vintage, 1987).

than others. So the toolkit, in the form used in the analysis of the preaching in the novels central to this study, is represented by the following diagram:-

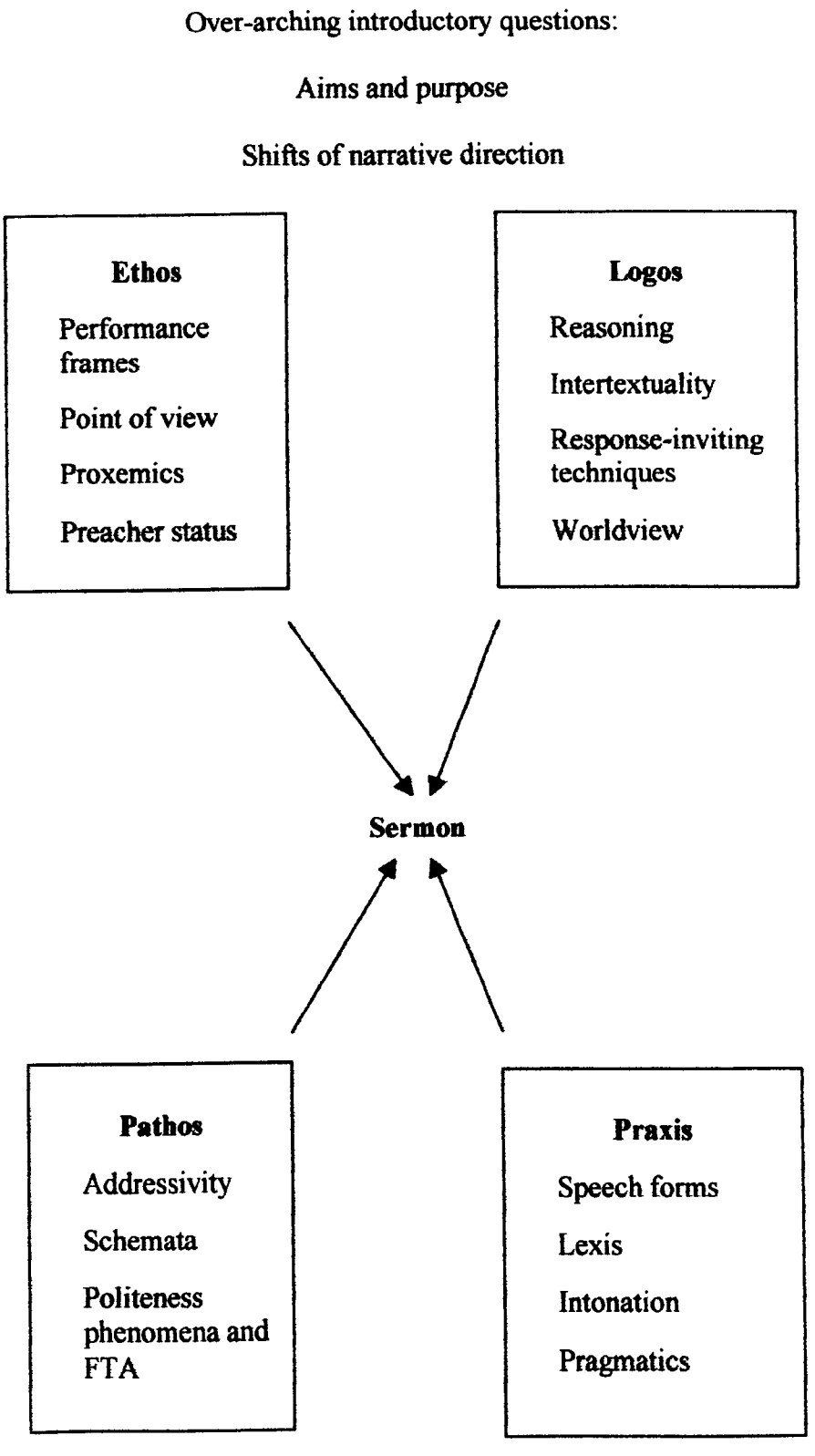

Fig. 6 A toolkit for analysing sermons in fiction

3: Authority in the fictional pulpit: the sermon's warrants, preacher and textual placing

All the novels serving as primary texts for this research were published in a culture in which religious authority is usually either suspect or unstable, yet they represent preaching as an exercise in which a rhetor assumes a superior position of authority claiming to dominate its audience. This renders the presence of sermons in the novels problematic. One of the conventions of preaching is that preachers often conclude their sermons by saying 'Amen', effectively transposing it from its original usage as a 'people-binding utterance' - a congregation's response assenting to the assertions of the liturgy - to an audible punctuation mark.[1] Cyril of Jerusalem said that Christian congregations make a public act of prayer their own by 'sealing' it with an amen and, in more expressive cultures than that of most British churchgoers, listeners encourage preachers, and express their accord with what is being said, with murmurs or acclamations of amen; thus, authority is ascribed to the preaching. When preachers say amen themselves, however, they are claiming authority for

[1] Lash, Nicholas, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed*. (London: SCM, 1992), p.1.

themselves and their sermon, even if they say it with quizzical intonation as if inviting an affirming response.

This assumption of authority in the pulpit originates in Christianity's foundation documents. The author of Matthew's Gospel concludes the Sermon on the Mount by describing the crowd's astonishment at the authority of Jesus' teaching which set him apart him from other teachers of the day.[2] From this point forward in the gospel, distinguished from the other canonical gospels by its presentation of Jesus as the new Moses, authority becomes a recurring theme. As a new lawgiver with new teaching, Jesus has authority to forgive sins,[3] to heal disease and to exorcise demons.[4] Ultimately Jesus claims that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him.[5]

Many other New Testament books continue this concern for authority. For instance, when Paul uses his pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus to encourage them in their discipleship, he appeals to his own authority as an apostle of Christ[6] and, once he has reminded them of the themes of their teaching and preaching, he urges them to "argue them with an authority which no one can disregard."[7] In line with Paul's general exhortation to Christ's followers - "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus"[8] - Christian teachers are to teach as Christ taught; Christian preachers are to preach authoritatively as Christ preached.

The trouble with this in the twenty-first century is that suspicion of authority, which was already evident in the postmodernism of the late twentieth-century, came to a head in the catastrophic events of '9/11', when the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington were attacked by religious fundamentalists whose fanaticism was bolstered by perverse readings of the Qur'ān. When, on 11th September 2001, terrorists, some reciting, others

[2] Matthew 7: 28f.
[3] Matthew 9:6.
[4] Matthew 10:1.
[5] Matthew 28: 18.
[6] I Timothy 1: 1, 18.
[7] Titus 2: 15.
[8] Philippians 2: 5.

carrying, proof texts from the Qur'ān, targeted their peopled weapons at buildings representative of Western culture, this destabilised discussion of religious authority and authoritative texts. '9/11' occurred towards the end of the twenty-five year period limiting my research, yet, as I implied when identifying the chief characteristics of contemporary culture in chapter 1, it is possible to interpret the event as the culmination of several influences throughout the period, such as the growth of fundamentalism, the developing political aspirations of religious groups and their increasing impatience with democratic methods of attaining political change. '9/11' can be regarded as an appalling symbol of conflict between religion and culture, which is expressed with more subtlety in many contemporary British novels. Central to this conflict – and paradoxically key to the way out of any impasse – is our understanding of authority. Mark Taylor, a self-styled postmodern or deconstructionist a/theologian, identifies 'the book' as a feature common to both Christianity and 'western' culture: "Christianity is a religion of the book, and the West is a book culture."[9] Later he uses what he calls the 'dynastic relationship' of author and book to suggest that there is a close connection between the concept of authorship and the economic principles of private ownership that are prevalent in the west. Books stamped '©', he says, bear the mark of their creators; authorship implies a claim of authority as well as ownership. The author's interest in the book is literary, intellectual and monetary. Taylor then introduces to his argument a distinction between books and Book, which was merely implied in his earlier description of Christianity as a religion of the book. He asserts:

> *"Quite clearly, God is not just any author, nor is His book just any book. God is the Author of authors who dictates the Book of books. For this reason, God is the Author to whom all authors finally defer, and His Book is the Book to which all books ultimately refer."* [10].

John McClure makes a related point in his discussion of postmodern homiletics. He speaks of a unitary, masterful and transcendent (A)author behind every author of the biblical text and a unitary, absolute and wholly masterful

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[9] Taylor, Mark C., *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.76.
[10] *ibid.*, p.81.

(R)reader engaged in the exegetical process.[11] This, with Taylor's theological assertion, encourages me to acknowledge that a discussion of religious authority in fictional sermons orbits a family of words including 'author', 'authorship', 'authorise', 'authority' and 'authenticity', each of which might be used in some way to refer to divine creativity and inspiration. The validity of the following discussion does not depend on our firmly establishing relationships within this family of words but we can acknowledge loose etymological relationships in that, in the case of sacred and religious texts, the authenticity of a text is often understood as undisputed authorship, the authorship of a text often permits some degree of authority over or through it, and an authoritative text may often become an authorised text. It is apparent that the scope of authority and authenticity is related to authorisation and authorship and that what is said of books in this regard may also be said of the spoken words of religious leaders in their sermons.

In this chapter I will focus on three fictional preachers – Ted Bishop, Michael Mompellion and John Wroe. I will examine their authors' expression of authority in their preaching, at the same time demonstrating that the authority of preaching, though problematic, is not necessarily alien to contemporary culture. I will assess the robustness of their fictional preaching by considering three aspects of religious authority, for, in common with actual sermons whose authority is three-fold – the authoritative texts behind the sermon, the authority of the preacher and the authority of the sermon's liturgical placing – fictional sermons are bolstered by authoritative texts, preacherly authority and the intratextual authority of the rhetorical act established by its placing in the novel. In both actual and fictional sermons the sturdiness of the sermons – like a three-legged stool – is determined by the strength of all three props.

[11] McClure, John S., *Other-wise Preaching: A postmodern ethic for homiletics*. (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2001), p.14.

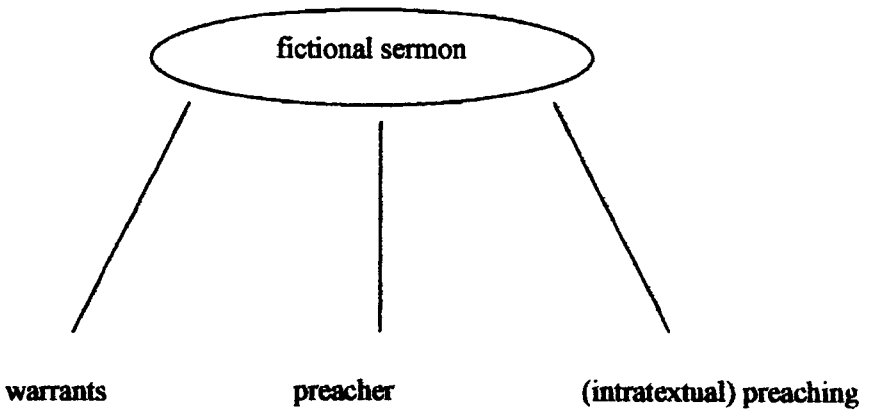

Fig. 7 Three-fold authority of fictional sermons

An authoritative text

First is the authority of the Christian bible, the authoritative text most frequently cited in the scrutinised sermons. A discussion of the use of the bible in these sermons will inform my subsequent comments on the dismantling of the bible's authority in our contemporary culture, the nature of inspiration and the concept of expressive authority. Homiletics teachers at the beginning of the twenty-first century, despite the diversity of their approaches to the homiletic task, are almost univocal in their assumption that the primary role of the Christian preacher is to interpret the bible so as to appropriate its insights for Christians faced with the complexities of modern living. In other words, the preacher begins in the world of the bible with the presumption that the gap of at least twenty centuries requires bridging and so uses a range of hermeneutical tools to apply these ancient, but authoritative, texts to the contemporary world. The process is 'from text to sermon.'[12]

Although British theorists and practitioners such as Ernest Best, Neville Clark[13] and Alec Gilmore[14] have published in the last twenty-five years, although

[12] Best, Ernest, *From Text to Sermon: Responsible Use of the New Testament in Preaching.* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988).
[13] Clark, Neville, *Preaching in Context: Word, Worship and the People of God.* (Bury St Edmunds: Kevin Mayhew Ltd., 1991).
[14] *op. cit.*

series of books about preaching are currently being prepared by British publishers such as the Epworth Press's Preacher's Library and although the College of Preachers has recently published a companion for preachers,[15] the publication of books on preaching is livelier in the USA. Mark Barger Elliott's useful summary of contemporary homiletical thinking in America, surveying the practice and theory of most currently-published American homileticians, lists nine 'styles' of preaching.[16] For each style he gives two examples, each of which is headed by a biblical passage. Some begin by quoting a biblical text. The implication is clear: even those styles called 'imaginative', 'narrative', 'pastoral' and 'topical' are preached 'from' the bible in that at least one of the aims of the sermons is to relate the cited bible passage to the hearers' life-experiences. They are all 'biblical' preaching inasmuch as the directional flow of the sermons is from biblical textworld via the text of the sermon to audience textworld. There is an inferable assumption that the bible passages merit interpretation so that they can be successfully, helpfully and appropriately applied to the present age; in other words, these preachers regard the passages from which they preach as authoritative texts. I think it is unlikely that the authors and readers of fictional sermons start from the same premise of 'from text to sermon', for the interpretation of the bible will rarely, if ever, be the primary concern of novels. However, in this appraisal of fictional preaching, I begin by assessing to what extent fictional preachers start from this premise of necessary biblical interpretation. How do novelists – and their preachers - employ the bible in the creation of their fictional sermons?

In Arditti's *Easter*, Bishop Ted Bishop is the chief representative of fundamentalism. He preaches two sermons, both parodies of what Arditti in an interview called fascistic preaching,[17] both sermons unashamedly and anachronistically using the *lexis* of conflict and crusade as he announces war on liberalism. Because of the triptych form of the novel they are not presented chronologically. Arditti reverses their order and places them far apart: the

[15] Hunter, Geoffrey, *et al.*, eds., *A Preacher's Companion: Essays from the College of Preachers*. (Oxford: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2004).
[16] Barger Elliott, Mark, *op. cit.*
[17] Wilson, David, "Crucifying Religion" in *SCMP*, 22 April 2000.

earlier sermon – preached on Holy Monday – comes almost two hundred pages after the later sermon supposedly preached on Maundy Thursday. The effect is that the reader reads first the sermon intended for the wider audience – all the clergy of the diocese – a sermon that introduces the new bishop and announces his perceived task.

Both the *lexis* and the intertexts of the sermons underpin their satirical intention. Before the Maundy Thursday service begins, the bishop expresses the view that he has a strong sense of the changing room whenever he comes to the Dean's Vestry at St Paul's Cathedral. Walking into the pulpit is, for him, like walking into the boxing ring. In the foregrounded rubric of the novel, Arditti's choice of verb to describe the bishop's entry into the pulpit – 'mounts' (37) – reminds the reader of a jouster facing a valiant fight astride a charger.

The Maundy Thursday service of the blessing of the oils in St Paul's Cathedral is Ted Bishop's opportunity to address the clergy of his new diocese. Using the lexis of business management, which he himself uses when he addresses his diocesan "team", Ted Bishop is a senior executive, the most high-ranking of all the fictional preachers in this study. Before he preaches he prays that God's "written word may be (their) rule" (78). There is an expectation that the newly-appointed bishop will bring a new era of reconciliation and hope, but Ted Bishop feels himself called to purge the diocese of "pernicious liberalism" although one wonders whether he is as misguided in his sense of call as he is in his belief that his closet lesbian wife, keen to break free from his oppressive grasp, is his "dear lady wife". The sermon is an episcopal rallying-cry in which he exhorts "ministers of the Lord" to raise the Holy Bible as a sword and shield above their congregations (80). He knows that for liberals this will be an embarrassment, for they regard the bible as "just another volume in their library", while they should regard it as "their sword and shield". At the conclusion of the sermon his cry of 'Hallelujah' is returned like a mating call and, as the bishop holds up a bible, he declares, "This is the witness of God. Amen."

Later in the novel, Ted's sermon at a healing service on Holy Monday begins in conventional style with the quotation of a text – Matthew 11: 4f. – which refers to Jesus' healing miracles. The sermon, after an opening declaration that the Bible is the Word of God (267), quickly becomes an attack on humanists, atheists and liberals, some of whom are characterised as people who read the gospels "like a modern novel where nothing can be taken on trust". The bishop implicitly denies any need to interpret the bible for the modern age when he criticises 'liberals' for watering down the bible by translating it into modern parallels: first, for turning Jesus' invitation for children to come to him into Lord Shaftesbury saving them from the mines, and then for turning Jesus casting demons from a young girl into Freud putting her on a couch. Thereafter Ted makes what we may describe as careless or 'liberal' use of the Bible, in that he makes leaps of interpretation without either acknowledging or making plain his hermeneutic: he asks who is more powerful – God or the Devil – and asks why God created the Devil. He answers his own question by referring to the legend of the fall of Lucifer, who was created as God's good creature, embellished with the misogyny the bishop seems unable to resist, for Lucifer had no woman to blame for egging him on (268). The bishop seems to be unaware that he owes more to Milton than to scripture for the legend of Lucifer. The two biblical texts, on which the legend of the fall of Lucifer developed, are imprecise. The first is from a powerful taunt,[18] written in the form of a lament on the death of an unspecified world leader, who cannot be identified with certainty as there are no criteria within the poem by which it can be dated outside its eventual biblical context, in which it seems to apply to the king of Babylon.[19] The taunt – "How you are fallen from heaven, Shining Star, son of the Dawn!" – was taken up in Jewish tradition and its application to Satan was strong enough to inform one of the seven visions of St John the Divine in *Revelation*: the seer 'imagines' a battle in heaven in which the victors, Michael and his angels, throw down the serpentine dragon by which the whole world had been led astray.[20] Both

[18] Isaiah 14: 12.
[19] Kaiser, Otto, *Isaiah 13-39*. (London: SCM Press, 1973), p.29.
[20] Revelation 12: 7-9.

Protestant and Catholic New Testament scholars and commentators,[21] note that, in Luke's Gospel, these texts are echoed when Jesus, in commissioning his disciples with the power to exorcise demons, says, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." What has happened is that two New Testament writers, independently of each other but both writing within the tradition of Jewish legend, have appropriated an unspecified political taunt, decontextualised it and given it mythological significance. In the 220s CE, Origen of Alexandria in his *De Principiis*, arguing that the text has no 'corporeal' interpretation by which it can refer literally to Nebuchadnezzar, sought a spiritual meaning and, twisting Isaiah 14: 12, firmly established the Christian association of the Shining Star, or Lucifer, with Satan.[22] Milton developed this in *Paradise Lost*, a text which British Protestantism has easily conflated with the bible. Although there is some biblical warrant for the legend for the fall of Lucifer, it could be argued that for many Anglicans, such as those in the bishop's congregation, understanding of the legend is filtered through Milton and its authority is literary rather than scriptural. In failing to acknowledge the minority status of the biblical tradition of the fall of Lucifer, the bishop, in whom *episcope* is believed to reside, and who earlier held a bible aloft as 'Word of God' above all other texts, might be being duplicitous. Arditti's satire of the bishop is that he is a self-confessed biblicist who unwittingly blurs the margins of the bible. On the other hand, it would be difficult to bring the charge of duplicity against another fictional preacher who also cites Milton: when Stephanie Potter marries Daniel Orton in *The Virgin in the Garden* the vicar quotes from Spenser, Milton and the ordination liturgy with a degree of authority similar to that he accords his cited biblical texts (VG, 343f.). The vicar's motivation for this is an attempt to incorporate into his address the respective interests of the bride and groom and he is open about what he is doing; unlike the bishop, he makes specific the authorship of these authorities.

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[21] For instance Marshall, Ian, H., *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text.* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978) and Johnson, Luke T., *The Gospel of Luke.* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991).

[22] Book IV. 22, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04124.htm, accessed 20th December 2006.

In contradistinction with Arditti's bishop who holds a bible aloft, *Year of Wonders*'s Mompellion lets the bible fall from his hands. Both the prologue and the first section of the epilogue share the title 'Leaf-Fall 1666' suggesting that they narrate events occurring in the autumn of the first year since the passing of the plague, yet the title also draws our attention to another kind of leaf fall, the dropping of the bible. At the beginning of the novel the reader finds the rector refusing to read the bible and expressing surprise that Anna Frith has learnt to read. At the end of the prologue Anna once more finds him alone with an unopened bible. This time without asking his permission she takes it from him. He takes it from her hands and lets it fall from his. These are the same leaves that fall again in the first section of the novel's epilogue. It is the same event retold by the narrator; in the second telling, however, letting the bible slip from his open hand has become a "flinging to the floor" (270). We know by now why the rector rejects his sacred text: he is exhausted, bereaved and challenged in his faith by all that has occurred in Eyam. His strict adherence to, and harsh interpretation of, the bible's teaching have guided his life and soured his marriage to the narrator's close friend Elinor.

Although the novel begins and ends with the rector's rejection of the bible, his preaching is naturally infused with biblical allusions. He quotes John 15: 13 when encouraging his parishioners to acts of self-sacrifice. Local historian, John Clifford, whose history of the plague in Eyam was first published in 1989 and with whom, according to the Afterword, Brooks spent time when she visited Eyam before publishing her novel, surmises that this and the parable of the Good Samaritan were the texts on which Mompesson relied in his successful appeal to the villagers in 1665.[23] In the sermon in *Year of Wonders* Mompellion describes the plague as a gift like a casket of gold (102). References to the pre-Exodus plagues on Egypt are used to counter the view that the plague is a curse expressing God's displeasure: Eyam is not like Egypt and its leaders are not like Pharaoh. Mompellion's imagery of smelting may be an indirect allusion to Peter's teaching in I Peter 1: 6-7 on suffering as testing for purity. Directly citing Isaiah 30: 16f., indeed repeating three times one phrase – "in quietness and trust"

– letting his voice descend to a hush, Mompellion lends biblical authority to his warning that loneliness and fear are all that would lie ahead for anyone who faithlessly ignores the proposed course of action (105).

On the other hand, Rogers makes comparatively little use of the bible in the sermons she creates for her preacher in *Mr Wroe's Virgins*. This is remarkable for it is in contrast with the real-life preacher John Wroe, whose published sermons are samples of how to use the scriptures when preaching as Christian Israelites; every paragraph makes a direct quotation of at least one, and often more than one, proof text, in a manner both Christian and non-Christian modern readers find repetitious, tedious and unenlightening. Whereas it might appear that Rogers restyles Wroe's preaching to protect modern readers from biblicism or to avoid the trap of alienating them, it seems that her real motive for using fewer biblical texts is two-fold: first, she wants to portray Wroe as a man of charismatic power who can sway people by the force of his personality and, second, her real interest is not in Wroe's religion. Recurring themes in Rogers's other novels betray the focus of her interest in this one. These include mother-child relationships, especially when the relationship has been compromised or damaged, as for instance in *The Ice is Singing*[24] where the first person narrator is a mother who has abandoned her children and in *Island*[25] where the protagonist is a woman seeking revenge against the mother who abandoned her as a child. Again, in Rogers's more recent novel, *The Voyage Home*, the figure from the past foreshadowing the life of the main character is Anne's late father, a missionary in Nigeria in the 1960s who had returned to England to become a priest. The impact on his faith of his sexual peccadilloes are of lesser interest to Rogers than the father-daughter relationship and the effect of *post-mortem* discoveries about her father on Anne's life and her eventual realisation that matters most is honesty in relationships.[26] This recurring theme of child-parent relationships is to be found in *Mr Wroe's Virgins*, too: parents abandon seven children on the strength of John Wroe's request for seven virgins. He becomes a

[23] Clifford, John, *Eyam Plague 1665-1666*. (Eyam: John Clifford, 2003), p.18.
[24] Rogers, Jane, *The Ice is Singing*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).
[25] Rogers, Jane, *Island*. (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999).
[26] Rogers, Jane, *The Voyage Home*. (London: Abacus, 2004).

surrogate, but abusive, parent. The novel continues Rogers's interest in the mother-child relationship in that at least one virgin becomes a mother and another becomes a saintly spiritual mother. As a teacher of creative writing Rogers is also interested in the power of stories and how they are told: this interest finds expression both in the range of stories parents tell their children in *Island*, many of them fables and folk tales concerning parents who abandon their children or, at least, put them at risk and in her employment of several voices to narrate her novels such as in *Promised Lands*[27] where three narratives are interwoven and in the four points of view from which Wroe's story is told. Furthermore, there is a recurring interest in the persona of the *idiot savant* – Calum in *Island* and Martha in *Mr Wroe's Virgins*. Wroe's religion provides the frame for, but not the centre of the thematic interest, in Rogers's story.

Hannah, the most sceptical of the seven virgins, presents most of Wroe's preaching in the novel. Wroe confides in her that his ministry is a façade (225), yet she is unable to doubt his authority as a preacher, whether this can be attributed to God or some other source (211). The main sermon in the novel – preached in Huddersfield marketplace - contrasts with the mesmerising yet forgettable sermons to which the community members are subjected in the Sanctuary three times each Sunday. Hannah, however, remembers one of these supposedly 'forgettable' sermons: not long after the marketplace sermon, Wroe preached in the Sanctuary on a text from Hosea – "The prophet is a snare to his people", or in the Revised English Bible, "The prophet has become a fowler's trap."[28] Although, in its biblical context, in this seemingly self-reflexive oracle, Hosea was distinguishing himself from the ecstatic practices of the court prophets,[29] this is a 'hazardous' text for a self-styled prophet like Wroe to choose. Already readers are suspicious of his intentions and doubtful of his integrity. Is it an act of bravado to preach on this? Is Wroe playing with the ensnared like a cat playing with a mouse, taunting the virgins to attempt to escape? As I have found no evidence to suggest that the real-life Prophet Wroe preached on this text, I am persuaded that Rogers's allusion to this text is

[27] Rogers, Jane, *Promised Lands*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).
[28] Hosea 9:8.

'preached' over the heads of the intratextual audience to the novel's readers, alerting us to the true, that is entrapped, status of these women and Wroe's status as fowler and fouler.

On the other hand, the marketplace sermon has both intratextual and extratextual audiences, one of whom is Hannah who feels shame and embarrassment in the marketplace and expects a riot. The last thing Wroe does before preaching is to wink at Hannah (82), a small gesture which draws Hannah into the conspiracy of manipulating the audience, suggests he knows he is playing a game and destabilises the reliability of the entire episode for the reader. Hannah tells us that the language Wroe uses in this sermon is simpler than that used in the Sanctuary. Although he alludes to the Revelation of St John the Divine and the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative, this sermon quotes no bible verses. Nevertheless there is a sense that Wroe is presenting the Word of God: he begins by saying that he has a message direct from God (83), uses the terminology "according to my prophecy" and claims to know God's order. He confidently foretells that two members of the audience will fall ill (84) and Hannah tells us that for some of his hearers Wroe's power was nothing other than the power of God. The woman, who interrupts the preaching to ask how she may be saved, is reminiscent of the disciple, who asked Jesus, "How then can we be saved?" after Jesus had said how hard it was for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, and puts Wroe in Christ's place. Despite Hannah's scepticism she shows that Wroe is bewitching and convincing, which is all he claims he needed to be in order to convince (226).

Ted Bishop's contradictory practice of holding the bible aloft as the Word of God while conflating it with other authoritative literary texts, the living tension within Mompellion between his dependence upon the bible in his exercise of spiritual and community leadership and his rejection of it as a result of what he experiences in the plague year and Rogers's reduction of biblical references in the preaching of the fictional Wroe in marked contrast with the actual Wroe's almost complete reliance on the bible for the substance of his

[29] Mowvley, Harry, *The Books of Amos and Hosea*. (London: Epworth Press, 1991), p.142.

preaching, all suggest that the novelists' primary concern is other than biblical interpretation. Either they are more interested in how a character can control others or they include biblical references because they believe readers will expect some biblicisms in preaching which is authentically representative. Furthermore, they reflect the ambivalent attitude of twenty-first century British society to the bible. It is still a best seller but it is not widely read. Gradually its authority is being dismantled. There are several cultural, literary and theological reasons for this.

The first has to do with advances in biblical criticism, as Rupert Davies warned in his Fernley Hartley lecture.[30] He argued that our awareness that the bible is prone to literary critique, as are other texts, has destabilised its status as a book communicating divine authority and has challenged its historical reliability. These advances in biblical criticism have made more people aware of the degree of plurality among the literary forms in the bible: the presence of various genres such as saga, liturgy, poetic forms, law code, letter, apocalyptic and 'theologised history', for instance, make it inappropriate to read any part of the bible without genre awareness. The same advances in biblical criticism have made us conscious of the human - and broken - transmission of biblical tradition. The search for an authoritative text in a state of unadulterated originality, or impeccability, often appears to interest biblical commentators and translators but the conclusions of their searches usually reveal inevitable imprecision, for the original authentic text is irretrievable. This is reminiscent of the endeavours of literary scholars to retrieve, say, the original Shakespeare from the various versions of his plays or the authoritative versions of Wilfred Owen's war poetry: in the case of the bible, these endeavours in literary archaeology are multiplied when biblical scholars attempt to piece together 'broken' texts from the preliterate Ancient Near East transmitted through several religious traditions, languages and cultures. This lack of an originating authenticity in the biblical text has, for some, compromised its acceptability as an authoritative text.

[30] Davies, Rupert E., *Religious Authority in an Age of Doubt*. (London: Epworth Press, 1968).

Some cultural changes have also impacted on the concept of biblical authority. One is the radical scepticism Davies identified in his lecture before the convenient shorthand of 'postmodernism' was available to him. Part of this radical scepticism takes the form of an emphasis on individual autonomy and another part takes the form of what David Law rather imprecisely calls "suspicion of the past,"[31] by which I understand him to mean the commonly-held assumption that now we know better than our ancestors. It is necessary therefore to take account of the gulf between ancient and modern cultures. If it was indeed ever possible to do so, we can no longer read the bible without engaging in a complex hermeneutic that takes account of the culture in which the texts were written, the culture in which the texts are read and cultural changes in the interim. Preachers are often conscious of straddling this divide.

These and other destabilising influences on the current status of the bible permit a range of views of biblical authority in the contemporary church, described in a recent report to the Methodist Conference entitled *A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path.*[32] This provides a useful summary of the range of views of biblical authority held by people within one of Britain's mainstream Protestant churches; it is particularly useful for this study as the Methodist Church is a broad church encompassing high church and evangelical expressions of faith and liturgy, as well as diverse theological views. It is significant for the practice of preaching that the report forms part of the current training programme for Methodist local preachers. The report outlines the following views held by people within the church. At one extreme is the view that, as the Word of God, the bible is inerrant and has complete authority in all matters of theology and behaviour. It is 'God-breathed' and its human authors were channels of the divine Word. Those who hold this view believe that it is the Christian's task to discern accurately what the bible teaches and then to believe and obey it, judging reason, experience and tradition in the light of the bible.

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[31] Law, David R., *Inspiration*. (London: Continuum, 2001), p.12.
[32] Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, "A Lamp to my Feet and a Light to my Path: The Nature of Authority and the Place of the Bible in the Methodist Church," (1998).

At the other end of the spectrum is the view that the bible comprises a diverse and often-contradictory collection of documents, a library of books, which represent the experiences of various people in various times and places. Those who hold this view see the Christian's task as following, in some way, the example of Christ. To the extent that the bible records evidence of Christ's character and teaching it offers a useful resource. However, in the twenty-first century it is simply not possible to obey all its teachings since these stem from fallible human authors and often represent the ideology of particular groups or classes in an ancient and foreign culture.

Four median views differ depending on the strength of authority they accord to the four branches of the Wesleyan or Methodist Quadrilateral - scripture, reason, tradition and experience – four "overlapping authorities that have bequeathed preaching to us."[33] These median views include the view that the bible's teaching about God, salvation and Christian living is entirely trustworthy, although it cannot be expected to provide entirely accurate scientific or historical information since this is not its purpose. Nevertheless, those who hold this view believe that it provides the supreme rule for faith and conduct, to which other ways of 'knowing' should be subordinate. The second median view identified in the report is that the bible is the essential foundation on which Christian faith and life are built. However, because its teachings were formed in particular historical and cultural contexts, it must be read in that light. Those who hold this view acknowledge that the way to apply biblical teaching in today's very different context is not always obvious or straightforward. Reason is a God-given gift that must be used to the full in this process of interpretation. Third, there are those who contend that the bible's teaching, while foundational and authoritative for Christians, needs to be interpreted by the Church. In practice the interpretation and guidance offered by Church leaders and preachers provides authoritative teaching. Those who hold this view often give high importance to church tradition as a practical source of authority. Fourth, there are those who regard the bible as merely one of the channels of revelation.

[33] McClure. John S., *op. cit.*, p.2.

Those who hold this view often acknowledge that the movement of God's Spirit is free and unpredictable, and what God's Spirit is doing today is of greater importance than what was being done in biblical times. The bible helps us to interpret current experience, yet spiritual experience itself conveys its own compelling authority.

In the conventions of Wesleyan theology, the relationship between scripture, tradition, reason and experience is often expressed as the bible being the centrepiece for our knowledge of God with reason, tradition and experience orbiting around it,[34] but in practice the relative strength of these authorities shifts; it is not a fixed relationship. Many conservative Christians use the bible as a higher authority over other authorities, but others choose to use other components of the Quadrilateral as the arbiter of their 'knowledge' of God. Those who pay greatest heed to church tradition may be thought of as having a catholic approach to faith, those who pay greatest heed to experience may belong to either a modernist or the pentecostal wing of the church, and those who pay greatest heed to reason take what Cunningham called a 'particularly philosophical approach to theology.'[35] Cunningham's discussion of the Quadrilateral in his book on rhetorical theology simplifies the range of views on biblical authority to three principle beliefs: the bible as univocal and inerrant with an absolute authority, the bible as a primary but not sole source for theology, and the bible as a book requiring interpretation in the light of reason, tradition and experience.[36] In the fictional sermons I have studied, 'reason' includes the logic of argument employed in the sermons, 'tradition' includes both the liturgy in which the sermons are set and the non-canonical ecclesiastical literature cited by the preachers, and 'experience' is manifestly pluriform - not only the experience of 'self' but also the experiences of historical people, women, minority groups and many more, a variety to which Cunningham adverts.[37] Practical experience of the Quadrilateral as a church leader

[34] Dawes, Stephen, "Revelation in Methodist Practice and Belief." in *Unmasking Methodist Theology*. Clive Marsh *et al.*, eds., (London: Continuum, 2004), p.113.
[35] *op. cit.*, p.187.
[36] *ibid.*, pp.183-4.
[37] *ibid.*, p.190.

ministering to churchgoers as they formulate their faith, Cunningham's brief discussion of the Quadrilateral and James Barr's insight that "scripture is derived from faith" rather than *vice versa*,[38] all encourage me to see the Quadrilateral functioning in a constantly fluid manner: each component informs the others, faith informs each and each informs faith.

What does this suggest about the concept of inspiration? It suggests a need for caution when discussing inspiration, for it is a complex and problematic matter. It is problematic first because it is used of literary texts as well as of theological texts. When poets appeal to the muses, for instance, we take this to mean something other than when theological writers and speakers claim divine intervention in their writing and speaking. When someone listening to a speech at a Labour Party Conference describes it as inspired, we take this to mean something other than the claim that Billy Graham at an evangelical rally was inspired.

The concept is further problematised by the imprecision of the term resulting from the various models theorists use – including instrumental, dictation, verbal and plenary theories.[39] Moreover, the notion of double enunciation, by which it is thought that a poem comes from both the poet and beyond the poet, is paradoxical to current thinking because insufficient distinction is made between human skill and divine agency.[40] However, this is often not so in the case of sermons: in these, enhanced fluency and empowering dispossession are often regarded as compatible with the preacher's technical skill.

Of the various models or theories of biblical inspiration the crudest is the dictation theory, which Jerome, Chrysostom and Augustine were all capable of expressing, and which was the dominant Protestant orthodoxy in the first two centuries after the Reformation. There are also instrumental theories in which

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[38] Barr, James, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), p.126.
[39] Law, David R. *op. cit.*, pp.50-66.
[40] Clark, Timothy, *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-romantic Writing*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p.42.

the author is regarded as a passive tool in God's hands, verbal theories which suggest that God creates the conditions in which writers can receive and express divine communication and the theory of plenary inspiration which denies any gradations of inspiration and argues that all scripture is equally inspired. All these theories are fraught with questions of authority.

In popular understanding, where the term inspiration has entered common parlance, there are at least three levels of inspiration: one claims that the bible is inspired, a second that sacred texts are inspired and a third that secular texts may be inspired. All three are present in the strata of the novels I have studied: some of the novelists may claim to have been inspired as they created their art, their fictional preachers at times are self-consciously presenting themselves as both inspired and inspiring and they cite inspired – or God-breathed – biblical texts. To distinguish between these three levels the terms 'InSpiration', 'inSpiration' and 'inspiration' can be coined, where 'InSpiration' indicates the higher inspiration of biblical texts, 'inspiration' is the lower secular model and 'inSpiration' is the inspiration of non-biblical sacred texts popularly, but perhaps confusingly, called 'inspirational writing'. In each case the claim of inspiration means something different.

In the influential lectures in which he established an image-based theory of inspiration, Austin Farrer reminded us that the New Testament is not uniquely inspired; rather it is both "uniquely informative" and a field where inspiration works.[41] He was broadening the concept of divine inspiration to claim that other sacred texts can be inspired, too. Few are the Christians who believe that the inspirational work of God came to a conclusion when the last word was put to the bible. Many discern signs of inspiration in theological and spiritual writings both ancient and modern; many discern signs of inspiration in hymnody and preaching, again both ancient and modern. Often this 'inSpiration' is taken to mean that God has in some sense and to some degree 'taken over' the writer or preacher, who is both possessed and dispossessed, in that composition seems

[41] Farrer, Austin M., *The Glass of Vision*. (London: Dacre Press, 1948), p.53.

effortless, enthusiastic and automatic.[42] This differs from the third level of inspiration only in its source: some secular writers feel inspired in that they write beyond or outside themselves – they are literally enthused or 'a-mused' - and some readers are capable of recognising inspired writing in both sacred and secular texts adjudged on the basis that it inspires them.

This association of inspired writing with readers' recognition of inspiration results from a form of 'double enunciation'. When Clark used this term he was speaking specifically of the belief that a poem, say, comes from both the poet and the divine,[43] but use of the term can be extended to elucidate other aspects of how inspiration functions, for it seems to me that, in the case of inspired texts, inspiration relates to the relationship between the writer and the reader around the text. In my view, inspiration is in the reading of texts as well as in their writing. In his discussion of biblical inspiration, David Law hints at the existence of an unspoken compact between reader and writer when he says that inspiration "does not describe a specific feature of a text but indicates rather how the reader should handle the Bible."[44] This relates to a subjective theory of inspiration which claims that what matters is the reader's involvement with a text. There is, Law claims,[45] a complex dialectic of active and passive, objective and subjective, or causative and resultative inspiration in which there is a definite link between being inspired and inspiring: as Law expresses it, one cannot inspire others without being inspired oneself. He argues that, if an implied reader is present in all texts, in the case of the bible this implied reader is an inspired reader.[46] This is a more dynamic understanding of inspiration, that of a divine *ephlatus* breathing in and out between writer and reader, speaker and hearer. If this is true of the bible about which Law writes, it is also true of all inspired texts.

This 'internal testimony of the Holy Spirit', as Calvin called it, equates with the total interiorisation in Derrida's notion of *'apprendre par coeur'*, to

[42] Clark, Timothy, *op. cit.*, p.3.
[43] *ibid.*, p.42.
[44] *op. cit.*, pp.139-140.
[45] *ibid.*, pp.38-9.
[46] *ibid.*, p.149.

which Clark refers in his discussion of learning by heart and rote, as he attempted to progress our understanding of inspiration from the archaic concept of dictation by an Author either within or beyond the author.[47] I have found this *apprendre par coeur* helpful in that we may call a text inspired if we take it to heart; texts are inspired because they resonate in our being. In the fictional sermons discussed above, Ted Bishop intended his Maundy Thursday sermon to inspire his diocesan team but, although his hearers returned his concluding hallelujah like a mating call, there is little evidence to suggest that his diocese rounded on liberalism as he wanted. Readers sense that he is trying hard to inspire. In contrast, both the fictional Mompellion and Wroe succeed in inspiring their hearers: Mompellion, who claims God has shown him the solution (239), inspires the villagers of Eyam to self sacrifice for the sake of surrounding parishes by asking them to show greater love for their neighbours and Wroe, who also claims direct communication from God, succeeds in enthralling – or, in the terminology of the text he cites from Hosea, entrapping or ensnaring - his harem of virgins.

This discussion of inspiration assists an understanding of the nature of biblical authority if Theo Hobson's attractive argument, that authority resides in the rhetorical performance of the bible rather than the bible itself, is accepted.[48] Despite Kennedy's contention that Christian preaching was originally proclamatory rather than suasory, Hobson argues both that theology is a form of persuasive argument and that confessional theology has become a discourse of rhetorical performance.[49] Although most, if not all, of the fictional preachers I have studied might argue that the bible is an authoritative text – and they certainly preach as if it is – I am unable to concur with any expression of this biblical authority as inherent or absolute. Any authority the bible enjoys is bestowed, or ascribed, authority in that readers give to the text the authority they recognise; it is attributed, not intrinsic. In other words, biblical authority is rhetorically or expressively performed. This is one of the qualities of biblical

[47] *op. cit.*, p.282.
[48] Hobson, Theo, *op. cit.*, p.2.
[49] *ibid.*, p.200.

authority identified by a group of writers following the philosophical argument of Joseph Bocheński.[50] He identified two main forms of authority: the first is epistemic authority which is the authority of expertise, variously known as cognitive or propositional authority; the other is deontic or administrative authority which is the authority of command.[51] Epistemic authority is present in the bible when believers accept its propositions and deontic authority is present when believers hear and obey its commands. More recently philosophy has identified a third form of authority – expressive authority. This is a *de facto* illocutionary and subjective form of authority which Maarten Wisse says enables "one to express one's faith in a certain way because the sacred scripture one accepts also does so."[52] At first sight this seems unacceptably vague. Closer consideration, however, reveals that this permissive authority liberates the bible into the vital debating chamber of rhetorical performance and resurrects biblical citation from the grave of "dead quotation"[53] into expressive, intonated, confessional speech utterance,[54] capable of inspiring faith and creating a sense that the hearer has encountered God. When making sermons, preachers are engaged in an interplay with all these forms of authority – sometimes applying a rule to live by, whilst at other times reinterpreting and updating the application of an outdated rule, sometimes uncovering and learning a propositional 'truth' about God from a bible passage, and sometimes using biblical expressions to express the nature of contemporary faith and experience. Never is the authority absolute; it is always confessional, rhetorically performed and subject to a compact between preacher and hearer.

Vir bonus dicendi peritus

The second aspect of religious authority to consider is that of the preacher. How authoritative are preachers Bishop, Mompellion and Wroe, where

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[50] Bocheński, Joseph M., "On Authority." in *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 8:2 (1988), pp.61-65.
[51] Goodwin, Jean, "Forms of Authority and the Real *Ad Verecundiam*." in *Argumentation*, 12:2 (1998), pp.267-280.
[52] Wisse, Maarten, "The meaning of the authority of the Bible." in *Religious Studies*, 36:4 (2000), pp.473-487.
[53] Bakhtin, Mikhail M., *Dialogical Imagination*, p.344.
[54] Bakhtin, Mikhail M., "Speech Genres", p.85.

does their authority reside and how consistent is it? In classical rhetoric there were three principal fields of study and teaching: technical rhetoric, which concentrated on the speech, was concerned with the technique of how to persuade and was eventually reduced to the production of guides on composition and style; philosophical rhetoric, which was interested in the speech's effect on the audience and, because it was concerned with the validity of the message, stressed the teaching of logic and reason; and sophistic rhetoric which emphasised the role of the speaker and developed into the study of literary oratory.[55] The tendency of sophistic rhetoric to slip into decadent histrionics was the beginning of the eventual slippage of the meaning of 'sophistry' from its noble origins - the study of a speaker's oratorical powers - into its current pejorative sense of "specious but fallacious reasoning; employment of arguments which are intentionally deceptive."[56] The ancients were themselves conscious of the danger and sought to avoid the corruption of sophistry: most sophists sincerely held the belief that the orator should be a good man.[57] According to James Kinneavy both Isocrates and Cicero held the view that "the orator is a moral and good man,"[58] which Quintilian turned into a simple Latin tag, *vir bonus dicendi peritus*, "the good man speaking well."[59] Although some of the Church Fathers, including Jerome, expressed concern about using Ciceronian rhetoric in the service of Christian preaching mainly because of its interest in technique above integrity, Augustine of Hippo's description of Christian eloquence in *De Doctrina Christiana*[60] revived an interest in the application of rhetoric to Christian preaching and saw *ethos* as an important rhetorical factor. Reviving the Aristotelian and Ciceronian concern that speakers need to establish intratextually their credentials as good people worthy of attention, Augustine argued that the life of a speaker carries far greater weight than eloquence. It is important to note, however, that Augustine means more than the *ethos* presented or created within a speech: he means the entire life of

[55] Kennedy, George A., *op. cit.*, p.17.
[56] *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd Ed.) 1989, prepared by Simpson, J.A. and Weiner, E.S.C., (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
[57] Kennedy, George A., *op. cit.*, p.40.
[58] Kinneavy, James L., *A Theory of Discourse*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971), p.215.
[59] *The Institutes 2.15*, quoted in Hogan and Reid, *op. cit.*, p.30.
[60] Robertson, David, *op. cit.*, *4.6.-4.26.*

the speaker.[61] Expressed proverbially, Augustine was reminding Christian preachers that they should practise what they preach; not to do so compromised their preaching.

In the mid-nineteenth century the principle of *vir bonus dicendi peritus* received Kierkegaard's theological and philosophical attention in his biting *Attack on Christendom*, which bulldozed the idea that one might be an effective spokesperson for Christianity without exhibiting in one's life the qualities and virtues that its teaching entails. John Whittaker's discussion of Kierkegaard reiterated his view that some church leaders contemporaneous with Kierkegaard were monstrously deluded when they made the outward show of faithfulness by preaching, posturing and administering the sacraments without inward compliance to the affirmations of faith. Apostolic authority requires that the preacher's life should also furnish assurances for what he teaches.[62] Elsewhere, in his *Training and Christianity*, Kierkegaard averred that "the truth consists not in knowing the truth but in being the truth."[63]

More recently, I remember being intrigued by the discussion engendered by Hannah Tillich's biography revealing the serial infidelity of her husband, a prominent and influential Christian theologian in the middle decades of the twentieth century. It appears that Paul Tillich used his unquestioned powers as a teacher to attract into his orbit women with whom he was wilfully promiscuous, and in his promiscuity he was coldly cruel to his wife.[64] When Donald MacKinnon explored the issues provoked by these revelations he could not escape the conclusion that Tillich's unethical behaviour "infected the texture of his *oeuvre*."[65] There is an element of fraud or hypocrisy, this latter term with its etymological origins in Greek theatre having of course some intentional significance in this discussion of preachers as performers. Despite the revelation that Tillich did not comply inwardly with the teachings of Christianity, he has

[61] Kennedy, George A., *op. cit.*, p.157.
[62] Whittaker, John H., "Kierkegaard on the concept of authority." in *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*, 46, (1999), pp.83-101.
[63] *ibid.*, p.99.
[64] Tillich, Hannah, *From Time to Time*. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974).
[65] MacKinnon, Donald, "Tillich, Frege, Kittel: Some Reflections on a Dark Theme" in *Explorations in Theology 5*. (London: SCM Press, 1979), p.134.

been, and continues to be, an influential theological voice of the twentieth century, not the least being his influence on Nathan Scott whose early work in theology and literature has become almost normative in this field.[66]

Consistency between what a preacher preaches and does facilitates what Goodwin calls the 'authority of dignity', a concept she derives from John Locke's concept of *argumentum ad verecundiam* or the appeal to 'shamefacedness' or modesty.[67] She distinguishes this authority of dignity from deontic and epistemic forms of authority in that it is to do with the authority of the speaker rather than the authority of his or her commands or asseverations. What Locke was arguing was that it would show disrespect, and be a matter of shame, to disregard the authority of dignity, the authority of a good man speaking well. As Goodwin reminds us, Cicero expected his word to be carried 'on the nod.'[68] Speakers whose lives do not match their expressed views lack dignity as well as integrity and forfeit the authority of the "real *ad verecundiam.*"[69]

This question of integrity was famously and fictionally explored by Graham Greene in *The Power and the Glory.*[70] The unnamed whisky priest at the heart of this novel is stripped of everything including reputation in a descent into darkness where he discovers the vocation of martyrdom for the sake of the Catholic people for whom he still cares. Greene is asking his readers to consider to what extent this disreputable and worldly priest can continue to be an effective and 'dignified' representative of Roman Catholicism. Almost everyone sees that he is a "bad priest", yet readers are being invited to assess whether it is true that a man's office does not depend upon the man. Arditti reverses this declaration, just over fifty years later, when the character struggling with a sense of vocation at the heart of *The Celibate* says, "It was the man who made the office and not the other way round..."[71] Perhaps, because the notion of *ex officio* authority had

[66] Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane, *op. cit.*, p.314.
[67] *op. cit.*, p.274.
[68] *ibid.*, p.275.
[69] *ibid.*, p.278.
[70] Greene, Graham, *The Power and the Glory.* (London: Vintage, 1940).
[71] Arditti, Michael, *The Celibate.* (London: Minerva, 1993), p.277.

become less acceptable, people were less tolerant of priestly peccadilloes in the last decade of the twentieth century than they had previously been.

Like Greene's whisky priest, Ted Bishop, Michael Mompellion and John Wroe are all unreliable or undignified preachers. Readers are conscious of the humanity of these divines because they suspect that the preachers are not always presenting their authentic selves when preaching. Existentialist theologians of the middle years of the twentieth century, who took their lead from Kierkegaard and Heidegger, saw salvation as a choice between authentic and inauthentic selfhood. John Macquarrie, for instance, defined authentic selfhood as "a unitary, stable and relatively abiding structure in which the polarities of existence are held in balance and its potentialities are brought to fulfilment."[72] He spoke of the unity of this authentic selfhood, which, in Christian terms, is the product of acceptance of, and commitment to, 'the authentic faith' which is the belief and practice of the Church.[73] In other words, people may choose either a fragmented, disrupted and inauthentic existence or integrity of being. This authentic existence fulfils its potentialities; this Kierkegaardian 'moment' of openness to past, present and future[74] maintains the balance between, and holds together in unity, the three dimensions of our being. Integrity of being is an ideal state in which there is unity of vocation and praxis, as well as unity of self-perception and self-as-perceived-by-others. Intimations of such integrity and authenticity are noticeably lacking in Brooks's and Rogers's fictional preachers, as well as in Arditti's bishop although his other preachers explore this more interestingly.

Arditti's Ted Bishop is a figure of fun. His inexpert application of management theory to episcopacy is a source of humour for *Easter*'s readers and irritation for diocesan clergy. His pugilistic approach to preaching, preparing himself in the vestry like a boxer preparing to enter the ring, is an idiosyncratic and unorthodox homiletic. His purple tracksuit embroidered with a silver cross is risible episcopal jogging attire (189). His ignorance of the lesbian affair his

[72] Macquarrie, John, *Principles of Christian Theology*. (London: SCM Press, 1966), p.64.
[73] *ibid.*, p.365.
[74] *ibid.*, p.67.

"dear wife" enjoys, *contra* his homophobia, puts into question his judgement of others, let alone those supposedly closest to him. His justification for his appearance as a celebrity guest on the National Lottery because Matthias was chosen by lot to replace Judas is transparently disingenuous. Indeed, Blair Ashley's description of Ted Bishop as a television natural implies the glossy superficiality of an image-conscious narcissist. Dangerous though he may be both for the credibility of the church he belongs to and the diocese and clergy he leads, we are unable to take him seriously. In that sense, he meets the fate of other literary religious hypocrites.

Brooks's Michael Mompellion is a master of pretence. The dropping of the bible, bracketing Brooks's narrative of the plague year in Eyam, advises readers from the outset that Mompellion is one of a common type in contemporary novels: church leaders suffering loss of faith populate many contemporary fictions. His contested leadership in the community is threatened further by his acting of the priestly role with less than total conviction. Whereas the tour guide in Arditti's *The Celibate* said that "as rector, [Mompesson] was expected to be both doctor and divine,"[75] Brooks's novel sets up a conflict of expectations around the rector's role: when Anna is tending the first victim of the plague, he asks for the rector because only he can make him comfortable now (42). That Anna is keen first to nurse him and make him comfortable is the earliest indication in the novel of one of its themes – the nature of sickness and healing. In case of sickness who can offer more comfort – priest or nurse, a "good infusion" prepared by the wise women of the village or "the empty mutterings of a priest" (48), herbal remedies from Gowdie's physic garden or leeching, the conventional medicine of the age? Prayer is "in vain" (86), for God proves to be a poor listener. Which, then, is most effective - superstition, "the unreformed Papistry lingering" in the villagers' hearts or the Reformed faith represented by Stanley, Mompellion's predecessor (170)? The shadowy presence of Stanley throughout the plague year is historically accurate: as recently as 1660 the people of Eyam had been united, though unsuccessful, in

[75] *op. cit.*, p.241.

petitioning for Stanley's reinstatement to the parish, so Mompesson's appointment as rector in 1664 when his predecessor died was contrary to the common expectation that Stanley would be reappointed. In wilful contravention of Acts of Parliament intended to prevent Dissenting Clergy from coming within five miles of their former parishes, Stanley spent the last five years of his life in Eyam after his wife's death in 1664 and before his own death in 1670.[76] Both historically and in Brooks's fiction, the rector's leadership during the plague year is in contest with the villagers' deep and longstanding affection for Thomas Stanley who had first been appointed to the parish in 1644. The challenge brought to 'official' leadership by women of the village, who listened to their own hearts (55) and are regarded by some as "cunning" and others as "ignorant" (75), is dealt with in the way that was common at the time: they attempt to drown Mem Gowdie and then hang Anys Gowdie who saved her mother with the 'witchery' of the kiss-of-life. To be fair to Mompellion however, it must be said that he tried to prevent these deaths. More importantly, Mompellion's leadership is in contest with the dark side of his personality.[77] The way he expressed his religion and his interpretation of the bible ruined his marriage to Elinor and perverted his image of his wife. Towards the end of the novel he admits to Anna Frith that, although he had loved his wife in the beginning, he had never lain with her but had forced himself to revile her (280). Not only is Anna appalled at his treatment of Elinor, but she also recognises his duplicity: Mompellion's reasoning for the way he treated Elinor is in direct contradiction with words he had used to console a dying man. Brooks heightens our sense of his duplicity when, speaking to Anna in the intimacy of the bedroom, his voice "gained the ringing timbre of the pulpit" (282). He is about to do as he pleases once more but, repelled by how badly he had treated Elinor, Anna gathers up her clothes and runs from the bedroom to prostrate herself on Elinor's tombstone. The credit for containing the spread of the plague that readers want to give Mompellion is tainted by his lack of personal and spiritual integrity.

[76] Clifford, John, *op. cit.*, p.14.
[77] Steinberg, Sybil, *op. cit.*, p.279.

The motives of Rogers's John Wroe are suspect from the outset. Why, except for abnormal reasons, might the leader of a religious community invite parents to send seven virgins to live with him? Martha's account of Wroe's routine abuse, much of it reminding us that her father had hurt her in a similar way (168), confirms our suspicions that Wroe is after sexual gratification from some, if not all, the women in his community. Later Joanna, in a state of turmoil, finds herself unable to order her thoughts: she, who has been the most sympathetic of the women to Wroe, has discovered that Wroe has taken advantage of both Leah and Hannah for the gratification of what she calls his base desires. "Entrusted by God with a sacred mission ... he has abused that trust" (236). Joanna is, with slight reluctance, reaching the conclusion that Hannah had already reached: despite the fact that when he looks directly at her Hannah does not know what to think, she has made the perceptive judgement that Wroe is an actor (190). Joanna, too, is made aware that he is a charlatan.

This absence of the authority of dignity in Bishop, Mompellion and Wroe draws attention once again to the overlap between preaching and acting, the potential confusion between which might be offset by an appreciation of a preacher's 'textual self-footing' and the concept of 'embodied delivery'. These are terms borrowed from the work of Frances Lee Smith[78] and the insights of feminist gender studies such as those outlined by Ruth Pidwell.[79] The insights, however, transcend gender boundaries.

Performativity, named in Chapter 1 as one of the problems of preaching, is an unavoidable aspect of our lives as social beings. We are never able to escape performativity, for we *act* who we are rather than *are* who we are. This is a development of Judith Butler's understanding of gender as performatively constructed[80] by repetition, reiteration and ritual.[81] If preachers, who are expected to be people of integrity, *act* or construct their identity as preachers,

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[78] Smith, Frances L., *op. cit.*

[79] Pidwell, Ruth, "The Word Made Flesh: Gender and Embodiment in Contemporary Preaching." in *Social Semiotics*, 11:2, (2001), pp.177-192.

[80] Butler, Judith, *op. cit.*, p.33.

[81] *ibid.*, p.xv and Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. (London: Routledge, 1993).

then this poses a dilemma which Richard Ward expresses: because performance is readily associated with playacting and grandstanding, how can preachers perform authentically?[82] As a teacher of homiletics Ward attempts to turn his students away from the imitative artifice and the self-regarding persona that he notices many adopt towards what he calls 'embodied delivery.'[83] Although he credits a fellow homiletician, Don Wardlow, the origins of this term can be detected in feminist theories of body, of which, as Ruth Pidwell says, there are at least three:[84] the 'essentialist' theory based on women's biological differences from men, the 'social constructionist' theory based on both the performance of gender and the notion that society imprints its ideas of gender on the body and, third, 'embodied subjectivity' which postulates the notion that the body is an interface or threshold between the material and the symbolic. This concept of embodied delivery embraces Pidwell's claim that preaching includes materiality as well as discursivity[85] and is rigorously theological in that embodiment is a central christological concept. If it is coupled with Frances Lee Smith's concept of textual self-footing, the perceived clash between performativity and integrity might be avoided. In her attempt to distinguish between the ways women and men preach, Smith suggested that preachers typically display textual selves as exegetes, illustrators or exhorters[86] and that each of these textual selves may be expressed in one of three forms of talk – parenthetical embroidery which gives the impression of light authority, hypersmooth delivery and high style.[87] Deborah Tannen's brief discussion of Smith's work suggests that, because they normally avoid high style talk in the pulpit, women preachers manage to exercise authority without explicitly claiming it.[88] It is as if their performance is in who they are, rather than in what they say or how they say it.

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[82] Ward, Richard, "Performance turns in homiletics: wrong way or right on?" in *The Journal of Communication and Religion*, 17:1(1994), p.2.
[83] *ibid.*, pp.7-8.
[84] *op. cit.*, pp.178-181.
[85] *op. cit.*, p.178.
[86] *op. cit.*, p.147.
[87] *ibid.*, p.151.
[88] Tannen, Deborah, *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and Men at Work: Language, sex and power*. (London: Virago, 1994), p.175.

This embodied delivery is often visually signified by the preacher's apparel, which is one of the performance frames in section 2.2 of the analytical checklist. Indeed, Pidwell's article about gendered embodiment in contemporary preaching includes a discussion of the choice women preachers make between 'neutral' priestly garb and gendered feminine dress and says that liturgical attire is a visual signifier of "religio-cultural discourses ... inscribed on to the preacher's body."[89] On the other hand, as in the case of Ted Bishop's purple jogging suit, inappropriate costumes, inducing sniggers from the audience, can compromise the performer.

Embodied delivery implies the inseparability of the preacher from what is preached and exposes the falsehood of the sneering canard that, although the Word became flesh, Protestantism has made him words again. Furthermore, the fictional presence of Bishop, Mompellion and Wroe as undignified preachers alerts us both to the inevitability of enfleshed performance in preaching and to the way preaching is compromised when the authority of dignity is absent: the preacher is as much a part of the text of the sermon as are words on the page, so, today as in the age of classical rhetoric, the preacher still needs to be *vir bonus*. In the case of Paul Tillich, this might not be an issue because we do not encounter him in the flesh; rather, we read his disembodied voice.

Intratextual authority

Having discussed at some length the authoritative texts to which the preacher appeals and the authority of the preacher, there remains a third aspect of the authority of fictional sermons. This is intratextual authority, by which I mean the authority established for the sermon by the novelist, or the extent to which the novelist presents the sermons as privileged texts. Remembering that the inclusion of externally authoritative discourses can be hazardous for the novelist because according to Bakhtin they become dead quotations, it is apparent that the sermons in the nine novels examined in this thesis mostly avoid the danger of ossification; the novelists retain vitality for the fictional sermons, some more

[89] *op. cit.*, p.189.

successfully than others, by the deployment of several techniques. John Murray in *John Dory* uses the technique of end-placing by locating Ken Wright's lengthy sermon towards the end of the novel with only a few concluding pages to follow. Others such as Byatt and Lodge use sermons during *rites de passages* at significant moments like weddings and funerals, thereby heightening sermons as commentaries facilitating and making sense of life change. Brooks and Rogers introduce sermons at turning points in their narratives, what Toolan called the hinge points, kernels, or nuclei of narratives.[90] Placed at these points, the sermons are necessary to the narrative and determine the narrative's direction. For instance, Mompellion's sermon establishes a *cordon sanitaire* around Eyam and Wroe's marketplace sermon, prepared for with brooding ominous expectation, establishes suspicion in the minds of the women of his community. Arditti's more complex novel employs facets of all these techniques: the sermons in *Easter* form part of the integral structure of the novel, figured around the events of Holy Week; Blair Ashley's climactic Easter sermon enjoys the privilege of end-placing located in the novelist's account of the final act of worship in the book; some of the sermons are preached during *rites de passages* including a wedding, a funeral and the blessing of a lesbian partnership; and they all mark hinge points in the narrative of Holy Week. Furthermore, in all these novels, some of the narratival interest, satire and humour are found in the way auditors respond, or fail to respond, to the preaching.

This question of response to preaching brings me to the next problem with these sermons – the difficulty of convincingly communicating religious experience in fiction.

[90] Toolan, Michael J., *op. cit.*, p.22.

4: Religious experience: epiphany and magical realism

Paul Gauguin's painting, *Vision of the Sermon: Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, in which a small group of Breton women listen to a sermon on Jacob's story in Genesis, demonstrates how important are questions about the nature of religious experience to any assessment of the practice of preaching. In the painting, either the women are so devout and suggestible – or the preaching is so vivid and effectual – that the women can actually see the event that is being described. The preacher is not in the painting: instead Gauguin paints Jacob and the wrestling angel, thus the invisible is seen in bold outline against a field of crimson, giving visible form to vision. From outside the painting we are able to visualise the religious experiences of the people in the painting as their imaginations are caught up in the preaching event. Pictorially, Gauguin's painting draws our attention to the fact that engaging with a sermon as a listener is potentially an experience that takes us either 'beyond ourselves' into a spiritual realm or inwardly into the world of creative and spiritual imagination; it is potentially a religious experience.[1]

[1] Whitford, Frank. "Gauguin's Vision." in *The Sunday Times*, London, 7 August 2005, pp.6-7.

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Religious experience is widely regarded as the most protean and complex of topics in the psychology of religion. Preaching is 'complicated' by the presence not only of the potential for religious experience for hearers but also the preacher's previous religious experience, either giving rise to his or her vocation to a preaching ministry or specifically related to the subject matter of the sermon under way. These prior experiences of the preacher are often antecedents for preaching. My aim in this chapter is to consider whether preaching in fiction is capable of communicating the validity of such religious experiences in a manner accessible and acceptable to secular readers. To achieve this aim I will focus on one novel from my primary sources and use both the novel and insights from cognitive psychology to reach an understanding of the nature of religious experience. I will begin with a critique of current models of religious experience and conclude with discussions of two novel genres – epistolary novels and magic realism – useful to both novelists and preachers in their efforts to communicate religious experience convincingly.

I have chosen to focus on John Murray's novel, *John Dory,* in this chapter because the nature of religious experience, in its credibility and its capacity to effect change in people's lives, is declared by its narrator to be the *crux interpretationis* of the book. Although crises of vocation, faith or experience faced by preachers such as Blair Ashley in *Easter* and Austin Brierley in *How Far Can You Go?* are addressed in their preaching, none addresses questions of the nature, credibility or validity of religious experience as directly as Murray's novel does. About half way through the novel, at the beginning of a new chapter in an unmissably prominent location, the narrator says, "Now we get to the heart of the matter, meaning the validity or otherwise of a spoken as opposed to a wordless message" (100). There are at least five categories of such messages or experiences to be dealt with in an appraisal of this text. The most prominent is that of the fictional preacher, Ken Wright, who tells of his conversion to Christianity in his confessional sermon; next is George Singer's experience of listening to Ken's testimony within the sermon; this is contrasted with George Singer's largely non-verbal experiences of a shimmering Christmas tree, a smiling fish, a seahorse in the labour of childbirth and swinging coal

buckets, all foregrounded in the novel by the author's italicisation of these epiphanies; prior to these intratextual types of experience, there is the author's own experience of low church Anglicanism and independent gospel hall evangelicalism; and, furthermore, 'after' the text, there is our experience of reading *John Dory*.

The extension of potential religious experiences in *John Dory* to include those of the author and readers can be justified by referring to an essay intended to encourage students interested in the multidisciplinary study of religion and literature to take seriously and do justice to "the religion-half of 'religion and literature'", in which Eric Ziolkowski contended that we may ask four questions of any text.[2] First, what is known about the religious beliefs of the author and how does this illuminate any possible religious aspects of the novel's themes, characters, symbolism and motifs? Next, what image of the universe does the text present and how might this have been conditioned by the religio-cultural world in which the text was produced? Then, what moral or spiritual effect does the text either achieve or seem intended to achieve in the reader? Finally, how does the text relate to religious thought, practice or institutions within its particular context? The presence in Ziolkowski's questions of both the author, *contra* the New Critics for whom the text is everything, and the reader has emboldened me to expand the list of potential religious experiences in *John Dory* beyond the text itself to include Murray and his readers, particularly because his declared intention in writing the novel was to convince his readers of the power of Christianity and the authenticity of its truth claims, to which didactic and suasory end he exploits Ken Wright's sermon. The novel invites its readers to consider how credible and effective, valid and authentic, both wordless and word-based religious experiences are.

In common parlance the terms 'religious experience' and 'spiritual experience' are often used synonymously. However, theologically speaking, there is a distinction in that 'religious' implies bound up in or related to

[2] Ziolkowski, Eric J., "History of Religions and the Study of Religion and Literature: Grounds for alliance." in *Literature and Theology*, 12:3, (September 1998), p.317.

Otherness, whilst 'spiritual' suggests something to do with an aspect of Self, or the ground of one's being whether expressed physically, mentally or (tautologically) spiritually. In this chapter I am conscious of this distinction, but, as my discussion here is in terms of the psychology of religion rather than 'pure' theology, I can use both terms interchangeably without confusion.

Current academic understanding of religious experience among cognitive psychologists originates in the foundational work of William James first published in 1902.[3] James began with a review of the creeds of world religions as he sought a common nucleus and tried to identify a principle which he suggested was universal: that people feel a sense of uneasiness which can only be resolved by contact with a higher power. He suggested that it might be a characteristic of human consciousness to have a sense of reality beyond that given by the senses, an experience he called 'ontological imagination'. Such ontological imagination can be so powerful that it creates experiences that are as strong as hallucinations and totally convincing to those who have them. The authenticity of such religious experiences may be demonstrated by the dynamism and zest they give to the experiencer, by the way the experiencer finds significance in the event and by the enchantment the experience gives to everyday life. He argued that the validity or veracity of the origin of such experiences neither diminishes nor enhances their spiritual significance, for this is recognised by its fruit in people's lives.

Taking their lead from James, Daniel Batson with Patricia Schoenrade and Larry Ventis also focused their attention on more dramatic and intense religious experiences believing that these would most clearly demonstrate the psychological processes involved.[4] They cited ten instances: Siddhartha, Moses, Saul of Tarsus, Augustine of Hippo, Teresa of Avila, Henry David Thoreau, someone attending a revivalist camp-meeting, a twenty-eight year old student, Malcolm X and a psychologist who had taken LSD. They then used the analogy of the creative process, in which there are commonly four stages of preparation,

[3] James, William, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. (London: Fontana, 1960).
[4] Batson, C. Daniel, Patricia Schoenrade and W. Larry Ventis, *Religion and the Individual: A Social-Psychological Perspective*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

incubation, illumination and verification, to posit a four-stage model of religious experience common to all ten cited instances. Whereas creativity involves an initial stage, 'preparation', in which the inventor is conscious of lack of success with old or existing methods, the first stage of religious experience is existential crisis. The second stage of creativity is 'incubation', in which the thinker deliberately gives up thinking about the problem, provides an analogue in religious experience for the stage of self-surrender. The third creative stage, 'illumination', in which a new way emerges as a result of the insightful experience of knowing the answer, is matched in religious experience by the discovery or emergence of a new vision. The final stage, 'verification', in which the new way is tested, has its equivalent in religious experience in the discovery of a new way of living – new life.

In a paper published in *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, Anthony Edwards with Mike Lowis challenged this Batson-Schoenrade-Ventis model of religious experience (BSV) in four ways.[5] First, they questioned whether a stage model is at all appropriate for religious experience, especially as they interpret James to have intimated that transiency [*sic*] is a characteristic of religious experience. Next, asking whether all four stages are necessary to the model, they set forward the notion that BSV's last stage is inessential. Then they challenged the BSV model on the basis that its description of the contents of each stage is too vague, but concluded that to be too specific about the contents of the stages would limit the comprehensibility of the model. Finally, they considered whether the model is sufficiently comprehensive to cover a wide range of religious experiences and concluded that, although it might overemphasise cognitive aspects of religious experiences, it is cross-culturally universal and cross-credal. In the light of these considerations Edwards and Lowis reformulated the BSV model as a three-stage model. Like the BSV model rooted in James's classical work, it has echoes of a classical work, in this case Evelyn Underhill's study of mysticism published in

[5] Edwards, Anthony C. and Lowis, Mike J., "The Batson-Schoenrade-Ventis Model of Religious Experience: Critique and Reformulation." in *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 11:4, (2001), pp.215-234.

1911.[6] The three stages – preparation, incubation and illumination – echo Underhill's Awakening of Self, Purification of Self and Illumination of Self, although Edwards and Lowis are careful to point out that their model of religious experience is more positive about its understanding of renunciation than in Underhill's second stage of mystical experience. Edwards and Lowis concluded their paper by warning that what they are offering is not a statement of fact to be treated as dogma (the fate they imply has befallen James and BSV); rather, it is a useful heuristic device.

In the same edition of the journal, Chris Boyatzis offered a critique of Edwards and Lowis's reformulation of the BSV model, raising many issues that ring true for many practitioners of Christian ministry and spiritual advisors in the current age when many people are suspicious of organised religion yet spiritually curious. The first is to do with the diversity of religious experience, the second to do with the relation between extreme cases and lesser experiences, the third to do with the selectivity of narrativity and the fourth to do with the passage of time between the occurrence and its telling, all of which are to do with the problem of veracity.

The diversity of claimed religious experience is so great that it is difficult to circumscribe. Indeed, according to Boyatzis who believes that 'varieties' is the key word in the title of James's book, some scholars are of the opinion that it is not worthwhile to search for inherent common features of religious experiences. He quotes Kwilecki's "medley" of religious experiences:

> *"Jehovah's Witnesses knocking on the door to announce the Apocalypse, Jain monks starving themselves to death, Mother Teresa succo[u]ring the dying, New Agers recalling past lives, Islamic terrorists plotting vengeance on the United States, yogis immobilised in blissful trance – and, of course, average Americans reciting blessings over meals and filing into pews on Sunday mornings."*[7]

This list is, of course, more a list of religious practices and observances (some of them deviant), but each is potentially a form of religious experience, if the term

[6] Underhill, Evelyn, *Mysticism: The Nature and Development of Spiritual Consciousness.* (Oxford: One World, 1993).
[7] Boyatzis, Chris J., "A Critique of Models of Religious Experience." in *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 11:4 (2001), p.248.

'experience' is considered in this context to suggest some form of communication with the Divine Other or the spiritual Self. To this medley I add the assortment of claimed religious experiences ministers encounter as they listen to parishioners in the confessional, the counselling room, the vestry or by the fireside. Typically these might include claims of near-death experiences, extraordinary calm before surgery, strange phenomena associated with bereavement, recovery from illness, visions and messages, vocations and so on. To these I add both the disturbing claims of the American President Bush that God told him to invade Iraq and the much less worrying fictional catalogue of ordinary-but-extraordinary events in George Singer's narrative: coal buckets that glow eerily in the dark, a shimmering Christmas tree, a turbot that seems to smile, a seahorse rocking as it gives birth to a myriad of young and a sermon describing a dramatic conversion to Christianity. The discovery of either a single stage-like model of progression that will cover all instances of claimed religious experiences or a classification system that will classify and account for such diverse experiences is unlikely ever to be made.

The second problem is to do with whether extreme examples of religious experience can be used in any way to comment on less dramatic cases. Boyatzis cites Paloutzian's observation that religious experiences differ along many dimensions: "ordinary versus unusual, frequent versus infrequent, prebelief versus postbelief, mystical versus earthly, and so on."[8] Boyatzis observes that most discussions of religious experience, including those of James, Batson and his associates and Edwards and Lowis, favour the unusual and infrequent. However, the much more common type of religious experience is that felt by ordinary people in daily life. What have these to do with the exceptional cases of, say, Moses at the burning bush or Daniel in the lions' den? He asks whether exceptional figures can speak for the masses and whether the extreme case is *sui generis*. Clearly, extreme cases, in other words either dramatic life-changing experiences or experiences felt by people who are either highly-charged spiritually or saintly, can mark the upper and outer limits of religious

[8] *ibid.*, p.249.

experiences. However, most religious experiences are less dramatic and will not result in cognitive restructuring; most people will resume their everyday lives as if nothing has happened. Often the experience will confirm a pre-existing faith or worldview rather than induce new vision.

Boyatzis's third insight into problems with religious experience is to do with the fact that people inevitably use narrative to recount religious experiences. Boyatzis reminds us that narrative requires three components – the selection of experiences for inclusion, a temporal ordering of such experiences and the imposition of a meaningful theme or moral.[9] The telling of the experience is not the experience itself, but an interpretation, some might say corruption, of the experience. The telling of the experience may impose a stage-like structure on the events because the narrator chooses both to omit incongruous aspects and to include all that reinforces his or her interpretation of events. Accounts of religious experiences are always "mitigated reality":[10] testimony is an overtly innuendoed narrative of events, thus generally untrustworthy. In *John Dory* Ken Wright narrates his conversion experience in great detail, yet what we have is not the 'pure' objective experience: in his telling of the experience, 'what actually happened' has become 'an exploration of the significance of events in my life that made me see things differently'. How can we trust the interpretation Wright applies to the events he chooses to tell us? Is what he tells us undermined by the untold countertext? Is what he tells us compromised by the limits of language to construct and understand experience? Readers know that, because he is preaching, he has selected his warrants and data to suit his rhetorical purpose: does this create yet more suspicion about the veracity of his religious experience?

The fourth issue raised by Boyatzis follows from the problem of selectivity in narrating events; he asks, what has the passage of time between the experience and its subsequent retelling of it done to the experience and the 'story'?[11] In short, he suggests that, once a person arrives at a particular outcome or stage in religious experience, both individuals and psychologists have a

[9] *ibid.*, p.252.
[10] *ibid.*, p.253, quoting Bruner.
[11] *ibid.*, p.254.

propensity to look back and identify a particular path that led to the outcome. When we look back on experiences we tend to schematise and see in them a line of deterministic progression. In other words, the construction of stages in religious experience is a phenomenon resulting from our narrativizing nature, rather than an essential attribute of the experience itself. The passage of time between the experience and its telling gives the experiencer, who is also the eventual narrator, time to mould the experience to fit. This is not to say that Ken Wright, or others like him who testify to religious experiences, are necessarily being dishonest, but it is does alert us to the shape-shifting quality of religious or spiritual experience.

This indefinability of religious experience presents practical problems. Testing a person's vocation to ministry, assessing the validity of a person's claim for a vision or message from God, deciding on the veracity or otherwise of a supernatural experience, discerning God's Word among, within, behind or over a preacher's many words are all notoriously difficult tasks to fulfil objectively. They become all the more difficult when we attempt to establish religious experience as natural and normal, as unremarkable as listening to music, reading a book or looking at a picture, as quotidian as sunrise. In the middle years of the twentieth century, the work of M.V.C. Jeffreys gave direction to pedagogical thought in many mainstream British churches and led to an experiential approach to Christian education being encouraged by the newly formed National Christian Education Council and adopted by many children's education departments in churches. Part of his argument for an experiential approach to education helps towards an understanding of the nature of religious experience. He wrote:-[12]

> *"It is of the greatest important to understand that religious truth is not a special kind of truth, nor religious experience a queer, unnatural kind of experience belonging to some strange and other world. Religious experience is normal experience, and we have religious experience every day, whether or not we recognise it as such. Religious truth is normal experience understood at full depth; what makes truth religious is not that it relates to some abnormal field of thought and feeling but that it goes to the roots of the experience which it interprets."*

[12] Jeffreys, M. V. C., *Glaucon: An Inquiry into the Aims of Education*. (London, Pitman and Sons Ltd., 1950), p.118.

An almond branch in blossom is an almond branch in blossom – or a vision communicating divine truth to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah; an open book is an open book – or a divine invitation for Augustine to pick it up and read there words that changed the direction of his life; a pool of spilt whisky is a pool of spilt whisky – or the moment of revelation when Ken Wright knew he had reached "total degradation" (202, 205). This is something of a frustratingly circular and subjective argument, for it appears that the acid test of religious experience is only and always retrospective: if the result of the experience is to take either the experiencer, other people or both deeper into an understanding of 'Ultimate Truth' then such an experience can be called religious or spiritual, but this cannot be known either in advance of, or during, the experience. The worth of religious experiences can be known only or, at best, mainly by their fruit.

The sermon within *John Dory* is by far the longest of those studied in my research. It is in three sections.

I. What are you worth? (138-147)

II Ken Wright's testimony (147-161 and 188-208)

III The doctrine of justification (214f.)

The most obvious difference between the sections is in the manner of the sermon's presentation. The first section is presented mainly in direct speech with frequent interludes in which the narrator draws the reader's attention to what is happening both elsewhere in the room and within the audience's thoughts. The second section is still in direct speech although there are fewer interruptions; the effect is that this section reads as if it is an uninterrupted, unmediated first person narrative. The third section is much shorter and contains no direct speech. It uses narrator's representation of speech acts such as, "For the next half hour he talked in terms which I barely understood, and I listened very hard, afraid to miss a single word" (214). In this the author gives readers none of the words used by the preacher; in fact, at this stage the only indication he gives of the subject is its complexity and the narrator's sense of its importance. In the main paragraph of this short section the author uses free indirect speech; it is told in the grammatical style of indirect speech but it retains a trace of some of the actual words and phrases the speaker may have used. As a result, the reader feels that

Murray implies that this last theoretical section of the sermon is less important than the life-story Wright has just given; the author is summarising what the preacher says to save the reader the task of reading it; it is as if the author has made sufficient demands on the secular reader and needs to counter Ken Wright's undiluted preaching with George Singer's memory of his deeply anti-religious mother who described such theology as "a load of poppycock" (215).

I note also the flatter intonation conveyed in the narrative of the second section of the sermon. The reader is less aware that this section is being preached; Wright is simply telling his story. Of course, in telling the story, Wright still intends to have an effect on the audience, but this section of the discourse is markedly less suasory than the first. Indeed Wright is telling his story to an extratextual audience. This is inversely reminiscent of the way Chaucer's Pardoner switches his address from an imaginary congregation back to his audience of pilgrims: "- And lo, sires, thus I preche."[13]

My reading of the novel stimulates five points for discussion in the remainder of this chapter. First, as expected, I found that some parts of the toolkit that I devised for the analysis of fictional sermons were more useful when analysing different sermons than others. I discovered that schemata, politeness phenomena and point of view were particularly helpful concepts when analysing the narratival section of Ken Wright's sermon and its treatment of religious experience.

Asking what schemata are being relied on in the text of Wright's sermon (1.2 in my checklist) reveals his dependence upon the schemata of classical spiritual auto/biography, the sort of lifewriting which Christianity has produced in abundance for spiritual nurture and encouragement. Free Church services, such as that described in *John Dory*, have often given opportunity for members of the congregation to give their testimony. Those who attended early Methodist class meetings, for instance, were expected to testify to what God had done for them on a weekly basis. It remains the practice that people training to be

[13] Chaucer, Geoffrey, *Canterbury Tales*. (London: Dent, 1958 edition), p.359 line 915.

Methodist local preachers must give an account of their call to the circuit local preachers' meeting and, until very recently, the final stage of candidacy for ordination as a Methodist presbyter was to give an account of one's call to District Synod. This tradition continues in *The Methodist Worship Book* authorised for use in 1999, in which the third order for Holy Communion in the Ordinary Season has rubric allowing for someone to give his or her testimony,[14] as has the Confirmation Service.[15] When these opportunities are taken, my experience of hearing many of them over more than twenty years in the ministry is that they tend to be formulaic.

Life writing always has been, and continues to be, a vibrant oral and written genre within Christianity. In common with all life writing, religious auto/biography has an inevitable element of fictiveness in that the author reorders scattered ingredients to search for, or create, an order and meaning to life. Terry Wright discusses this in relation to Augustine's *Confessions, The Book of Margery Kempe* and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding.* The conclusion Terry Wright reaches is that testimony and conversion narratives are products of intertextuality, modelled on narratives of divine calling such as those found in the bible.[16] They are also modelled on Old and New Testament redemption narratives – in the case of the Old from slavery through wilderness into a promised land and in the case of the New through death to resurrection. One of the results of people attempting to construct for themselves a Christian identity by locating themselves within a particular repertoire of emplotted stories[17] is the sameness heard in the convention of testimony. This genre of spiritual auto/biography, in contradistinction with postmodernity's distrust of metanarrative and optimistic final resolutions, conventionally includes the elements of a religious childhood lost, a wasteful time in a far country and a conversionist route to 'salvation'.

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[14] Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *The Methodist Worship Book.* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 1999), p.215.
[15] *ibid.*, p.98.
[16] Wright, Terry, *op. cit.*, p.94.
[17] Brown, Callum, *op. cit.*, p.70.

A. J. Krailsheimer tested the formula in his book about conversion to Christianity.[18] On the basis of three models of conversion - those of Paul, Augustine and Francis - and accounts of nine other conversion narratives, Krailsheimer attempted to identify a common pattern. The methodology of his book is without scientific controls and his book is hindered by its circularity – did he select his examples because they sustained his pattern or did the pattern emerge from significant samples? – yet it is helpful in that it portrays conversion as a totalising narrative which entails an unconditional forsaking of the past, often after a period of emotional or intellectual confusion. More recently, Bruce Hindmarsh has published a comprehensive account of conversion narratives in the eighteenth century in which he identifies a common pattern: a life crisis provokes a quest leading to an encounter with advocates of a new belief system, which in turn leads to a process of deeper exploration of the new option ultimately consummated in an act of commitment.[19] He points out that, in the case of early Methodist spiritual life writing, Wesley's control of his preachers' lives and his editing hand gave their narratives a coherence which is suspect.[20] According to Isabel Rivers, Wesley's control of his preachers' reading and writing, apart from obvious reliance on John Bunyan and Joseph Alleine, repeatedly included recommendation of four particular religious life writers – Haliburton, a Scottish Presbyterian minister, de Renty, a French Catholic nobleman, Lopez, a Spanish Catholic hermit and Brainerd, an American Presbyterian missionary. In these he found a standard pattern of Christian perfection for his preachers to imitate.[21]

Both critics and sympathisers of religion express themselves suspicious of such totalising narratives for their portrait of what a former Anabaptist, Gerard Peters, called a mutilating God.[22] The new future embraced by the convert is often described as new birth in that *μετανοια* entails total change, which is often

[18] Krailsheimer, A. J., *Conversion.* (London: SCM Press, 1980).
[19] Hindmarsh, D. Bruce, *op. cit.*, p.11.
[20] *ibid.*, pp.241f.
[21] Rivers, Isabel, "Strangers and Pilgrims: Sources and Patterns of Methodist Narrative" in *Augustan Worlds.* Hilson, J.D., Jones, M.M.B. and Watson, J.R., eds., (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), p.195.
[22] Peters, Gerald, *The Mutilating God: authorship and authority in the narrative of conversion.* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

an entirely private affair leaving the convert feeling a sense of isolation even when among friends. Common to all these discussions of conversion testimonies is the observation that testifiers are aware of other examples of religious selfwriting, which suggests that the genre feeds itself.

The formula of Christian conversion testimony reflects the dominant Protestant salvation schema, represented in diagrammatic form in figure 8. It is now challenged because sinfulness is no longer universally regarded as our original state and sin is no longer regarded as the prevalent problem from which people need to be individually saved. Among the many theologies that trouble the sin-salvation schema those described by Matthew Fox, Mary Grey, Daphne Hampson, James Alison, Don Cupitt and Stephen Pattison might be mentioned.[23] These are written from a variety of theological perspectives including feminist, gay, postmodern, post-Christian and practical.

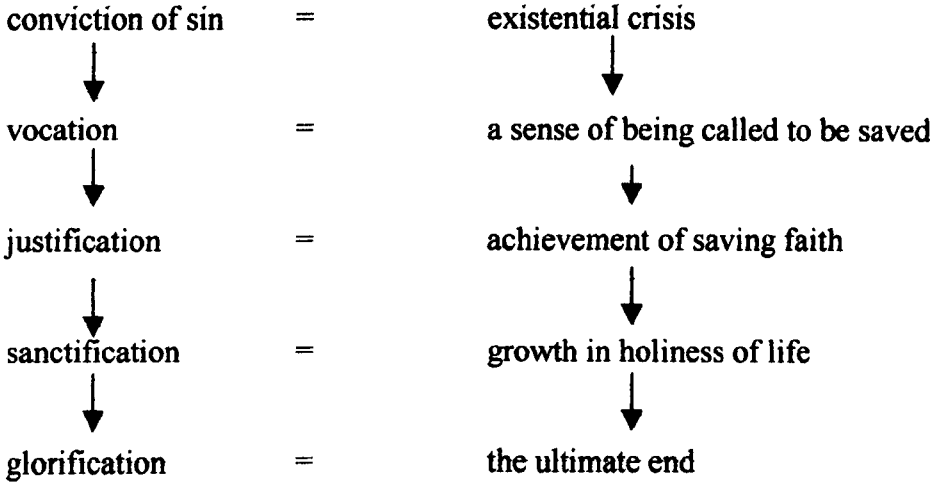

Fig. 8

Nevertheless, the schemata of classical spiritual lifewriting and conversion narrative are the basis of Wright's testimony. One of the attractions of schema theory is that it does not exclude people with only a passing

[23] Fox, Matthew, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*. (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Co., 1983), Grey, Mary, *Redeeming the Dream: Feminism, Redemption and Christian Tradition*. (London: SPCK, 1989), Hampson, Daphne, *After Christianity*. (London: SCM Press, 1996), Pattison, Stephen, *Shame: Theory, Therapy, Theology*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) and Alison, James, *On Being Liked*. (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 2003).

familiarity with a genre, situation or 'script'; familiarity with certain 'slots' in the script is good enough for the reader to negotiate the text successfully.[24] Typically, Stockwell claims, these scripts include props, participants, entry conditions, results and sequence of events. In the case of the gospel hall testimony schema in which *John Dory*'s sermon is located, the props are the chapel, simple liturgy and enthusiastic redemption-hymn singing (139); the participants are a lay preacher, a convert (who in this case is, but need not be, the same person) and an encouraging congregation; the entry condition is the recounting of an experience in the past which proved to be transformative; the overt result is typically an invitation for members of the congregation to experience the same, whilst covert inward results may include the encouragement of congregation members in their continuing life of faith and their approval of the testifier; the sequence of events is that outlined in figure 8. Successful processing of the discourse does not depend upon familiarity with all the script, but it does rely on the reader displaying some recognising and confirming experiential base. This conversion schema is so embedded in popular culture that it figures in politicians' stories, even by someone from a different religious base. Thus, general readers are familiar enough with it to see that Ken Wright's story preserves and reinforces the schema to the extent that its stereotypicality parodies and challenges its norms. Could it really be true that "the badge man", as the narrator calls him, "this harmless old bore ... in the tie and the golf-club blazer", as he calls himself, was once "as vain, as deludedly omnipotent as the worst megalomaniac conceivable" (152)? The exaggerated grandeur and arrogant pride of the young Wright is mirrored by the exaggerated degradation of the 'justification stage' in the schema when he describes himself as "the most hideous creature alive ... the ugliest insect that had ever existed" (205). The parodied hyperbole pushes Wright's narrative beyond credibility for the reader familiar with the schema at work; indeed Wright introduces it as "something incredible" (149). By permitting George Singer to suspect that this might be an invented "paradigm confession" taught by a Bible College correspondence course (149), the novelist, who, independently of the novel when

[24] Stockwell, Peter, *op. cit.*, p.78.

I interviewed him, declared himself keen to convince readers of the power of Christianity in Wright's life, indicates his awareness that he risks allowing the parodic elements in his testimony to challenge the conversion narrative schema, for some readers irreparably. Moreover, if it is true that testimony is both narrative and act, as Ricoeur, after Levinas, claims,[25] then where is the ethical witness pursuant of Wright's narrative?

Ironically some of the parodic elements in the sermon are employed by the preacher as politeness phenomena (1.3 in my checklist) to mitigate face-threatening acts in the discourse, the most threatening of which is the question he used as the link between sections one and two of the sermon: "What do you think you are worth?" Wright knows that if he randomly asked people on Maryport main street that question he would get "a gobful of indignation ... a split lip and a black eye" (141), so he must mitigate the threat of the question when put to his congregation. One of his techniques is to deflect the question away from his hearers toward intellectuals who had left Cumbria to get an education before returning to boast of their worthiness by buying "the gleamingest bungalow or most imposing Edwardian villa in the finest West Cumbrian suburb" (142). Another is to be repeatedly self-derogatory – "a completely uninteresting specimen", "a boring looking individual" and "this dull old gadger" in one paragraph alone - up to, and beyond, the point in the sermon when he answers his own question by declaring that he is worth nothing at all (147). His self-deprecatory comments, reinforced by Singer's description of the preacher as "a brilliantined golf-club steward of pensionable age who'd impulsively decided to step out of his mundane role and talk about God" (140), are paragraphs-long in a sermon in which he portrays himself as one whose CV induces "one big yawn" (148).

Here the point of view from which the sermon is communicated to the novel's readers is significant (2.2 in my checklist). We hear the sermon from two points of view – George Singer's in his role as the novel's narrator and Ken Wright's as the preacher. Unlike the other fictional preachers in this study, Ken

[25] McClure, John S., *op. cit.*, p.123.

Wright is unusual in that we are never given anything of his inner life; all we have is what Wright chooses to tell us. All we know of Wright is the sermon and it is his unmediated and unadulterated voice that tells us; in this respect, he is unique in the novel. The effect of this is to reduce the longest and most detailed epiphany in the novel to the level of all others; Wright's verbose message – a fifth of the novel and longer by far than most actual sermons – giving a crafted and considered lifestory told in public can, as a result, be measured against transient wordless epiphanies that Murray has made so ridiculous and personal that they are untranslatable and non-transferable. Their veracity is hard to test because they are private affairs that only the experiencer sees, yet to George Singer the sermon is supplementary to them and it is hearing the sermon that enables him to remember and understand the significance of previously incomprehensible epiphanies, perhaps because of the cumulative effect of experience on one's perception. The other side of the same coin is that the epiphanies have made him susceptible to hearing the Word in the sermon; they have made him suggestible to religious experience. Unwittingly I fear, given his declared motivation for writing this novel, Murray has affirmed the significance of susceptibility, suggestibility and, perhaps gullibility in cases of religious experience. As I recently read, "Christians have Christian religious experiences; Moslems have Moslem religious experiences; Hindus have Hindu religious experiences and, for that matter, Catholics have Catholic religious experiences and Protestants, well they don't usually experience the Virgin Mary!"[26] It is not surprising therefore that Ken Wright's circumstances, George Singer's presence in the mission hall and the congregation's repeated hearing of formulaic conversion narratives make them vulnerable to religious experiences fitting the Puritan schema.

The second point to make about the efficacy of *John Dory* as a novel about religious experience is to celebrate its polyphony. The main body of the novel is a first person narrative, but Singer's life story is populated with such richly diverse and eccentric characters, including his illiterate school friend Squinty Bar Radish to whom and through whom some bizarre events occur, that

[26] Hood, Adam, "Faith and Fear." in *The Expository Times*, 115:5, (February 2004), p.147.

the novel is, for the most part, polyphonous. The concept of fictional polyphony is generally regarded as originating in one of Bakhtin's early essays in which he attributed the significance of Dostoevsky's novels to the way in which readers are permitted to engage with a multitude of different characters at once; because several conversations run concurrently there is what Bakhtin called "a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices."[27] Drawing a distinction between single-voiced 'monologic' discourse and multilayered 'polyphonic' discourse, Bakhtin attributed Dostoevsky's greatness to his refusal to synthesise the complexity and polyphony of human life into a single 'author's message'. David Cunningham used this important distinction to draw attention to his claim that too many Christian theologians of recent decades have tried to identify and isolate a single melody line, succeeding only in reducing the plurality of Christian theology to a tedious monotone;[28] the same could be said of much Christian preaching.

The distinction can be seen in *John Dory*, too. Some reviewers regard the episodic nature of *John Dory* to be a weakness of the novel – and it is true that it is not always clear what strings together some of these episodes apart from a Cumbrian delight in folk tales - yet these episodes create a healthy polyphony successfully communicating both the physicality and the spirituality of the protagonist's life. This is only lost when the reader reaches the novel's core event, Singer's encounter with Wright's preaching in the little chapel at the far end of the North Quay, an event for which the reader has waited since it was first alluded to in the prologue, when the narrator indicated that what he learnt from Wright was that "he knew enough by now" (12). If readers struggle to find the sermon convincing, it may be because here the author lapses into single-voiced didacticism. Inverting Trollope's positive comment in his 1873 Liverpool lecture on 'The Teaching of Novels' that "works of imagination are the sermons of the present day" into a criticism of *John Dory*, it could be argued that what had been a polyphonic work of imagination, ably exploring the 'varieties of religious experience', too readily becomes a sermon.

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[27] Cited in Cunningham, David S., *op. cit.*, p.205.
[28] *ibid.*, p.205.

The third point to make about *John Dory*'s presentation of religious experience is to note that the dominant imagery is that of birth and dawning. This is in keeping with the Protestant evangelical tradition which tends to have focused its attention on the Johannine motif of 'born again', the original Greek of which is variously translated as 'born from above' and 'born of the spirit'. It expresses the assumed theology behind Murray's writing, derived from his understanding of Lutheran theology which, I learnt in interview, he gleaned from three sources - his own practice of attending both the local parish church and an independent evangelical chapel, his reflections on the contrast between these two churches' liturgical styles through his brief enrolment on the diocesan lay readers' course and his reading of Gerhard Ebeling's introduction to Lutheran thought borrowed from the local lending library.[29]

George Singer's potentially religious experience of hearing Wright's sermon is birth-like. It begins with an unintentional walk to the little chapel at the far end of the North Quay, paralleled by Ken Wright's waking dream wandering around a strange seaport (203). Although George appears to be aimlessly wandering around, the reader is conscious of a destiny for George that draws him to this place. George's walk to the hall is also indirectly described as his journey home (132). It is not far from being a journey to Bethlehem, for the North Quay Mission Hall is a former infant school resembling an old stone barn which, to George Singer, was like a manger (137). Although the word 'manger' denotes an animal feeding trough and may be a term in widespread use in some rural areas, for most of Murray's readers 'manger' denotes a particular feeding trough, that in which the infant Jesus was laid. When George Singer realises that this tiny chapel reminds him of a manger, he remembers his epiphany of the Christmas tree in 1942 and he "felt [he] knew where [he] had come to" (137). There is a feeling that these people, and perhaps George in particular, have 'arrived'; they have come home, perhaps on a round trip that takes them back to where they started so that now they know it as if for the first time.

[29] Ebeling, Gerhard, *Luther: An Introduction to this Thought*. (London: Collins, 1970).

Ken Wright's invitation for George to attend the service includes the observation that "every moment's precious on a night like this" (132). Of course George did not understand what he meant, for as far as he could tell there was nothing extraordinary about that night. For the novel's readers it is another Christmas allusion inasmuch as traditional well-known carols refer to a holy night. It is as if this small congregation has gathered in the stable in a simple contemporary re-enactment of an adoration of the magi. These people are wise in their simplicity – a Tarns farmer listening to a talk on Nominalism, Thomism and Ockhamism - and their preacher is an educated man. Although "in an age of mind worship" (144) he scoffs at the cult of intellectualism and cites Paul on the folly of the wise and the divine intention to destroy the wisdom of the wise, Ken Wright parades more learning than he thinks the congregation need. He even tells them they can forget what he teaches them as soon as they have heard it (143). He is, in other words, an educated man feigning simplicity. Rather than wear clerical grab, he cloaks himself in simplicity and acts out the part of a preacher who expresses an uncomplicated faith without hoodwinking his congregation with long words. The simplicity of the chapel, the absence of elaborate liturgy and the lack of vestments take us back to the raw experience of one man telling another a story. Wright is conversant with other modes of preaching and, although he stands in a tradition of evangelical preaching, he claims to be more than a travelling ranter. He claims not to be a maverick, yet the guile he once used in his incredible fabrications and deceitful ways with women and gambling (154) is now employed in the 'art' of preaching. In current society where slick salespeople hoodwink the gullible, facility with words is suspect and spontaneity is not always indicative of sincerity.[30]

Yet what is heard in this manger-like chapel are educated words, which Murray intends us to adjudge to be wise words from a wise man. In fact, Wright's disingenuous derogation of the intellect and the spiritual pride of intellectuals, for whom the "penetrating powers of analysis, synthesis, syllogism (and) ratiocination" matter more than the substance of faith, whilst he, like them, lets these "enormous Greek and Latin words" trip from his tongue like "hairs

[30] Ricoeur, Paul, *op. cit.*, p.324.

from a moulting dog" in the first section of his sermon (145), compromises the trustworthiness of his testimony in the remainder.

Wright also uses birth images within the sermon's account of his conversion to Christianity. When he reaches a moment of peace after a downward spiral, he describes it as "... a feeling of connection. I felt joined to something as a baby might be joined to its mother by the navel" (204). He becomes aware again of this "faint lifeline to a source, to an imagined parent, to a font of life" (206) when, at rock bottom, he cries over spilt whisky after tripping over a couple of milk bottles. He is like a child crying over spilt milk. In an italicised paragraph within the sermon – a stylistic technique Murray employs elsewhere in the novel to highlight epiphanic moments – there is a moment of enlightenment when Ken Wright describes a white light spreading within him like an ink blot (206), or like the pool of whisky spreading over the kitchen floor.

Wright's sermon thus vindicates the readers' expectations, aroused by the curious prologue entitled *Last Things First* telling of George watching a seahorse give birth in an aquarium the day before he saw Wright and realising he knew enough by then, that, as a novel about the nature of religious experience, this is a book about men giving birth. In choosing this imagery, Murray has alighted upon a key term in cognitive psychology's understanding of the nature of religious experience. My previous discussion of the work of James, Batson and his associates and their critics demonstrated both the centrality of 'incubation' in the process and new vision, or new life, being common terms to describe the result of religious experience. So it may be observed that the nature of religious experience as described in the sermon within *John Dory* concurs with the description of religious experience offered by the dominant tradition of cognitive psychology represented by James, Batson *et al.* It is an experience of awakening or birth, by which the experiencer knows what is experienced as if for the first time. Either wordlessly, as when a fish smiles, or with diarrhoeic verbosity, as when a preacher holds forth for two to three hours' worth of monologic speech,

the penny drops and something previously unseen or unheard is now seen or heard with potentially life-changing effect.

Communicating convincing religious and spiritual experience in fiction is difficult to achieve. If novelists choose to use sermons to achieve this, it is worth considering at this stage how this relates to two specialist novel genres. First, there are some points of comparison between sermons in fiction and epistolary novels, a genre that had its heyday in the early years of the history of the novel. Second, a more recent, but disputed, novel genre - magical realism - can usefully express religious and spiritual experiences.

In a book on Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*,[31] Terry Eagleton listed five characteristics of the epistolary form of novel, each of which can be applied to the narratival section of the sermon in *John Dory*, demonstrating that the inclusion of sermons in novels both provides opportunities and creates problems for the novelist similar to those evident in epistolary novels. First, Eagleton argued that the author of an epistolary novel wants his [*sic*] readers to read the text of the letters as both fiction and real.[32] That is to say that, in the specific case of Richardson's novel, that *Clarissa*'s readers are expected to have the mental dexterity to switch between reading the letters both as something made up by Samuel Richardson and as an actual correspondence between the characters. This is also true of Ken Wright's sermon: readers are expected to read it as something imagined by John Murray but also as an actual testimony of conversion to Christianity in the novel's imagined world. As a result we react not only to what is said in the sermon but also to who is saying it: we react to Wright as a preacher claiming authenticity as well as to his story. This is also true of the other preacher in this study who most openly wears his heart on his sleeve, Blair Ashley in *Easter*.

Second, whilst Eagleton acknowledges that there are limits to the epistolary form in that, when the characters do all the writing, there is no

[31] Eagleton, Terry, *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982).
[32] *ibid.*, p.19.

authorial 'voice-over', epistolary novels have the advantage of being what he called "writing to the moment."[33] He meant by this that the letters give the characters' immediate or 'real', unmediated response to the action. This is similar to my earlier point that, like the correspondents in *Clarissa*, Wright controls his own story. His sermon is 'to-the-moment' orality, although communicated to the reader chirographically, in that it directly gives the preacher's own response to, and considered opinion of, the events that have occurred in his life. The uniqueness of this mode within *John Dory* results in the foregrounding of Wright's lifewriting above that of any other characters', even George Singer's.

Third, Eagleton suggests that the letters in *Clarissa* are supplementary to what they "are about". While they are about the sexual union of bodies, he argues that this is what is palpably absent from them, so the sexual power between Clarissa and Lovelace is 'reduced' to a matter of strategic textual moves.[34] Similarly Wright's testimony in the second part of his sermon may be regarded as being supplementary to what it is about, inasmuch as it is a considered, retrospective reordering of events to highlight their greater significance. It is a textually constructed narrative in which the preacher is capable of strategic amendments to the prepared text as he responds to the intratextual audience.

Fourth, Eagleton characterised letters in novels as both private and public. They are private in their origins in that they begin as private correspondence between characters, but they become matters of public discourse in the public domain when published in novels.[35] This is to some extent true of Wright's sermon, which does not of course have private textual origins but it does originate in personal experience and individual beliefs, which he chooses to make public when he expresses what he believes in the métier of public discourse both intratextually and extratextually. Indeed, as a didactic novel, its creator is also combining private and public realms: this is, to date, his only

[33] *ibid.*, p.25.
[34] *ibid.*, p.44.
[35] *ibid.*, p.51.

novel which he would expressly and evangelistically label 'Christian'. Similarly, we see that in *Easter*, Blair Ashley finds it difficult to keep his private life out of the public pulpit: being a closet homosexual is hardly an option for him.

Fifth, Eagleton noted that the first-person intimacy of the letter genre has the curious effect of both intensifying and distancing the 'real'. It intensifies because of the letter's immediacy, but it distances because all we have are the letters which refer away from themselves to something else.[36] This means that letters in novels are both art form and substance; they are simultaneously nature and artifice.[37] This relationship between nature and artifice is at the core of this thesis, which raises troubling questions: is there an art of preaching that makes preachers actors when they practise it? And if there is, is there any integrity left in preaching? When he gives his testimony, Wright distances himself through facility with his own art form, yet the intensity of the experience of listening to him – or reading Murray's account of him – is strong nonetheless, for here we encounter Wright's inner self or, at least, as much of it as Wright allows us to see.

David Lodge, whose novel *How Far Can You Go?* is a primary source for this thesis, also wrote about epistolary novels in his collection of articles *The Art of Fiction.* There he said that the epistolary method creates a pseudo-documentary realism yet allows the same event to be shown from more than one point of view. Moreover, the fact that the anticipated responses of the letters' specific addressees condition the discourses makes them rhetorically more complex and revealing.[38] It might be argued that a similar rhetorical complexity is achieved when sermons are inserted genres within novels, where readers can see and hear their intratextual addressees' responses, for it becomes apparent that the sermons are intended to be apprehended as both authoritative and suspect, and in some cases both fictive and real.

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[36] *ibid.*, p.60.
[37] *ibid.*, p.80.
[38] Lodge, David, *The Art of Fiction: Illustrated from Classic and Modern Texts.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), pp.23f.

For those who read *John Dory,* these characteristics leave a problem which probably compromises the credibility of the religious experience recounted in the confessional section of Wright's sermon. It is a problem common to all accounts of religious experience. Furthermore it is a particular problem in the Protestant Low Church tradition where the Word is at the centre. It is this: if preachers control what they say, how can we trust the Story or their stories? How much credibility does their religious experience carry? How do we assess how genuine any claimed religious experience is? How can novelists communicate the veracity of religious experiences?

Reading *John Dory* I also observe that features of magical realism are employed and note the potential of this genre to assist in convincing readers of the veracity of religious experience. For those who read with a Christian pre-understanding, for novelists who want to explore the topic of religious and spiritual experience and for preachers who want convincingly to communicate the possibility of the spirituality of Self or a sense of Other, the genre of magical realism is an attractive prospect. If it is true that one of magical realism's distinctive features is "the existence of an 'irreducible element' that is unexplainable according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated by modern post-enlightenment empiricism,"[39] then the concept and genre of magical realism should offer some insights into how fiction and, indeed, other literary art forms, such as preaching, treat religious experience. What makes magical realism especially attractive is that it is an oxymoronic term suggesting the numinosity of the everyday and the potentiality for reconciling secularised society with its forgotten religiosity and spirituality; it implies that the disenchanted West can recover enchantment.[40] It is what Isabel Allende called "a way of seeing in which there is space for the invisible forces that move the world: dreams, legends, myths, emotion, passion, history"[41]. However, it is also a dangerous genre in that it can easily imply that the utopian visions it offers can

[39] Faris, Wendy B., "The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magical Realism." (Arlington, Texas, 2005) www.janushead.org. Accessed 14/9/05, p.102.
[40] Warnes, Christopher, "Naturalizing the Supernatural: Faith, Irreverence and Magical Realism." in *Literature Compass 2*, 20C:106, (2005), p.1.
[41] Faris, Wendy B., *op. cit.*, p.107.

only be imagined. Don Cupitt was very much aware of this danger when he called for a cessation of "nostalgic British fantasy-theology" with which he associates radical orthodox theologians such as John Milbank. These speak in the tradition of Christian fantasy-writing to which C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkein, Charles Williams and George MacDonald have all contributed. According to Cupitt, they write a theology of what does not exist, a fantasy world we want our children to know about.[42]

Magical realism is a voguish term, whose tenacity belies its lack of definitional precision among theorists and critics, who have displayed a range of contradictory attitudes towards the term. Despite continuing controversy about the genre, because there is a growing corpus of literary works that draws upon the conventions of both realism and fantasy or folktale without allowing either realm to assert a greater claim to truth than the other, Christopher Warnes suggests that magical realism is a useful tool for understanding specific texts.[43] I believe that sections of *John Dory* may be understood as incursions of magical realism into the main text of the novel.

There is no need for this thesis to outline a history of the term. It is sufficient to say that in the twentieth century magical realism was first applied as a critical tool to Latin American authors such as Alejo Carpentier and Miguel Angel Asturias and for some time was most readily applied to Latino writers, most notably Jorge Luis Borges and Garcia Marquez, before it was transferred to writers such as Salman Rushdie and Ben Okri. Now the incidence of the term in critical reviews is such that it is often alleged that critics overuse it to the danger point of meaninglessness. It is clear, therefore, that there is a need for me to be precise about the meaning I give to the term and, for this, I rely heavily on Amaryll Chanady's taxonomy from her study in which she distinguished between magical realism and fantasy.[44] Warnes describes Chanady's taxonomy in an essay which presents magical realism as a mode of narrative naturalising

[42] Cupitt, Don, *Kingdom Come in Everyday Speech*. (London: SCM Press, 2000), pp.48f.
[43] Warnes, Christopher, *op. cit.*, pp.1 and 17.
[44] Chanady, Amaryll B., *Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony*. (New York: Garland, 1985).

the supernatural, making the 'otherworldly' and unseen acceptable and understandable aspects of daily life.[45] According to Warnes,[46] Chanady identified the following as defining characteristics of magical realism: the magical realist text must display coherently developed codes of both the natural and supernatural; the antimony between these codes must be resolved; and there must be a measure of authorial reticence in place so that the coexistence and legitimacy of neither code is threatened. Warnes suggests that this taxonomy successfully distinguished the genre of magical realism from its neighbouring genres. It is distinct from fantasy, fairy tales and science fiction, for in these the codes of the 'real' are underprivileged because the narratives have been set in worlds other than the recognisable empirical world. Furthermore, it is distinguished from horror and Gothic because these genres do not resolve the antimony between the natural and supernatural realms. He also indicates that Chanady's taxonomy insists that the 'inexplicability' of the supernatural must be maintained in the text: in magical realism it will not do for the narrator to wake from a dream, for then the 'real' is privileged over the fantastic.

If the accepted coexistence of two realms – natural and supernatural, realism and fantasy[47] - is an essential characteristic of magical realism, then I contend that magical realism can be read 'from either realm'. That is to say that magical realism can be read as both 'denaturalising the real' and 'naturalising the marvellous.' These are terms employed by a Brazilian critic, Irlemar Chiampi, whom Warnes quotes. For instance, when we read one of the epiphanies in *John Dory* in which George Singer as a child sees a cardboard angel smiling down from the top of a Christmas tree and a purple bauble spelling the word love, we simultaneously read a story in which "immeasurable joy", "spiritual transfixedness" and "glimpse[s] of the world we never see" seem natural and a story in which a piece of printed cardboard cheaply cut in the shape of an angel and a dark purple bauble are media for "radiance ... from somewhere beyond them" that lifts the child to his "first sight of paradise" (32-35). The real is

[45] *op. cit.*, p.2.
[46] *ibid.*, p.4.
[47] For instance, Warnes cites Beloved who is simultaneously ghost and real person in Toni Morrison's *Beloved.* (London: Picador, 1987).

denaturalised in that an ordinary living room decorated for Christmas is heaven; the other side of the coin is that the marvellous is naturalised in that paradise seems normal. In passing, it is worth noting that the term 'marvellous', which Warnes adopts from Chiampi's work, may be more acceptable to writers, readers and preachers who want to assert the veracity of religious experience and for whom the term 'magical' is problematic.

Warnes suggests that when magical realist texts are interrogated with three interpretational questions - what is the source of the supernatural in the text, what sort of dialogue does the supernatural have with the text's more realistic elements and why does the writer engage this mode at this particular time?[48] – two tendencies within magical realism are revealed. One is that the element of the marvellous unmasks the real and shows the provisionality of the naturalistic world's truth claims; the naturalistic, empiricist, post-enlightenment worldview is seen to be contingent on consensus.[49] The other possibility is that the supernatural forces its way into the company of the natural and convincingly shares in the language of realism's privileged claim to represent and account for the world.

If it is true that magical - or marvellous - realism is a genre of writing in which the real and non-real exist in a state of contrived equivalence, it seems to me that the sections of Murray's novel that directly deal with the topic of the nature of religious and spiritual experiences may be read in this genre. These sections are the italicised epiphanies and the autobiographical narrative within Wright's sermon. Magical realism is a possible link between these different types of message which the novel sets as opposites: "spoken as opposed to ... wordless message[s]" (100). Wright's narrative, although using much less fantastic language than Singer's remembered epiphanies, is also magical realism inasmuch as it naturalises experiences in which Wright believes God reached down and lifted him into new life: for him heaven and earth coincide, both realms coexisting within experience. But it is not 'pure' magical realism, for in

[48] *op. cit.*, pp.5-6.
[49] *ibid.*, p.6.

Wright's narrative there is no equivalence between the coinciding realms. He makes his opinion transparent that the supernatural spiritual world has a greater claim to truth than the shallow solipsistic world that he inhabited in his youth. Indeed, Wright is Murray's mouthpiece as he strives to attain the novel's aim to demonstrate the power and truth of Christianity. Readers are encouraged to ask: what do George Singer and Ken Wright encounter in their parallel experiences? What does Ken Wright encounter in the pool of whisky and what does George Singer encounter in Ken Wright? Wright's own interpretation is that he reached rock bottom and stared down the precipitous slopes of an enormous abyss so that he came to know Self. The case of George Singer is less transparent, for, although in interview Murray said he likes to think that George was converted, the textual evidence is unclear: what George does at the end is to go fishing. The structure of the novel, with flashbacks prompted by links that George makes between his own life and Wright's testimony, shows that George sees the parallels between his and Wright's lifestory and suggests that he ought to have seen himself in Wright's story of redemption. Yet ultimately George continues to opt out; he shows no sign of accepting the Christian faith for himself; rather, he goes fishing. That, of course, was also the response of Jesus' first disciples to his call when he promised to make them fishers of people. After Easter, too, they returned to fishing on Galilee. However, there is little textual evidence to support the notion that Murray expected us to read George's going fishing in the light of the first disciples' response to Jesus. On the other hand, Murray claims that, through their various life experiences, Ken Wright and George Singer reach a place of 'knowing' or at least "knowing enough" (12). In terms of the novel's Pauline epigram, they find that they "know nothing yet as they ought to know."

Unlike Murray, magical realism does not of itself preach, although it may be the natural milieu for convincingly communicating in novels religious and spiritual experiences by which people come to places of knowing. It may also be a useful tool for understanding and interpreting texts such as novels, fictional sermons and actual sermons that seek to establish convincing and genuine experiences when characters and actual people feel beside themselves in the ordinariness of their existence.

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate that religious experience in novels is most convincingly communicated when attention is given to the schemata, politeness phenomenon and point of view of the narrative, when the narrative is polyphonous and when the imagery of the narrative is coterminous with that of cognitive psychology's account of religious experiences. I have also demonstrated that the accounts of religious experience in the sample text, *John Dory*, share features in common with both epistolary novels and magical realist texts. Critical consciousness of these features enhances our understanding of how novels might be capable of communicating the validity of a variety of religious experiences.

The next chapter turns to a particular variety of a/religious experience that is far from uncommon in novels – the a/religious experience of troubled preachers struggling to keep faith.

5: Troubled preachers: keeping faith

The troubled 'man of God' struggling with faith issues and wrestling with spiritual, vocational or intellectual doubt appears in many guises in contemporary novels. He appears in some of the novels I considered for inclusion in my research, namely as Father Angwin in Hilary Mantel's *Fludd*,[1] Barney Hardstaff in Catherine Fox's *The Benefits of Passion*,[2] Edmond Music in Alan Isler's *Clerical Errors* [3] and Colley in Golding's *Rites of Passage*,[4] in other recently published fiction such as Margaret Forster's *Is There Anything You Want?*[5] Stephanie Johnson's *Belief*,[6] Brooks's later novel *March* [7] and Peter Hobbs's *The Short Day Dying* [8] and in many well known American texts such as John Updike's *A Month of Sundays*.[9] So ubiquitous is this character that, in a review of Jonathan Tulloch's *Give Us This Day*, a recent novel about a Roman priest transferred to a run-down Teesside parish after falling victim to sexual scandals, D. J. Taylor invented a new genre - "the 'loss of faith' novel [which] despite its

[1] Mantel, Hilary, *Fludd*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989).
[2] Fox, Catherine, *The Benefits of Passion*. (London: Penguin, 1997).
[3] Isler, Alan, *Clerical Errors*. (London: Vintage, 2001).
[4] Golding, William, *Rites of Passage*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1980).
[5] Forster, Margaret, *Is There Anything You Want?* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2005).
[6] Johnson, Stephanie, *Belief*. (London: Vintage, 2001).
[7] Brooks, Geraldine, *March*. (London: Harper Perennial, 2005).
[8] Hobbs, Peter, *The Short Day Dying*. (London: Faber, 2005).
[9] Updike, John, *A Month of Sundays*. (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974).

unfashionable subject-matter ... is ... entirely contemporary."[10] Whilst there is little doubt that this is fiction reflecting real life, in that each year clergy leave parish ministry for various reasons, the frequent occurrence of the character is also because he is a convenient novelistic invention enabling authors to explore the life-faith dichotomy. This character significantly influences the imagined world of readers.

This chapter considers novelistic representations of the preaching done by preachers whose faith either has been, or is in process of being, challenged both by internal torment and by external events. It offers a literary and homiletical analysis of their preaching resulting from an application of my analytical toolkit to their sermons. Among the primary texts used in my research the most interesting examples of troubled preachers are Austin Brierley in David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* and both Huxley Grieve and Blair Ashley in Michael Arditti's *Easter*. This chapter briefly discusses the nature of faith, describes the sermons in Lodge's and Arditti's novels and discusses some of the homiletical issues these raise for actual readers and preachers.

In the imagined world of novelists there are two common causes of 'trouble' for preachers. One is the struggle with issues of personal morality or belief. In these cases, the tormented soul, wrestling either with doubts about the Christian faith or with inconsistencies between personal behaviour and Christian profession, is tortured on a rack when proclaiming Christianity from the pulpit – and there are likely to be external manifestations of the internal processes. The other challenge to faith is caused by natural or human-made disaster, most notoriously in the twentieth century the Jewish *Shoah* and, in the first few years of the twenty-first, the attack on the World Trade Center known as '9/11' and the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004. Theodor Adorno's comment that "writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" soon became an almost folkloric, culturally-accepted mantra: 'No poetry after Auschwitz.' Variations of this have been played by social and political commentators in the aftermath of each atrocity in the news.

[10] Taylor, David J., "God's odd-bods." in *The Guardian*, London, 2005 reviewing Tulloch, Jonathan, *Give Us This Day*. (London: Cape, 2005).

'No poetry after Auschwitz', for instance, was translated into 'No theology after 9/11'. However, the mantra is patently false. It is false both because there *has* been poetry after Auschwitz and because there was poetry, music and liturgy *in* Auschwitz. The falsity of Adorno's dictum has led to its being finally understood as "No poetry *on* Auschwitz."[11] However, art and theology should not divert their gaze from whatever challenges them; rather, the enormity of such atrocities demands serious artistic, theological and philosophical reflection. Doing theology may be more difficult than it was before 9/11 – and preachers may have to be more careful than they were before 9/11 – but the religious undertones of many human disasters make theological reflection yet more imperative.

For actual preachers, there are also the challenges of competing convictions, rarely alluded to in the novels I have studied (except for the reference to Islam in the Epilogue of Brooks's *Year of Wonders*). For contemporary preachers these competing convictions include not only the presence of other world religions but also religion-less Christianity, Christian humanism (such as is embraced by Daniel Orton in Byatt's Frederica quartet), irreligious modernism, post-Christian postmodernity and the superstition and New Age paganism attractive to people for whom organised religion is moribund but for whom spirituality remains vital. In short, the prevailing ethos of our secular, but spiritually-curious, society and the attractions of alternative lifestyles compete with conventional preached Christianity.

Before I discuss the form and function of sermons in 'loss of faith' novels, I need to establish a working definition of faith, as it is a much-deployed term with a range of meanings. On initial publication of *How Far Can You Go?*, its reviewer in the *Times Literary Supplement* greeted it as a novel about Faith [*sic*] – "at its most straightforward ... a simple expository account of doctrinal developments" - which successfully reminds its readers that faith (with lower

[11] Freedland, Jonathan, "Visions of Hell." in *The Guardian*, 10 January 2003.

case) is the substance of fiction.[12] Throughout this thesis I am conscious that writing fiction, reading fiction and making a critique of fiction all depend on faith – faith in the art and purpose of fiction, faith in the role and intention of the author and faith in the act of reading as a suspension of either scepticism or belief facilitating the construction of an imagined world offering a way of understanding the world we live in. This dependence on faith gives fiction an affinity with preaching. I want, however, to clarify a distinction between 'The Faith' and 'faith'. If 'Faith' is the Church's totalising narrative - a body of beliefs or a religious belief system - what do we mean by 'faith'?

Paul Tillich uses his *Systematic Theology* in part to establish that faith is not a matter of intellectual assent to any system of doctrine or an intellectual affirmation of the Faith.[13] Rather, in terms reminiscent of one of his better-known sermons entitled *You Are Accepted,*[14] faith is accepting that one is accepted.[15] Faith, intangible and nebulous, lacks aseity; it is irreal. It can almost be thought of as a state of mind inasmuch as, "Every theologian is committed *and* alienated; he is always in faith *and* in doubt; he is inside *and* outside the theological circle."[16]. If what Tillich says is true of academic theologians, perhaps it is also true that those practical theologians, who forge their theology in pulpits, are always in faith and in doubt, too. In John Macquarrie's terminology, faith is "an existential attitude."[17] Faith is hardly something we can lose, like our teeth or hair, but it is a faculty we can exercise with differing degrees of intensity; it is the capacity to imagine. Macquarrie argued that, because we can only see the world from within, certitude is beyond us so the best we can do is construct what we suppose to be "rationally demonstrable and objectively valid metaphysical systems,"[18] but the existence of diverse, often conflicting, systems is an indication that any systematic

[12] Treglown, Jeremy, "Where shall wisdom be found?" in *Times Literary Supplement*, London, 2 May 1980, p.487.
[13] Tillich, Paul, (1957), p.85.
[14] Tillich, Paul, *The Shaking of the Foundations*. (London: SCM Press, 1949), p.153.
[15] Tillich, Paul, (1957), p.179.
[16] Tillich, Paul, *Systematic Theology Volume 1*. (London: SCM Press, 1951), p.10. [his italics and his gender-specific pronouns]
[17] Macquarrie, John, *op. cit.*, p.70.
[18] *ibid.*, p.71.

metanarrative is inadequate comprehensively to account for all things. Nevertheless, in practice, people reach decisions about how they will understand themselves and adopt self-interpretative discourses because they have to exist, pursue goals and adopt standards of value in this world; we have 'to live and move and have our being' in a world so paradoxical that it is capable of pushing some people towards religious faith and others towards a Sartrean acceptance of absurdity. Macquarrie addresses the possible contention that lack of certitude implies that faith is little more than a leap in the dark by claiming that faith is not a perversion of our nature, but an attitude that really belongs to the kind of existence that is ours, that is to say that faith is "rooted in [our] very being."[19] This does not seem to take us very far in our understanding of the nature of faith, until I introduce the helpful insight of another a/theologian, to whom this thesis has previously referred. In a book first published in 1971, Don Cupitt described faith as "creative."[20] This prompts me to propose the theory that a 'creative urge' is one of the coping mechanisms by which human beings exist in a contingent world and that faith – or in some cases 'unfaith' - fuels our creativity. We make sense of our existence by constructing solipsistic narratives, many of which are characterised by what we might call 'the as-ifness' of faith. Using the analogy of classroom teaching where the high expectations of the teacher may enhance the pupils' performance, Cupitt sees faith, not as perversely and unnaturally choosing to believe something we have no good reason to believe, but as an inherent creative urge building on our limited knowledge in order to help us accept the kind of existence we have and create a meaningful worldview.[21] It is not self-deception; it is living 'as if' something that might be meaningful is indeed so. This is akin to Ricoeur's understanding of preaching as a form of mimesis that "opens the kingdom of the *as if*".[22] In practice, such faith is susceptible to crises.

Lodge's novel, *How Far Can You Go?*, is particularly useful in this study of fictional sermons and troubled preachers in that it discusses both personal and

[19] Macquarrie, John, *op cit.*, p.74.
[20] Cupitt, Don, *Christ and the Hiddenness of God.* (London: SCM Press, 1985), p.50.
[21] *ibid.*, pp.52f.
[22] quoted in McClure, John S., *op. cit.*, p.35.

communal challenges to faith with its readers. As I indicated in my introduction to the novel in chapter 1, I read *How Far Can You Go?* as a Catholic novel; this relates to two characteristics of the novel that bear upon how sermons are used within it. The first, for which the reader is prepared by the double meaning of the question in the title, is the novel's 'bitonality'. At a superficial level the title poses the question asked by young Catholics pushing for permission to go as far as they can sexually without committing mortal sin; at a deeper level it is a question for the Catholic Church in modern times: how far one can go in changing the externals of a religion without eroding its substance?[23] It is a question of personal morality as well as of institutional identity and survival. In an essay on Lodge's use of irony, Streichsbier points out that the author's exploration of this intimate yet general question is achieved by oscillating between the novel's prevailing frivolous tone and occasional serious passages dealing with fundamental questions of belief:[24] these include several authorial comments, the Epilogue, the interpolated authorial essay on *Humanae Vitae* in the first eight pages of chapter four to which Michael Wheeler draws attention[25] and Austin Brierley's preaching in the novel. There are passing references to other sermons endorsing papal orthodoxy (119), hell-fire sermons in the tradition of Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (286), sermons to maintain the fabric of the church (85) and an allusion to Father McKenzie's unheard sermon in The Beatles' song *Eleanor Rigby* (111). There is also a parody of a revivalist sermon which begins with a lame joke and incongruously uses British European Airways (BEA) as an acronym for true Christian faith in which, 'b' stands for 'believes in God', 'e' stands for 'expects Christ to come' and 'a' stands for 'will accept him when he comes' (175-6). But the 'serious' preaching passages are Austin Brierley's reported sermons, one at Dennis and Angela's wedding (67-68) and the other after the Aberfan disaster (106-7).

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[23] Crowe, Marian E., *op. cit.*, pp.144f.
[24] Streichsbier, Beata. "Irony in David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?*" in *A Yearbook of English Language and Literature*. Korninger, S., ed., (1981), p.108.
[25] Wheeler, Michael, "The Limits of Hell: Lodge, Murdoch, Burgess, Golding" in *Journal of Literature and Theology*, 4:1, (March 1990), p.74.

The second characteristic of *How Far Can You Go?* is that it is a paradigmatic novel. There is, as one reviewer of the American edition of the novel observed,[26] a strong sense of verity in the novel's history of English Roman Catholicism. As the novel was published in America with the title *Souls and Bodies*, it is ironic that its British title more poignantly accentuates Salwak's observation that the novel is a paradigm posing an overarching question both in the novel and for the decades of English Roman Catholic history it chronicles: the question is, how far can Catholics go without destroying their Catholicism? Lodge himself saw the novel as a literary exploration of a crisis of faith and morality, which effected an overall transformation of English Catholicism to the extent that the traditional Catholic metaphysic faded away.[27] One of the changes in English Catholicism post-Vatican II that Parsons records is the increasing incidence of sermons in services, an official and liturgical acknowledgement of the necessity for interpretation, teaching and exhortation to faithfulness. Austin Brierley is the only character in the novel who does not exchange one certainty for another,[28] yet there are considerable changes within him, echoing those within Catholicism itself. At the beginning he is, as Bergonzi says, narrow-minded and priggish,[29] yet, as Catholicism changes through the sixties and seventies, Brierley embarks upon a lively though uncomfortable priestly career, becoming increasingly radical as he discovers new modes of theology and biblical exegesis. He moves into secular disciplines such as sociology and by the end of the novel he has left the priesthood and married, though he remains "a kind of Catholic." At the beginning of the book Lodge had described the Catholic worldview as a giant Snakes and Ladders board with salvation as the game's goal; heaven at the top, hell below. Complicated rules govern the game in which sacraments, prayers and good deeds permit you to climb a ladder while sins send you slithering down a snake. The novel – in company with both English Catholicism in general and Austin Brierley in particular - moves from

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[26] Salwak, Dale. "Review of *Souls and Bodies* by David Lodge." in *Magil's Literary Annual*, (1983), pp.761-763.
[27] Parsons, Gerald, "Paradigm or Period Piece?: David Lodge's *How Far Can You Go?* in Perspective." in *Journal of Literature and Theology*, 6:2, (1992), p.174.
[28] Streichsbier, Beata, *op. cit.*, p.105.
[29] Bergonzi, Bernard, *op. cit.*, p.54.

this metanarrative acceptable to most English Catholics in 1952 to what is strongly suspected to be the present theological perspective of the author, which Lodge describes in his introduction to the Penguin reissue of *The Picturegoers* as "demythologised, provisional and in many ways agnostic".[30] One critic writing about Catholicism in one of Lodge's later novels, *Paradise News*, borrows a term from the spiritual writer and theologian, Kenneth Leech, and calls Lodge's status *vis à vis* the Roman Catholic Church a state of "creative doubt".[31] Like Byatt's Frederica quartet, this novel is a chronicle of changing social mores, a genre that is particularly receptive to a treatment of changing scenes in religion. Unlike both Byatt and his fellow-Catholic authors Greene and Waugh, Lodge is attempting a religious history 'from below', tracing the beliefs and practices of 'ordinary', though middle-class and university-educated people.[32] Throughout Lodge's work there is a conflict between Lodge the critic, for whom ambiguous endings are acceptable, and the Catholic Lodge whose latent faith expects an ultimate end.

The sermon Brierley preaches at Dennis and Angela's wedding (67-68) assumes a worldview of Catholicism with the authority to appoint a world leader and promotes the ideal of monogamous heterosexuality, usually expressed, as in this sermon, in male-gendered fashion as 'man and wife'. Brierley employs the specialised idioms of ecclesiastical language to express marriage as a sacrament for which the relationship between Christ and his Church is an appropriate analogy. This hegemonic church is set against opponents such as "rampant materialism", the "teeth of Communist persecution" and "the stormy seas of the Second World War" across which Pius XII sailed a dangerous course. Whilst the sermon is given in free indirect speech from the novelist's point of view the reader also hears Dennis's father's criticism, Angela's parents' incomprehension, the view held by some of the congregation that the homily was too heavy and Polly's flirtatious view that it was "beautiful". The irony of this sermon is evident in the nature of its various audiences: Brierley's intratextual audience

[30] Lodge, David, (1960), p.ix.
[31] Crowe, Marian E., *op. cit.*, p.152.
[32] Parsons, Gerald, *op. cit.*, p.187.

includes Dennis and Angela's friends from university days who don't need to be reminded how long it has taken the couple to marry, Angela's parents who are unable to understand the concept of analogy, Dennis's father who fidgets because he feels the sermon is too gloomy and Polly who, feeling 'Magdalenish', desperately wants to marry. Its extratextual audiences, including the "so many young people these days" to whom Brierley refers are both Catholic and non-Catholic, both those who share a sacramental doctrine of holy matrimony and those who do not, those who believe in Christ's abiding presence and those who have no belief in Christ. Brierley makes allowances for neither his celibacy which limits his understanding of marriage, his increasing interest in liberal theology and ethics nor the plurality of his congregation. In contrast with Huxley Grieves's attempt to encourage tolerance of alternative expressions of human relationship in *Easter*'s wedding sermon, Brierley merely iterates the conventional official Catholic line on marriage.

On the other hand, his sermon after the Aberfan disaster (106-7) engages more with the problematic questions that flood like mining slurry into the hearers' heads. Brierley's new parish is a dull market town in what is described as a 'scandalously flat landscape', scandalous because it is untouched by the mounds and heaps resulting from mining, absence from which prepares the reader for the scandal of the congregation's flat response to a challenging and questing sermon. Lodge sets the scene for the sermon with a paragraph that describes the disaster at Aberfan as an eruption of the Industrial Revolution's constipated bowels and points out that, unlike Brierley, few ministers took up the theological challenge of the events. In his sermon Brierley challenges some conventional responses to the disaster and uses the Job legend, which he reads as myth or poem, to encourage prayers of protest. His implied view is that the preacher is not God's public relations officer, but a priest. As a priest he is the people's representative before God, rather than God's representative to the people, so he represents both the people of the parish and the broken suffering people of Aberfan. As in the tensions that exist among the possible responses to suffering represented among Job's comforters, the various theological and philosophical responses to Aberfan are in tension. Given that one might expect

outrage, tears or shock, scandalously the sermon's intratextual audience carries a blank expression, as all seem asleep, except some mothers who, waking to the link with the mothers of Aberfan, look anxiously at their older children. Readers, however, experience Aberfan as a more profound challenge to religious belief than the issue of contraception ostensibly at the novel's heart. How far can you go in questioning God? How far can you go in your protestations with the divine? How far can you go with biblical criticism in sermons? And how far can one criticise the divine in one's preaching? The quiescence of the intratextual audience suggests a possible answer: quite far, it would seem – without challenging the assumptions of the faithful.

Inasmuch as the book chronicles the change from 'How It Was' (the title of the first chapter) to 'How It Is' (the title of the last chapter), it seems that *How Far Can You Go?* is a novel about "fundamental disturbance".[33] For the former students populating the novel this fundamental disturbance is most often the result of issues to do with contraception, whilst for the novel's pivotal character, the priest, it is this as well as other challenges. For one critic, Michael Wheeler, the change is finally encapsulated in the terror of going to hell.[34] The flippancy with which Lodge treats the theology of hell belies how significant it is that the doctrine of hell and the human need to flee from the wrath to come by confession has been replaced by a desire for self-expression and a need for personal development. As one of the novel's characters who becomes a Jehovah's Witness, thus replacing one "form of religious mania" (190) with another, observes, "Catholic religion isn't true Bible religion. ... For instance, there's no hell, like they used to tell us at school, only gravedom" (191). The novel sees this loss of fear of hell as part of a more general liberalisation of Catholic doctrine following the sweeping changes instigated at Vatican II, a change that Parsons characterises as a move from pre-conciliar uniformity to post-conciliar pluralism.[35] Post Vatican II it is certainly not a matter of 'anything goes', but the plurality of beliefs expressed by the various characters of this novel makes it

[33] *ibid.*, p. 176.
[34] Wheeler, Michael, *op. cit.*, p.75.
[35] *op. cit.*, p.182.

clear that it is a matter of 'how far can you go?' On the other hand, because the novel also presents the limitations of liberalisation and permissiveness, it does not lapse into simplistically celebrating that there is now less interference into the behaviour of individual Catholics by the institutional church. Instead the book poses the questions left open by changes within the Catholic Church and presents the dilemmas faced by individual Catholics as they and their church try to take account of living in the plurality and permissiveness of British society in the 1960s and 70s.

The troubled preachers in *Easter* belong to a different tradition – Anglicanism - and a later era – the last decade of the twentieth century; their problem is political and sexual scandal, mainly surrounding the gay curate Blair Ashley's behaviour in Holy Week. One of these preachers is Blair himself; the other is his vicar trying to manage the affair. The five sermons preached by the vicar, Huxley Grieve, develop one of the novel's themes: if we read *Easter* as a midrash on the Christian credal statement, "I believe in the resurrection of the body," we read it as an exploration of intimacy and embodiment.

Huxley's first sermon is preached in unfavourable conditions – during a Palm Sunday procession on the way to church in the middle of a traffic roundabout. The reader has already been told that the vicar approaches services more like a choreographer than a priest (3) and one of the parishioners, Thea, has already observed that he is dressed in red like a circus ringmaster. Given that the distractions of the setting for this sermon include a squawking parrot and a braying donkey, as well as honking cars, this is an appropriate comparison. The setting is in marked contrast with the desire to create sacred space, to preserve one's own space and to establish conditions suitable for a holy and reflective pilgrimage. The main intertext for this sermon is the risen Christ's words to Mary in the garden, '*Noli me tangere.*' One of Arditti's reviewers commented that the church has taken this specific instruction to Mary to mean that no one must be touched[36] and, as Arditti remarked in an interview with Damian

[36] Mann, Michael, "Let there be (gay) love in the church." *Camden New Journal*, 20 April 2000.

Thompson, "The *noli me tangere* side of the church has become too dominant"[37]. The Palm Sunday sermon introduces this theme in Huxley's attempts to encourage his congregation to move closer so they can hear. The church, although ecclesiologically described as the Body of Christ, keeps space around its members; the bodies within the Body keep their distance.

His sermon at Daisy and Joe's wedding on Holy Tuesday (59-61) is an attempt to encourage the congregation to tolerate alternative forms of human relationships. Huxley preaches on what the Book of Common Prayer calls 'the matrimonial causes' in a manner intended to challenge society's conventional understanding of marriage. To achieve this Arditti depends on contextual performance frames and schema-breaking. The disapproving groom's mother, Maureen, notices many of the contextual performance frames. Half the women guests are in jeans and little care has been taken with the bride's hair and make up. The Maori choral music reminds Daisy of her New Zealand home, but it strikes Maureen as odd. When she chats with another guest about the choice of music, the timing of the wedding breakfast and an unorthodox choice of date for the wedding, her husband, conscious of appropriate behaviour at weddings, tells her to stop talking, ironically revealing her inappropriate behaviour. Her perception of what is right and proper are the schemata of wedding conventions – dress, cameras, a long-winded vicar and churchly behaviour – yet there is much in this section of the book breaking readers' schema-expectations. These include the guest breast-feeding her baby, the female groom's sponsor, the women in jeans, the lack of a honeymoon and the attempt by Daisy and Joe to keep the event as low key as possible. The resulting humour is a comedy of manners. Even so, the established church, personified in the vicar of the parish with all the authority he enjoys, is here acknowledging the validity of physical intimacy in relationships other than conventional heterosexual marriage. In Raymond Williams's terms, the sermon is expressing an emergent worldview superseding the residual expressions of the world order expressed in the Book of Common Prayer. It is, thus, a site of conflict.

[37] Thompson, Damian, "Even the 'messy bits' are made in His image." *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 April 2000.

The funeral sermon (67-70) – a protest against premature death - shows a priest troubled by experience verbalising the perhaps unspoken doubts, questions and fears of his congregation. Only the parrot Stevenson squawks the question 'why?' The sermon also expresses a theology of resurrection which evangelicals like the bishop, whose sermons were discussed in chapter 4, would describe as reductionist: Huxley speaks of Jesus' disciples keeping his memory alive. This, however, is more than afterlife defined as the retention of happy memories of a deceased member of one's family. Rather it is that the Church, as the Body of Christ, perpetuates the life of Christ. Thus, the preacher in reaching out to touch the coffin during the funeral liturgy makes a further contribution to the novel's theme of embodiment.

The vicar's Maundy Thursday sermon (100-102) also invites the members of the congregation to move closer and to remove their shoes and socks for the ritual foot-washing. The sermon contrasts Jesus, who was prepared to "expose himself to another man's touch" (100), with the congregants, most of whom are terrified of contact. We define ourselves by difference, by gaps rather than points of contact. The sermon also expresses a contrast between safe space and dangerous ground, as the sanctuary contrasts sharply with Hampstead Heath as dangerous ground and the exposure and wilderness of the cemetery where Blair prays. The intended effect of the sermon apparently succeeds, for even the journalists remove their shoes and socks for Huxley to wash their feet.

In his final sermon of the week on Good Friday (107-110), in an image which confirms my characterisation of the pulpit as an exposed place and preachers as people who parade personal faith publicly, Huxley describes himself as naked before his parishioners, a clerical scarecrow stripped of all unnecessary baggage like the church stripped for Good Friday. He has been a spiritual conduit mouthing the words of others. In a sermon which aims to encourage mutual empathy and involvement, Huxley reflects on what he has experienced in Holy Week and acknowledges that he has faced questions of integrity. In Part 3's account of Palm Sunday, Huxley takes comfort from the thought that if a

"white man can black up to play Othello," (though, in contemporary theatre, there is a troubling inauthenticity about such productions) "then a sceptic can present the man of God" (246). The Good Friday sermon is capable of being misunderstood as "denying [God's] very existence" (143): it is, however, Huxley's honest reflections on his role as priest in which "there has to be some connection" between the office and the man (108); it is a sermon in which he expresses shame on using the phrase "if I'm honest" (109), because it implies he has been dishonest in other sermons; it is a sermon in which he looks for evidence of a "a world transformed by resurrection" (109). In the course of this sermon, preached soon after Huxley learns of the scandalous events of the previous day, the reader sees Huxley dying to the mask of faithfulness, which in fact hides the crisis of sceptical faith, and rising to a realised faith which is honest enough to enable faithful living in troubled times.

The Christ-figure at the heart of the novel, whose political and sexual behaviour brings to a head the vicar's crisis of faith is Blair Ashley, the curate. He preaches the two remaining sermons of the novel. These make clear what other sermons in the book have merely hinted, either, in Huxley Grieve's case, because the preacher has been wrestling with expressing the Christian faith or, in the bishop's case, because the sermon has been at best conservative or at worst anachronistic: that is the need for the church to find new ways of expressing its creed and create theology for the present age. The author's placing of Blair's sermons stresses their importance; he brings them together as the last the reader experiences, although in chronological time three days and four other sermons separate them. One was preached on Holy Wednesday at the lesbian union of Dee and Alice (282-284) and the other was the sermon at the parish's Easter Eucharist (375-377).

Both sermons are preached on the margins of the church. Alice and Dee's lesbian union takes place behind locked doors in the side chapel, in a setting Blair describes as "integral yet independent". Arditti himself sees this as an image of gay culture, in that it is at the side, yet part, of the main body of the

church.[38] In his preaching at Alice and Dee's blessing, Blair is conscious of God's approval. He regards all the people present as prophets and says that he is convinced that God is smiling over the ceremony. Similarly, the Easter Day sermon is preached on the margins, this time outside the church as the premises have been damaged by fire. This sermon, created by an author educated in a Methodist school, has an intentionally Wesleyan motif: when the curate climbs on a tomb to deliver it, I am reminded of a famous incident in 1742 when John Wesley climbed onto his father's tomb to preach after he had been denied permission to preach in the church of Epworth. Blair encourages his hearers to think of themselves as 'brands plucked from the burning', a biblical phrase which John Wesley also used to describe himself after he had been rescued from a house fire when a child. Here Arditti may be indicating either that Blair has now discovered an evangelical zeal in contrast with his earlier pulpit inhibitions (200) or that Blair no longer feels a need to dress up what he says in a form which will please traditionalists. It also indicates that Blair has moved outside the boundaries of the church to meet people where they are.

In both sermons, however, Blair appeals to tradition. In the first, he makes frequent references to the Prayer Book and liturgy, the origins of the Church of England, the biblical stories of Ruth and Naomi and David and Jonathan and the same sex rites of the first thousand years of Christianity. On the other hand, in the Easter sermon Arditti reminds us that Blair, too, uses the bible selectively when the curate hints that he would like to remove the pages that tell of the Fall. He wants to retain, indeed emphasise, other pages, "If we are to take a leaf out of Genesis, then let it be that one on which 'God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good.'" (376). All preachers take leaves out of the bible, in both senses of the phrase.

The intratextual audience of Blair's Easter sermon comprises the parishioners who are 'owed' an explanation for Blair's actions. The extratextual audience, however, is more likely to see it simply as an expression of honest contemporary belief, for, in expressing Christian belief that relates to the way life

[38] Mowbray, Tim. "Write This Way." *Time Out London*, 103, 10-17 April 2002.

is lived in contemporary society, this sermon on 'resurrection day' expresses in fictional form Arditti's view, given in a *New Statesman* interview, that the church must change, by constructing an alternative theology, or it must die.[39]

The fictional preaching of troubled preachers exemplified in these three characters exposes tensions in three relationships that are critical to my research - those between fiction and faith, preaching and liturgy and preaching and orthodoxy. The first is the symbiotic relationship between fiction and faith. In his essays on consciousness and the novel, Lodge characterised fiction as "a benign lie because it is known to be untrue yet possesses explanatory powers".[40] This view can be expressed less provocatively: fiction faithfully imagines possible worlds and helps explain the actual world. As a former Catholic believer, Lodge has attained the status of 'creative doubt',[41] in which he is able to see that faith functions in both fiction and religion in similar ways: for both the religious believer and the reader of fiction (and I might add the hearer of sermons), as Marian Crowe said in her assessment of Catholicism in Lodge's later novel *Paradise News*, "the life of faith enjoins living on two parallel tracks".[42] Using the working definition for faith I established above, these two tracks are an 'as-if' and an 'as-is' track. Both when reading and in believing, being faithful is living on both an 'as if' and an 'as is' track.

For many of Lodge's and Arditti's characters, not only Austin Brierley, Huxley Grieve and Blair Ashley, this tension of faith is present throughout *Easter* and *How Far Can You Go?* Treglown's review of the latter atomises the various crises of faith: "Some marry in the course of the story, one becomes a nun, one realises he is homosexual. One of the married people goes mad, one of the couples has a mongol baby and then loses another child in a road accident. There are 'affairs', some damaging, some not ... and there are similarly varied crises of belief".[43] The reviewer reminded his readers of Lodge's first fiction

[39] Arditti, Michael, "Frills and thrills."
[40] Lodge, David, *Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays*. (London: Secker and Warburg, 2002), p.42.
[41] Crowe, Marian E., *op. cit.*, p.152.
[42] *ibid.*, p.149.
[43] Treglown, Jeremy, *op. cit.*

published in the Catholic *Tell Me Father* series and consisting of four letters from Father Aloysius Brown to an earnest young man on National Service. The third letter urges the recipient to "move on from the land of make-believe to the territory of hard fact!" Although Father Brown expressed this more concretely than is necessary for my argument, this is indeed the oscillation made by people of faith – from 'as-ifness' to 'as-isness' and back again. These are the twin tracks fiction readers travel; preachers might heed that their hearers also travel these same tracks.

Application of the *logos* section of my checklist of analytical questions to Austin Brierley's preaching revealed that these twin tracks are most evident in his post-Aberfan sermon. In his earlier sermon at Dennis and Angela's wedding he had used the homily mainly to endorse papal pronouncements on sexual mores, thus expressing a worldview which sees the Catholic Church as hegemonic, with the preacher, even in the intimacy of a family occasion, conscious of world events as the Conclave of Cardinals met to elect a new pope to follow Pius XII. Even in an untroubled sermon of this sort, there is an 'as-is' world – the family occasion of a wedding – and an 'as-if' world – the higher matters of world-wide church governance. Brierley's later sermon reflecting on the disaster of Aberfan juxtaposes 'as-is' and 'as-if' more challengingly for actual readers and fictional hearers. The Aberfan disaster is a bigger challenge to faith than contraception issues inasmuch as "it strained religious belief of any variety" (106) and it is inescapable: when, for instance, Dennis and Angela set up the new home in a small middle class estate in rural Warwickshire, there were puddles and mud everywhere leading the narrator to comment, "It seemed impossible to get away from the physical ambience of Aberfan" (109). Brierley's troubled sermon pitted two traditional theological and ecclesiastical responses, either that it was the will of God or that it was punishment for human sin, both of which Brierley finds inadequate, against a response in which believers discover within themselves the Job-like courage to challenge God to justify himself (107). Like Huxley Grieve's wedding sermon in *Easter*, an emergent worldview is being articulated, effectively superseding expressions of a residual worldview. The apocalyptic dystopic scenes of "colossal, obscene evil-

smelling mess" and a "thunderous terrifying roar" (106) are answered in the sermon with the *episteme* or universal reasoning that we would be less than human if we did not protest and complain. The sermon reverses the expected compliance with a hegemonic institution and introduces into worship what people are actually feeling - the 'as-isness' of protest. Just as readers of Huxley Grieve's wedding sermon warm to his critique of *The Book of Common Prayer*'s out-moded depiction of marriage, readers empathise with Austin Brierley and feel the force of the verses he quotes from the Book of Job, but his intratextual audience seems unmoved and its members do not use the sacred space he offers to complain to God.

Jesse Matz, in his introduction to the modern novel, pointed out that modern novelists rarely describe things objectively, choosing rather to give the personal points of view of different characters, allowing the writer to test different versions of reality. He calls this 'subjective seeing'[44] and, when coupled with contemporary uncertainty about the means of storytelling itself,[45] it puts modern novels into a self-questioning mode that gives modern readers a choice of textual places to inhabit. So it is with *How Far Can You Go?* and *Easter.* Readers may choose to ally themselves with any of the responses of the large casts of characters in the novels as they respond to the challenges of liberalisation and permissiveness. As Paul Fiddes says in his introduction to a collection of essays about fiction and spirituality, borrowing Ricoeur's phrase, reading gives us the opportunity to see Oneself as Another.[46] And as Luke Ferretter in his effort to develop a Christian literary theory asserts, one of the properties of texts is that they "project [...] a world, determined by a specific structure of beliefs and values, in which the reader dwells, at the level of his [*sic*] lived experience, whilst reading".[47] It seems to me that this idea of indwelling is important for it suggests an incarnational aspect to the act of reading: both these novels are about people of faith as sexual beings; *Easter* is specifically about

[44] Matz, Jesse, *op. cit.*, p.35.
[45] *ibid.*, p.136.
[46] Fiddes, Paul, ed., *The Novel, Spirituality and Modern Culture*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1999), p.15.
[47] Ferretter, Luke, *op. cit.*, p.188.

touching, 'not touching' and embodiment; preaching is an essentially embodied exercise; sermons enflesh the Word; and troubled preachers are exposed and naked. I will return to this concept of embodiment (and the implications of gendered embodiment) in the concluding pages of the thesis.

In the meantime, let me draw a provisional conclusion to the discussion of fiction and faith. The reader's indwelling of the text is an act of imagination as well as an act of faith in the purposes of fiction, in the intention of the author, in the artifice of the text and in the act of reading. Paradoxically, acts of faith may entail crises of faith: this is the case both for Brierley, Grieve and Ashley as they preach and for their audiences, both intratextual and extratextual, as they listen or read.

This fiction–faith tension is echoed in the second relationship critical to this study, the organic relationship between liturgy and its 'component', preaching. Potentially this tension exists in all instances of preaching, but among the novels I have researched it is most evident in the preaching I am focusing on in this chapter. It is evident in *Easter* largely because the novel is liturgically arranged and the reader is always conscious of the liturgy in which the preaching occurs and it is evident in *How Far Can You Go?* because the reader is made aware of the liturgical changes effected by Vatican II, among which was an enhanced role for preaching. Parsons argues that, whilst the novel appears to be about sexuality, sexual ethics and the Catholic crises of faith which these matters engendered, the theme of *How Far Can You Go?* is much broader: as Lodge himself said, its subject is "the practical effects ... of Vatican II on Catholic liturgy, devotional practice and general lifestyles, both clerical and lay".[48] These changes include more frequent, lengthier and more probing homilies than tended to be typical before Vatican II. So the novel portrays English Catholicism in whose liturgy "demythologising of the Bible and of traditional doctrine jostles with charismatic prayer, belief in a personal devil (and) 'old-fashioned' belief in the real presence".[49]

[48] Parsons, Gerald, *op. cit.*, p.174.
[49] *ibid.*, p.182.

Easter, with its complex liturgical structure set out in Fig. 2, describes more elaborately the tension between the sermons and the liturgies that embrace them. It is expressed most clearly on Easter Day when Blair Ashley preaches resurrection outside the burnt out shell of a church, but it is present in almost every sermon recounted in the book, including all Huxley Grieve's preaching. In his sermon in the middle of the roundabout on Palm Sunday he speaks of liturgy as re-enactment rather than commemoration as he encourages the congregation to participate in the liturgies of Holy Week (7) but this contrasts with their diffident engagement with the Palm Sunday liturgy and their abiding reluctance to press forward in participation in congregational worship. The vicar's sermon at Daisy and Joe's wedding is an explicit step-by-step critique of *The Book of Common Prayer*'s causes of marriage explicitly questioning the liturgical Declaration of Purpose. Furthermore, *contra* the liturgy, the sermon encourages tolerance of other forms of sexual relationship as well as tolerance of other faiths (61). Arditti's account of Huxley Grieve's sermon at Julian Blaikie's funeral follows the rubric "The Curate reads the sentence over the coffin. *We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*" (64). The startling quiescence of this quotation from the bible, traditionally read at funerals, is in tension with the mourners' feelings of anger and pain which Huxley expresses in a sermon repeating the question "Why?" and encouraging rebellion against "disease and devastation, despair and death" (68). When he preaches on Maundy Thursday, the liturgy in which it is set includes the priestly humiliation of footwashing in imitation of Christ's actions as reported in the Fourth Gospel's account of the night of his arrest. In the sermon he continues his theme of people's rejection of intimacy and argues for "truly liv[ing] our liturgy" as "the keystone of our morality" (102). He reminds readers that Maundy Thursday's liturgy is centred on the new commandment of Jesus, "That we love one another as I have loved you," and I note that Maundy Thursday takes it name from the giving of this new commandment, or *mandatum*, which many of Grieve's audience are reluctant to follow. The next day the vicar uses his sermon to demonstrate the irony of using a familiar liturgy which domesticates its truly

radical transforming nature. Some communicate, he says, as if they are "swallowing an after-dinner mint"; where is there evidence of people transformed by the Resurrection? (109). He expresses worry in his sermon that, just as technological and scientific achievements have not been accompanied by moral progress, so the liturgical claims that Christ's death is salvific are not supported by evidence in the world that it has changed anything: "Electricity leads to the electric chair and gas to Auschwitz," he says (109). This tension between sermon and liturgy is present, not only in troubled preachers, but also in the manner of the bishop's sermon at the diocesan healing service. Although it is clear that Arditti is using the bishop's sermon satirically, there is a tension between the healing purpose of the liturgy and the ineirenic style of this combative preacher (268).

This can be a creative tension. Lyotard defined postmodernity as "incredulity towards metanarratives",[50] which, for Christianity, are liturgically encapsulated in the creeds and the *anaphora*'s Preface. Another feature of postmodernism is "an insistence that we hear alternative voices",[51] which may be accommodated in sermons and homilies. When sermons are employed in this way to establish dialogue between the traditional Christian metanarrative and alternative voices or points of view, then creatively forming new theology for the current age becomes possible. Preaching thus also adopts an appropriate modernising role of interpretation and development, as it seeks to apply traditional teaching from ancient times to contemporary society. Within novels this may be difficult to achieve because sermons on the page seem to be totalising narratives and 'one-man' performances. They do not appear to have the characteristics of dialogue, the interdependence and interchangeability that permits intratextual audiences to inhabit the world of the sermon.[52] On the other hand, readers can enjoy a luxury denied to hearers, who have insufficient time to consider alternatives, for readers can choose how to 'hear' the inflection of the

[50] Lyotard, Jean-Francois, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.xxiv.
[51] Middleton, J. Richard and Walsh, Brian J., *Truth is Stranger than it used to be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*. (London: SPCK, 1995) p.42.
[52] McClure, John S., *op. cit.*, p.50.

sermon's phrasing and can thus hear its polyvocality and discern alternative locations for them to indwell.

Related to, but distinct from, the tension between preaching and liturgy is a third relationship, that between preaching and religious orthodoxy, at times troubled, at other times affirming. David Lodge deals with this particularly well. In his more recent novel, *Thinks...*, one of his characters keeps a journal in which she expresses her profound dissatisfaction that the sermons at the University Church, in being no more than exhortations to obedience, avoid some obvious questions and problems,[53] and in his early novel, *The Picturegoers*, after seeing a film featuring Amber Lush, Father Kipling uses a sermon to express his disapproval of 'picturegoing',[54] but in *How Far Can You Go?* Lodge demonstrates awareness of the creative possibilities of preaching when Austin Brierley, preaching in response to the Aberfan disaster, faces challenges to orthodox belief.

At 9.15 a.m. on the last day before the half term holiday in October 1966 a waste tip from Merthyr Tydfil Colliery slid down the mountainside on to the village of Aberfan destroying a farm cottage, engulfing Pantglas Junior school and about twenty cottages before coming to rest. It killed 144 people, of whom 116 were children, and it profoundly shocked the general public. The narrator of *How Far Can You Go?* claims that if the slide had occurred a few hours later, when school had closed for half term, it would have been called a miracle in the popular press. As it happened "... the part, if any, played in it by God [was] passed over in tactful silence. On the following Sunday, prayers were offered throughout the land for the bereaved, the rescue-workers and (in Catholic Churches) for the departed souls of the victims, but few ministers of religion took up the theological challenge of the event itself" (106). In fact, was this so? In contrast with the outpouring of public expressions of grief in the early years of the twenty-first century, it is true that public expression over Aberfan was muted. Local ministers of religion provided emotional support and spiritual care as,

[53] Lodge, David, *Thinks...*, p.31.
[54] *op. cit.*, pp.105ff.

according to a political and sociological study of the disaster, some of the survivors and the bereaved spoke of their faith strengthening them as they came to terms with their losses, whilst others had their faith destroyed by the tragedy[55]. On the Monday after the tragedy the local ministers met to make arrangements for the conduct of the funeral. The local Roman Catholic and Anglican priests nominated the Roman Catholic Archbishop and the Anglican Bishop of Llandaff to conduct the funeral, but the nonconformists nominated their longest-serving local minister. The funeral, preceding a communal burial, led by all three clergymen, comprised two hymns, three prayers and four readings, and "hardly took twenty minutes";[56] *The Times* was more precise - according to the South Wales correspondent it lasted thirteen minutes. The only official church comments reported in the press that I have been able to find were made by the Bishop of Llandaff in a television programme broadcast the day after the disaster, in which he spoke of both reasonable and unreasonable bitterness and anger in the valley, and by the Archbishop of Canterbury who, in a sermon in a Kent church, said that risks of a similar disaster must be removed.[57] A survey of the sermons published in *The Expository Times* in the nine months immediately after the disaster is a further barometer of 'pulpit awareness'. It reveals that there was only one passing reference to Aberfan - in John Gray's Palm Sunday sermon on the cry of dereliction from the cross.[58]

> *"... the person dying slowly of cancer, the child victim of neglect – verminous, dirty, starving and bruised, the peasants in Vietnam, the parents in Aberfan, all cry, 'My God, why?'"*

This is in contrast with a preacher from Bangor who studiously avoided reference to Aberfan in a rhetorical dialogue with an atheist in a sermon about God and Evil.[59] Although the preacher speaks specifically about the natural beauty of Wales, his imagined atheist, overlooking Aberfan, says:

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[55] McLean, Iain and Johnes, Martin, *Aberfan: Government and Disasters*. (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 2000), p.110.
[56] Miller, Joan, *Aberfan: A disaster and its aftermath*. (London: Constable, 1974) p.29.
[57] Anon., "Twin Towns that know the same fear." *The Times*, 24 October 1966, London, p.8.
[58] Gray, John R., "The Cry of Dereliction." in *The Expository Times*, 78:5 (February 1967), p.157.
[59] North, C. R., "God and Evil." in *The Expository Times*, 78:9, (June 1967), p.277.

> *"How can I believe in God ... when an earthquake or a volcano, or a tidal wave or a hurricane, can kill innocent people by hundreds or thousands at a time?"*

The main response of the churches, however, was a remarkable example of community development, most notably Tŷ Toronto, a centre established as the focus for advocacy, community development and social welfare funded by the Welsh churches in Canada.[60] Although it was important that the churches should respond in practical ways, one wonders whether this also conveniently avoided the crucial and challenging theological questions that Brierley, unlike his real-life equivalents, bravely faces in *How Far Can You Go?* His sermon voices the feelings of those who, like Job, feeling utter despair and alienation from God because their sons and daughters have been killed, are unconvinced by the orthodox arguments of the pious who try to reconcile them to their fate (107). His sermon challenges the orthodox piety of the children's hymn *Loving Shepherd of thy sheep* and the Wesley hymn *Jesu, lover of my soul*, both sung at the Aberfan funeral, although neither of these are referenced in the novel. Brierley acknowledges that words convincing to Job would fail to convince the parents of Aberfan, but *The Book of Job*'s point – as story, myth or poem – was, according to Brierley, that "God only spoke to Job because Job complained to God ... and let his embittered soul speak out" (108). Brierley's parish priest asks what good it does to make people doubt the goodness of God and suggests Brierley needs a holiday or "a course of some kind," which implies that the priest suspects that Brierley has experienced 'loss of faith'. The novel concludes the conversation at this point, leaving us to fill in the gap of Austin Brierley's response, because the novel has already alerted us to the fact that it is Aberfan, not Austin Brierley's response to Aberfan, that makes us doubt God's goodness. Brierley is facing, not losing, faith; his sermon honestly addresses where people are in their faith and doubt, commitment and alienation.

On the basis of the above analysis of these fictional troubled preachers' sermons, there are important points to be made about preaching today, not only

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[60] Miller, Joan, *op. cit.* and Ballard, Paul, "Poverty and Change: The Churches' response in South Wales, 1966-2000." in *The Expository Times*, 116:2, (November 2004), pp.43-38.

for preachers troubled by crises of faith. I will address these in the remainder of this chapter.

In chapter 1, I expressed the view that sermons are sites for both believers and agnostics to engage with the intersection of the quotidian world and classical faith and that one of the preacher's tasks is to bring together the worlds of belief and experience in meaningful discourse. The role of the preacher, interpreting scripture and applying the traditional teaching of the Church to the state we are currently in, is to craft theology for the current age. In the fictional worlds of *Easter* and *How Far Can You Go?* this has been the work of Blair Ashley, Huxley Grieve and Austin Brierley, and it is one respect in which fictional sermons are in step with homiletical theory of the period 1979 to 2004.

In 1975 Colin Morris published his Voigt lectures on preaching. In one of these he spoke of preaching as both personal and corporate. It is appropriate to reference a pre-1979 series of lectures, for many preachers practice their craft educated by the theory of their youth, rather than by the work of homileticians who are currently researching and writing.[61] Morris argued that the Gospel must not only be true but true for the preacher, although personal experience should not be the sole basis for preaching for that leads to "unhealthy and cramped subjectivism";[62] rather preachers should preach "out of the Church's experience" and he argued that, whilst a sermon may either attack or defend the Church, because no preacher is the Church's lackey but the servant of the Word, in the last resort the preacher must affirm the Church on whose fount of living faith the preacher draws.[63] I disagree with Morris on this last point because this could result in the preacher losing integrity and becoming no more than a performer mouthing or ventriloquising another's words. However, I agree with Morris that the Christian Gospel does not exist *in vacuo*, but is liturgically incarnate in a preacher on whom lies the expectation of honesty: better, he says, that a

[61] Here I acknowledge the cooperation of the active Methodist preachers, lay and ordained, in the St Albans and Welwyn Circuit each of whom answered a questionnaire asking them to list the books about preaching on their bookshelves and to indicate to which homileticians they felt most indebted. Very few cited recent or contemporary theorists.
[62] Morris, Colin, *The Word and the Words: The Voigt Lectures on Preaching*. (London: Epworth Press, 1975), p.30.
[63] *ibid.*, p.31.

preacher wrestles with a giant issue, is thrown and confesses defeat than that the congregation is buried in a torrent of words that tries to conceal the preacher's inadequacy to the task.[64] Thus he admits that preachers are vulnerable and may prove themselves to be broken reeds.[65]

At the beginning of the twenty-first century there is a vogue among homileticians to encourage doctrinal preaching, which they understand as proclamation rooted in the central tenets of the Christian faith *contra* "the mood of postmodernism which relativizes faith convictions into mere personal opinions".[66] Yet, as David Lose argues, this 'confessional' preaching (what Morris, in effect, was describing) is not only about telling the truth, but about telling both sides of the story.[67] This is to say that authentic preaching in our pluralistic world, what Lose calls "the public practice of confessing faith in Jesus Christ", is a matter of being "faithful to the Christian tradition, ... responsive to our pluralistic, postmodern context"[68] and true to our experience.

Walter Brueggemann, primarily an Old Testament scholar, has also contributed to our understanding of the nature of preaching in postmodernity initially in the 1989 Lyman Beecher lectures published as *Finally Comes the Poet*. In the introduction to these he identified four contextual partners in the act of preaching: the text, the baptised, the specific occasion and the 'better world'.[69] The text around which the community of faith gathers is a misshapen and diminished text robbed of its dangerous power, mixed up with the ideology of our nation, our class, our sect, our sex and reduced to ideological commitments which we vigorously trust.[70] The second partner in the meeting is the baptised who may not have any clear articulation about the authority of the text, but who have nonetheless made some vague decision about its 'cruciality'.

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[64] *ibid.*, p.35.
[65] *ibid.*, p.41.
[66] Van Harn, Roger E., ed., *Exploring and Proclaiming the Apostles' Creed.* (London: Morehouse, 2004), p.xii.
[67] Lose, *op. cit.*, p.214.
[68] *ibid.*, p.3.
[69] Brueggemann, Walter, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp.7-10.
[70] *ibid.*, p.7.

They will struggle with it, for in some way it is their text.[71] Then there is the specific occasion of poetic speech when the preacher "speaks an old text [that] everyone knows ... but played afresh" rendering "a world that is truly home but from which [we] have been alienated".[72] The final partner is a 'better world', revealing life and disclosing truth; Brueggemann calls this a "fiction to which I must trust myself ... authored by God who also authors the text and the speech".[73] In later books, for instance *The Bible and the Postmodern Imagination* and *Cadences of Home*, he will make much of the role of imagination in preaching in constructing this God-authored world. A recent collection of British essays on preaching included one by Paul Johns arguing for the centrality of imagination when preaching in times of crisis.[74] He comments that at such times "we tend to take refuge in familiar ways of looking at things only to find that the wine bursts the skins". It would be better, he says, if we were to use imagination which is "the gift most needed by the preacher who yearns to expose what is going on beneath the surface of the crisis; to set it in the context of God's past and God's future; and so help the worshipping community to discover how to live and what to say today." Imagination capable of achieving this act of faith is akin to the reader's indwelling of a text of which Ferretter wrote and the incarnational nature of preaching of which Morris wrote.[75] So it is that influential American homileticians, such as Ronald Allen, argue that, whereas once preachers were encouraged to craft sermons for effective delivery, we are currently conscious that preachers need to embody sermons.[76] In the moment of preaching, minister and sermon are conjoined. Whereas Allen claims that it is good for preachers to "name their own convictions",[77] he also cautions against "the lone ranger approach to interpretation" that can leave the preacher as an "interpretive orphan ... deprived

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[71] *ibid.*, p.8.
[72] *ibid.*, pp.9f.
[73] *ibid.*, p.10.
[74] Johns, Paul, "Preaching in Times of Crisis." in Hunter, Geoffrey *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p.131.
[75] *op. cit.*, p.30.
[76] Allen, Ronald J., *Preaching is Believing: The Sermon as Theological Reflection.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p.96.
[77] *ibid.*, p.94.

of connection with other voices that could add to the theological maturity of the sermon".[78]

It seems, then, that current homiletical theory affirms the approach adopted by the fictional preachers considered in this chapter. They imagined beyond what another influential American homiletician, David Buttrick, calls "house-organ speech",[79] that is merely expressing the institutional party line for the sake of the institution, and faced with integrity the dichotomy between traditional expressions of the Faith and actual experience. They achieved 'double-consciousness' that kept their eyes on tradition's page yet allowed them to glance sideways to the faces of others and enter into cultural negotiations with the text.[80] They reinterpreted the Faith for current times without limiting themselves to no more than personal opinion: for instance, Blair Ashley in the sermon at Dee and Alice's lesbian union referenced "pioneering scholars", submerged scriptural texts and a tradition of same-sex rites in the first thousand years of Christian history (282ff.). In the style of these fictional preachers, the actual preacher faced with inner or external forces that challenge faith may consider following the ancient advice of an eleventh-century monk, Anselm, whose motto was *Credo ut intelligam.*[81] It means, 'I believe so that I might understand' and it suggests that belief precedes understanding.

As Neville Clark said, the site of the tensions referred to in this chapter is the preacher; he or she is the battleground:

> *"If scripture is to yield a contemporary word, text must intersect with all the relevant garnered assumptions, understandings and loyalties that may be presumed to mark congregational hearing. What will be their questions? What will be their responses? What will be their resistances? What will be their perplexities? Where lies the stuff of real conflict, and how is it to be resolved? Where lies the point of true convergence, and how is it to be attained?"*[82]

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[78] *ibid.*, p.49.
[79] Buttrick, David, *Preaching the New and the Now.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p.42.
[80] McClure, John S., *op. cit.*, p.44.
[81] Allen, Ronald J., *op. cit.*, p.93.
[82] Clark, Neville, *op. cit.*, p.86.

The short answer to Clark's last question about how meaningful convergence can be attained by preachers is that it may be achieved by allowing creative doubt, at play with the creative tensions between fiction and faith, between imagination and belief, between the world as it is and what Brueggemann called "God's future fiction",[83] to 'fund' our imaginations so that we can live faithfully in a world that challenges faith.

In the next chapter I will examine the nature of the language used by novelists to communicate such faith.

[83] Brueggemann, Walter, (1989), p.10.

6: "Words, words": the language of fictional sermons

The most taciturn of Byatt's clergymen in the Frederica novels dismisses preaching as "Words, words" (VG, 47) yet words are basic tools for teachers like Daniel Orton's atheistic father-in-law and the essential building blocks of all who speak. Words are, therefore, the foci of two of the four rhetorical lenses giving form to the methodology of this thesis. One is the section I have called *Logos* which assesses the nature of the reasoning or argument employed in the speech; the other is the section I have called *Praxis* which assesses the pragmatic or practical outworking of the rhetorical situation under scrutiny and includes a subsection inviting the analyst to consider the *lexis* or vocabulary of the text. This is a standard aspect of discourse analysis in which 'linguistic or interpretative repertoires', by which I mean "recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena,"[1] are often indicative of attitude, agreed behaviour and accepted mores. Conscious that discourse analysis has limited methodological value for at least three reasons - because the analyst can easily impose meaning(s) on another's text, because

[1] Potter, Jonathan and Wetherell, Margaret, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. (London: Sage Publications, 1987), p.149.

different linguistic repertoires present in a text may not be phenomenologically discrete and because it is difficult to move from a specific text to a wider context[2] - I have nonetheless successfully used its insights when working previously with small groups of preachers as they have engaged with the linguistic structure of actual sermons. Furthermore, I have found that closed discourse analysis, applied restrictively to the texts of the fictional sermons, has displayed the preachers' implied attitudes, the working of preacherly power over the texts and the manipulative power of language within them.

At the outset of this research I expected to find that novelists' use of specifically theological language distanced, or in Levinas's terms,[3] decentred or dislocated the reader, because it formalises the discourse. Moreover, because the presence of specifically theological language permits voices additional to the narrating voice to be heard, namely those of the institutional church and the academic discipline of theology, I expected to find that it tends to render anachronistic any theological and philosophical comment in novels.

However, religious language is not essentially strange, distancing or anachronising, even though much academic interest in the nature of religious language since the groundbreaking work of Ian Ramsey[4] has often implied its peculiarity.

The inclusion of point of view as a subsection of the analytical checklist is a reminder that all language use is value-laden. As Paul Simpson asserts,[5]

> *"Language use cannot be regarded as value-free, natural or exempt from at least some 'angle of telling.' It is shaped by a mosaic of cultural assumptions, political beliefs and institutional practices."*

In the case of sermons, their linguistic structure encodes a particular worldview[6] and communicates an ideology derived from 'taken for granted assumptions' and

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[2] Burman, Erica and Parker, Ian, eds., *Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action.* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.154.
[3] Levinas, Emmanuel, *Otherwise than Being.* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), pp.5-9 and 37-38, cited by McClure, John S., *op. cit.*, p.10.
[4] Ramsey, Ian, T., *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases.* (London: SCM Press, 1957).
[5] Simpson, Paul, *op. cit.*, p.176.
[6] *ibid.*, p.104.

shared value systems.[7] In most, but not all, cases, these include the presumption of God's existence and a shared "theory of how the world is arranged."[8] This textual ideology is a linguistic construct rather than an objective reality, for as David Cunningham says, theology is "pre-eminently verbal", an observation that had previously led Kenneth Burke to understand his own work to be a study of both 'words-about-words' and 'words-about-the-Word', or what he called 'logology'.[9] The tautology is unavoidable: the relationship between theology, etymologically 'words about God', and language, comprising words, is close.

According to Cunningham, Burke's study of logology led to some general observations about the paradigmatic function of theological language. Starting with the observation that language is a human means of communication, Burke argued that theological language is not a divine dispensation but a human attempt to communicate first-order religious claims. This is not to say, however, that language may not be transformed when it is used theologically. Indeed, he claims that when language is employed for theological purposes it "tends to develop new, ultimate connotations that then find their way back into non-theological uses of the same language."[10] The examples he gives are 'grace' and 'create', whose meanings have been augmented during their migration in and out of ordinary usage and theological application.

This augmenting migration is possible because all language, and most obviously religious language, is essentially metaphorical; as the theologian Nicolas Lash said, "everything we say is metaphorically said."[11] The transformation of words when used theologically is through the 'magic' of metaphor, its hocus pocus or *hoc est corpus*. Here I am following Terry Wright who characterised religious language as a "complex web of metaphors and symbols pointing towards an imperfectly understood reality", then claimed that

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[7] *ibid.*, p.6.
[8] *ibid.*, p.104.
[9] Cunningham, David S., *op. cit.*, p.177, discussing Burke, Kenneth, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961; reprint Berkley, University of California Press, 1977).
[10] *ibid.*, p.178.
[11] Lash, Nicholas, *Holiness, Speech and Silence: Reflections on the Question of God.* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.51.

metaphors are "the most important means by which language is stretched beyond the literal in order to talk of God,"[12] lest, as Tillich warned, the symbols themselves become idolatrous, demonised or elevated to ultimate reality.[13] We not only live by metaphors, but our God-talk is also metaphorical. What Henry Gates Junior claimed for African-American literary criticism, that the literal and the figurative are locked in a signifying relation in double-voiced discourse resulting in an indeterminacy of interpretation,[14] is true also of language employed theologically: there can be a difference between the meaning a term conveys and the meaning it was intended to convey;[15] there can be a difference between surface and latent meaning;[16] a difference can be drawn between literal and metaphorical signification. But the louder voice is metaphor.

In this discussion it is important to maintain a distinction between metaphor and analogy. In her study of gender and genre, Mary Gerhart saw analogy as an unknown understood in terms of a known, whereas metaphor is two knowns forced into equivalency by establishing common fields of meaning.[17] In other words, analogy is argumentative and explanatory, whereas, according to Sue Sorensen, metaphors work on senses and emotions as well as minds providing "a moving and human framework for ideas, partly because they are full of contradictions and may even be illogic [*sic*]."[18] Because metaphor does more than make comparisons,[19] making accessible what would otherwise lie beyond our linguistic grasp, it is generally agreed that metaphors cannot be replaced by literal equivalents.[20] In the language of preaching we are using metaphor, not analogy: *contra* Alan Bennett's comedic life as a tin of sardines, we are not arguing 'this is like that'; we are saying, hopefully in a faithfully

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[12] Wright, Terry, *op. cit.*, p.129.
[13] Tillich, Paul, *Theology of Culture*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp.66f.
[14] Gates, Henry L., *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[15] *ibid.*, p.46.
[16] *ibid.*, p.82.
[17] Gerhart, Mary, *op. cit.*, p.121.
[18] Sorensen, Sue, "A.S. Byatt and the Life of the Mind: A Response to Jane Sturrock." *Connotations* 13:1 (2003), p.188.
[19] See Soskice, Janet M., *op. cit.*, for a discussion of classical Christian use of metaphor and analogy.
[20] Green, Garrett, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination*. (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), p.133.

persuasive way, that 'this is that by which we live as if it is so'. As Lakoff and Johnson assert in their seminal work on metaphor, its essence is "understanding *and experiencing* one kind of thing in terms of another."[21]

Since philosophers tend to regard metaphors as "out of the ordinary imaginative or poetic linguistic expressions",[22] for some Christians the problem with regarding theological language as metaphor is that it compromises the 'truth' of their faith. Lakoff and Johnson argue that, whilst objective truth is a myth wielded by people of power imposing their brand of truth, truth is an important aspect of our daily lives in that we base all our actions on what we take to be true, from something as simple as where we go to buy a loaf of bread to something as complex as the way we express our sense of the numinous; we then ritualise the actions and culturally embed the 'truth'. Because Lakoff and Johnson believe that truth, rather than being objective and absolute, is based on understanding, they suggest that truth depends on categorisation in the following four ways: first, statements can be true only in relation to some understanding of them; second, understanding always involves categorising the statement in terms emerging from our experience; third, the truth of a statement is always relative to the properties highlighted by the categories used in the statement; and fourth, categories are neither fixed nor uniform, but defined by prototypes and family resemblances to prototypes, thus adjustable and variable in context.[23] They go on to demonstrate that the concepts enabling us to categorise and grasp the meaning of statements are carried in metaphors: "we understand the world, think and function in metaphorical terms."[24] In other words, in the absence of objective reality, which is a problematic concept for anyone working on faith and fiction, truth is carried in metaphor, which is to say once again that the metaphor is essential and cannot be replaced by a literal translation.[25]

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[21] Lakoff, George and Johnson, Mark, *Metaphors We Live By*. (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1980) [my emphasis], p.5.
[22] *ibid.*, p.160.
[23] *ibid.*, pp.165f.
[24] *ibid.*, p.184.
[25] Wright, Terry, *op. cit.*, p.130 and Soskice, Janet M. *op. cit.*, p.93.

Moreover, as Ricoeur argued, referring to Majorcan storytellers who said *"Aixo era y no era"* (It was and it was not), there is an important 'and is not' in any positive metaphorical statement so that both halves of a metaphor, what Wright calls its 'stereo-scopic' or 'bi-focal' vision, are held in tension in such a way that the metaphorical concept of truth is not lost and the 'split-reference' or 'tensional' quality of the metaphor is retained.[26] This tension is what gives metaphor the dynamism to generate new meaning, in theology as well as in literature, in speech as well as in writing, in academic as well as in confessional theology.

To see how novelists employ metaphor in their fictional sermons, I began by identifying the range of linguistic repertoires used by all the fictional preachers in this study, then analysed the effects achieved by the novelists. John Murray, for instance, varies the *lexis* of the different sections of the long sermon in *John Dory* to distinguish between them. In the first section of the sermon (138-147), the preacher uses many philosophical terms which we can regard as part of an academic repertoire mingling them with colloquialisms with which his working-class audience would be familiar. The sermon's academic repertoire includes references to philosophical movements like "Nominalism, Thomism and Ockhamism", technical terminology such as "analysis, synthesis, syllogism, [and] ratiocination", awareness of "current university teachings", thought systems such as "intellectual method" and "the Catholic monastic system", the capacity of intellectuals to overcome "the incalculable, the inimitable and the immeasurable", the necessary work of "logicians", Latin phrases such as "ad infinitum", the distinction between "philosophical theology" and "*theological* theology" (his italics) and our dominance by the "operations of time and chance". The colloquialisms that occur amongst these terms can be regarded as the repertoire of 'street-talk'. These include the preacher's expectation of "a gobful of indignation" if he were to conduct a vox pop on the streets of Maryport, his self-depiction as "an ugly old gadger" and in his younger days "a real bobby dazzler", his depiction of St Paul the Apostle as a man widely acknowledged to have had a "colossal brain", his description of Jodokus

[26] Ricoeur, Paul, (1978), pp.221 and 255.

Trutfetter, Luther's teacher of Greek reasoning, as "a brilliant chap" and his description of success being that of a "big-shot boss with half a dozen phone lines ..." Standing out from other colloquialisms in this section because of its jagged awkwardness is his description of a bungalow as "gleamingest" (142), a lexical deviation in the form of functional conversion, in that the speaker has clumsily reconstructed an adjective as a comparative, more appropriate to the 'low-talk' of conversational dialect than the 'high-talk' of formal preaching. Murray is not only attempting the 'bilinguality' of both worldly and spiritual language, which David Lose argued is necessary to keep preachers faithful to their confession,[27] but in mixing 'high-talk' and 'low-talk' in such an exaggerated way he has created a jarring effect which exposes Ken Wright to be a man as desperate to communicate as a politican using contemporary slang: it brings his sincerity into question.

Both the academic and street-talk repertoires of Wright's sermon feature the linguistic repertoires of value and conquest. The preacher uses the vocabulary of conquest when he speaks of "the penetrating powers of analysis" (145), the men and women who "by the power of their tongues" are "capable of cooking up the subtlest of arguments", those with spiritual pride who believe they "can conquer everything from family tension to a breaking marriage", our desire to "win a serene old age", his claim that "only one person, only one almighty power" knows how to deal with time and chance and, in the transitional stages of the sermon as the preacher moves into the narrative of his life, his self-preening notion that he "literally had to fight off half the females in Blackburn" (149). The preacher's paradoxical pride in his erstwhile attraction to women is also part of the repertoire of value for which his opening rhetorical question - what are you worth? - prepares us. The terms of this repertoire include his self-description as "boring-looking", "dull old gadger", "not worth a second glance", "monumentally anonymous", "existing in other people's minds just as a lump category", and being like a "walking ghost". The repertoire also includes his expressed disapproval of "secular self-regard", people who "rank themselves in terms of their life's achievements" and the equation of "personalised stationery"

[27] Lose, *op. cit.*, p.125.

with "personal value" (141). The novelist thus establishes a prevalent theology for this discourse; it is a conversionist understanding of God's activity in which a new man 'replaces' the old man. As Wright expresses it, however, it troubles the issue of self-worth, with which, perhaps ironically, the sermon began. Wright now has an excessive pride in his former depravity and retains an over-bearing sense of self-worth evident in the way he stresses his success at work and that women were attracted to him. Murray expresses both Wright's conversion away from this and his readiness to use oral autobiography for rhetorical ends.

Murray maintains the integrity of this long sermon by introducing another linguistic repertoire in the first section which he develops to both greater extent and significant effect in later sections, the repertoire of enlightenment. He opens this repertoire with two uses of the image: the preacher's disapproval of Aristotelian teaching is evident when he says "in short the whole of Aristotle is related to theology as darkness is to light" (144) and he also scoffs at the self-confidence of the intellectually and spiritually proud who believe they can "teach themselves to see in the dark" (145).

In the second section of the sermon in which the preacher tells his own story, the repertoire of enlightenment is used to express his journey from the "abyss, an endless and terrifying pit that really has no bottom to it" (154) to "redemption" (188). Once when he fell from a window ledge, "everything went as black as hell. Only the lass's terrified scream came piercing through my darkness" (199). In periods of lucidity amid drunkenness, he could see that the quayside was "pitch dark, blacker than any normal night" (203). The depth of his depravity was like "going down a pitch-black pit shaft" but he struggled up towards the daylight as he found that he was attracted by "the comforting light" (204). Lying weeping, he became "full of something best described as radiance, ... brilliant light and I knew ... that all my blackness had been purged" (206). The converting moment was at dawn when "a little sliver split the sky. A bright white radiance was soon covering the whole dockside" (208).

This is familiar imagery from the New Testament, supplemented by the preacher's use of other biblical terms such as "redemption" (188) and, in the third reported section of the sermon he speaks of "justification" and a "once-and-for-all atonement by the God ... who sacrificed himself in place of all of us" in "an absolute once-and-for-all battle against the appalling powers of darkness" (214). Although other aspects of the sermon may have unsettled readers, Murray uses these recognisably conventional religious terms to prevent total disruption of schematic expectations which would alienate the reader: thus he settles the reader once again in familiar territory. Actual preachers often use this same ploy when moving between biblical and contemporary worlds, between exegesis and interpretation.

To persuade us – and the intratextual audience – to continue listening in the early part of the second section, the preacher deploys an interpretative repertoire that constructs a persona of expertise for himself. He has the verbal and social dexterity to play one woman off against another and enjoys the "magnetism" of good looks and "handsome money" (150). Because of his "genius for motor cars" and "natural eye for design" he was offered jobs with top manufacturers (151). No shrinking violet, he confesses that he was "as vain, as deludedly omnipotent as the worst megalomaniac conceivable" (152), a vanity now exercised with similarly ruthless "diabolically methodical ... [and] ... tirelessly diligent" calculation in his coercive hold over congregations like this one in the mission hall (152). The sleek pinstripe suit and gleaming sports car that impressed the girls in his youth (157) have been replaced by a navy blue blazer, perfectly creased grey trousers and a brand-new estate car sufficient to impress churchgoers with his respectability and middle-aged social success (128). And when he tells how difficult it was to live with all the lies he used to tell in his youth, he is still capable of dazzling his hearers with a "technical term" for it – "cognitive overload" (154).

Although the novel's narrator reckons that this is "strange ... music to a secular ear" (215), these are familiar sounds to people attuned to the biblical cadences of evangelical preaching, the clichéd Church language distinct from

what Karl Barth called "the language of Mr. Everyman."[28] In this sermon the language of Canaan, likely to distance contemporary readers, is only partially translated through the preacher's self-narrative into the language of the newspaper.[29] The incompleteness of this translation may indicate the novelist's view that the reader still has translating work to do, in other words, that the translation is only complete when readers have appropriated Wright's conversion story for themselves. The incompleteness is an invitation for readers to locate themselves in relation to this novel and its evangelical expression of Christianity. *John Dory*'s primary purpose is to challenge its readers with Christianity's truth-claims, for, as Murray said when I interviewed him in 2003, although the novel is comic the sermon is very serious. He said he was being didactic with this novel: "[he] was trying to preach something – that Christianity is a powerful thing."

The authors of other novels featuring more than one preacher vary the linguistic repertoire of the sermons to differentiate between preachers. We may take Byatt for instance. She has an academic interest in metaphor which she has sustained since the 1950s, when she worked at Oxford on a (never finished) doctoral dissertation about religious metaphor in Renaissance poetry, to a recent newspaper review of a National Gallery exhibition in which she referred to her thesis.[30] In her Frederica tetralogy the sermons have less effect on the characters and have a smaller role in the novels' plots than the sermons in any of the other novels in this study. Even so she gives her preachers, Ellenby, Farrar and Holly, distinctive speech idioms.

Of all the novels in this thesis, the dilemma of the inadequacy of human language to speak of God is explored most thoroughly in Byatt's Frederica novels, which are concerned from beginning to end with what Hodder Pinsky in *A Whistling Woman* called the inability of human beings to think without metaphors (353). The sermons in these novels appear to be incidental texts-within-texts, yet Byatt intends that they contribute to this exploration of the metaphorical nature of religious language. She draws attention to this when, in

[28] Barth, Karl, *op. cit.*, p.32.
[29] *ibid.*, p.33.
[30] Byatt, Antonia S., "A life less ordinary." in *The Guardian Review*, 2 July 2005, pp.16-17.

Still Life, as Stephanie Potter and Daniel Orton visit Gideon Farrar after he has preached his first sermon in the parish, Stephanie thinks of novels as sites where things are, not because they are there, but because they signify something (161). Like everything else in the novels, the sermons are there because they signify something and, as I will now show with reference to three of her preachers, they play a small, but significant, role in Byatt's exploration of some of her novels' themes.

In *The Virgin in the Garden*, the local vicar, Ellenby, delivers an Easter sermon and a wedding address. Both are characterised by the language of the King James Version of the bible. The Easter sermon about "decomposition ... reversed" (VG, 202) composes a resurrection narrative intentionally recomposing the Body of Christ as the Church and enabling the congregation to celebrate its composition as the beating heart of Christ (202). Ellenby's composition of resurrection narrative is more *re*composition in that it comprises a repertoire of Pauline biblical allusions, such as "condemned to eternal death" alluding to 1 Corinthians 11: 32, "if after the manner of men ... I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die" quoting 1 Corinthians 15: 32 and "we too live forever" taking up the theme of Romans 8: 12f. His address at Stephanie and Daniel's wedding is similarly informed by the language of the King James Bible, as he refers to Genesis 2: 24 and some verses in Ephesians 5, especially verses 28 and 32, in which the letter writer, in the tradition of Paul, sees the relationship between a man and his wife as analogous to that between Christ and the Church (343). But the success of his attempt to communicate is limited: Daniel's blunt 'yes' is unreadable to Ellenby who suspects he is "half pagan" (343), at the back of the church Marcus distractedly only "partly heard" the sermon and Stephanie "harboured briefly savage thoughts about the essential shiftiness of argument by analogy" (VG, 344). The author's revelation of Stephanie's thoughts is striking: both analogy and metaphor are unavoidably 'shifty' in that they depend upon shifting meanings of signifiers, so Stephanie - and Byatt herself who has expressed herself not at all religious – is, in this revealed thought, challenging the very basis of all preaching and the possibility of all talk about God.

The interpretative repertoires Gideon Farrar employs in his preaching in both *Still Life* and *A Whistling Woman* are more varied and move away from biblical discourse, except for the (mis)application to Christ of a Pauline phrase – "all things to all men" – in the sermon he preaches when he first arrives in the parish (SL, 158). The sermon is more theological than biblical and also uses the linguistic repertoire of the social sciences, the novelist thus causing us in this early novel to distrust Farrar as a moderniser of religion who is maverick enough eventually to distort Christianity in the final Frederica novel. After reminding his audience of the many parts Shakespeare expects us to play in our lifetimes, Farrar uses sociological jargon and the interpretative repertoire of the theatre to warn that our roles should not be "confining cells" but "masks" and he speaks of "the relations of men in groups" and "primordial groups" (SL, 159). He announces his subject as "the Second Person of the Trinity", "Jesus Christ the divine man" and how we behave in personal relationships. The theological distinction he draws is between the real, the sacramental and the symbolic (distinctions also present in fiction).

When we next read one of Gideon Farrar's sermons several years have passed, he has founded a breakaway religious community and he is addressing its members at a communal love feast for the Children of Joy. Because this sermon is mediated through the filter of a letter in which Brenda Pincher, an ethnomethodologist, analyses Farrar's leadership role, discourse analysis of Farrar's preaching, in this case, cannot be pure. Nevertheless readers are aware that Farrar has not entirely eschewed biblical quotation: he cites "Come unto me all ye who are heavy laden and I will give you rest," although Pincher says it is unclear whether 'me' refers to Christ or Farrar and he quotes John 8: 32, "The truth will make you free," before claiming that *he* will cast out fear and shadow so that community members may live "in the clear" (WW, 203). Byatt, through Pincher, thus shows us that he has appropriated the Word. The *lexis* of traditional ecclesiastical language is present; for instance Farrar is said to talk a lot about the openness of fellowship, but he also prefers to use circumlocutions such as "'grievous faults', 'errors', 'mistakes' and even 'misfortunes'" (WW,

203) rather than require "a full public confession of ... sins". He also interprets Jesus casting out demons in terms of "painful birthing" (WW, 203).

Canon Adelbert Holly preaches twice in *A Whistling Woman*: once giving an impromptu sermon on St Lucy's Day, the other a Christmas Day sermon at the invitation of the vicar of Freyasgarth. The first plays variations on the theme of the interpretative repertoire of enlightenment, as Holly quotes John Donne's *St Lucie's Day* and, according to Brenda Pincher, twists his quotation into a desperate prayer to the Deus Absconditus who is "reborn in the Particles of Light in all of us" (WW, 232). In what is in effect "half after-dinner speech, half pagan paean", Holly muses on Lucy as "Lux, Lucis, the Maiden of Light ... blessed among women for providing the Hall for the Hearers" (WW, 233).

Holly's Christmas sermon uses the *lexis* of kenotic theology. Intending to say something "real, rather than a few nice platitudes," he speaks of "a steady distancing of God from the earth" in the history of the development of theological thought, culminating in Nietzsche's eventual declaration of the death of God, which disturbed many people who recognised the state of affairs he was describing (WW, 241). Holly equates Nietzsche's 'death of God' with the moment of incarnation when God "emptied himself out" into "finite flesh" and "entered History [in such a way that] ... His birth is repeated daily in historical time" (WW, 242). In a phrase reminiscent of Daniel Orton's dismissal of preaching near the beginning of the first novel in Byatt's quartet (although their yardsticks are quite different), Frederica, in real time almost twenty-five years later, is irritated that the sermon was "*almost* meaningful but not quite, [merely] in the end a game with language" (WW, 242). Without Frederica's literary appreciation and analysis of the poetry of *In the bleak midwinter* that follows Holly's sermon, this remark is little more than a reiteration of her sister's earlier unexpressed criticism of Ellenby's wedding sermon. Remarkably, the unmusical Stephanie finds that the carol's music enables her to "make sense" of the poet's words. This may be confusing for the reader but it enables Byatt to imply the ease with which language can slip from sense to senselessness.

Like Byatt but in a more marked way, Arditti distinguishes between the three preachers of his novel, *Easter*, by varying their linguistic repertoires. When Ted Bishop preaches to the clergy of his diocese on Maundy Thursday he uses the linguistic repertoire of management theory to express his understanding of his relationship to his audience: this is his one opportunity to address the "whole team" at "Head Office", many of whose members are "toiling away on the shop floor" (78). As he is a newly-appointed bishop, he feels he needs to introduce himself and, in doing so, he uses the familiar repertoire of spiritual pilgrimage although he degrades it into a repertoire of travel and tourism as he speaks of a spiritual journey under "two very special guides", the first of whom "gave [him his] ticket", the second of whom "punched it" (79). This second spiritual mentor was Billy Graham whose missions in Britain in the 1950s were, in hindsight insensitively, called 'crusades', so it should not surprise us that Ted Bishop understands missiology in terms of conflict and employs the repertoire of combat: the diocesan team is said to be "standing together to fight the good fight for the Lord" and his episcopal role is "to purify [the diocese], to purge it of pernicious liberalism" (79). He believes that they "face powerful enemies" and that it is up to the diocesan clergy to provide "a strong moral lead" using the Bible as "the central weapon in their armoury", the Christian's "sword and shield" (80).

The bishop's second sermon in the novel is preached at a healing service earlier in Holy Week but reported to the reader later in the novel. It, too, sees mission in crusading terms as he encourages his hearers, who have just been told that evil and suffering are "trials sent by Satan", to "arm [themselves] for the fight every day" because although "the battle is won ... it's not yet over" until Satan has been banished from every heart (268). The bishop's discourse in this sermon can be characterised as fighting talk: he begins provocatively by saying that the Bible is the Word of God "but many people deny it". They call themselves Christians but he calls them humanists because they "strip Christ of his divinity, reducing him to a first-century Robin Hood". They are "compromised by their own agendas" and "trot out their cocktail-stick arguments". When they laugh at their own wit, the bishop warns that they will

be "laughing on the other side of their faces soon enough". He calls such liberal modernisers "a rot (that) reaches to the heart of the Church" (267). Whereas this yoking together of disparate discourses is a mechanism for making fun, it is curious that the bishop is comfortable with his ferocious rhetoric. Of course, it all rebounds on him later when his wife comes out as a lesbian.

For the sake of economy, I will not report my analysis of the *lexis* of all the novel's remaining seven sermons; instead I will demonstrate the lexical differentiation Arditti establishes among his preachers by describing the linguistic repertoires in Huxley Grieve's sermon on Maundy Thursday and Blair Ashley's on Easter Day, thus also avoiding the particularities of preaching at rites of passage such as weddings, funerals and lesbian unions. Because the vicar is involved in church politics associated with the gendered body of Christ, Arditti employs the linguistic repertoires of intimacy and political discourse in Grieve's sermon on Maundy Thursday. He asks whether St Peter was "afraid to expose himself to another's touch" in contrast with Jesus who was "not afraid of intimacy either with women or with men" (100). He also contrasted Jesus' encouragement of intimacy with the way we "shun ... proximity" using our "everyday greeting[s] ... [as] recognised code for 'Keep your distance'" (101). There is, the preacher says, "no call to be shy". He then introduces the *lexis* of political discourse by referring to the common suspicion that the members of the Church may be "as cynical as politicians". This is his entrée into a request that clergy should not be muzzled because that is to "neuter Christ" whose life was "as political as Karl Marx's or Che Guevara's or Margaret Thatcher's" (101). He claims that "everything Christ said and did sprang from an integrated radical vision" which amounted to a "lifelong challenge to our compromised humanity". Denying any distinction between public and private behaviour, what he calls "outdoor and indoor" morality, Grieve indicates that his taking up the "apron of Christ" in washing parishioners' feet is as political an act as his curate's more publicised and outrageous choice to take up "the mantle of Christ"; both are part of Christ's laying down of "a new world-order" (102); in a phrase both reminiscent of current academic interest in the relationship between ethics and

liturgy[31] and related to the matter of the next chapter - the way sermons shape communities - both are part of "living the liturgy" (102).

It is more difficult to identify distinctive linguistic repertoires in Blair Ashley's Easter sermon. This is partly because, unlike the bishop's sermons, it is not used for satirical purposes. It is also because it is the novelist's best thought-through attempt at sermon writing, expressing as it does what the author himself believes. Moreover, it is because Ashley's sermon carries the burden of dénouement: Easter morning is the climax of Holy Week and what Ashley says on this occasion expresses the parish's resolve to rise both from the ashes of the fire that has destroyed the church and from the scandal that has rocked the parish. Ashley's sermon expresses *Easter*'s main theme, the resurrection of the body; the novel's Christ-figure preaches continuing life. As such, the sermon is best understood as a measured theological retort to the conservative and evangelical expression of militant and muscular Christianity which sees itself as being in conflict with the prevailing culture, a view represented in the novel by Ted Bishop. For instance, Ashley says, "Christ became incarnate not in order to redeem a sinful people who had cut themselves off from salvation but to reassure a suffering people of their unity with God ... [T]he world was not in a state of sin waiting for Christ to rescue it: the world is in a state of grace, waiting for us to recognise it" (377). In passages like this, Ashley does not deviate from the *lexis* of recognised theological terms, but he is still able to construct an alternative theology, such as Arditti believes is necessary to keep the church alive.[32]

The sermons in the historical novels I have studied are more restricted in their vocabulary than Blair Ashley is, in an attempt to be true to their historical settings. Indeed, one of the motives for both Rogers and Brooks including sermons in their novels is that the language of the sermons assists in establishing the historical contexts of the narratives. Nevertheless Rogers's representation of Wroe's fictional preaching is different from extant records of the actual John

[31] Hauerwas, Stanley and Wells, Samuel, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).
[32] Arditti, Michael, "Frills and thrills" (2000), echoing John Spong's call for a new reformation in *Why Christianity Must Change or Die: A Bishop Speaks to Believers in Exile*. (London: HarperCollins, 1998).

Wroe's sermons in which I can detect no social, economic or political references. For instance, sermon IV on "Lord who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" (Psalm 15: 1), in the hands of other preachers of the era, could have led to a sermon describing personal or social holiness because the psalm provides its own internal answer to its questions – those with clean hands and pure hearts. Wroe's model sermon, however, lacks any social or political application and is little more than a meditation on 'the elect of God' using a list of biblical quotations and bracketed references in what the literary critic, Pamela Dalziel in another context, rather unfairly dismissed as the typical cliché-ridden nineteenth-century style.[33]

The main sermon in *Mr Wroe's Virgins* is the one Wroe preaches in the marketplace impressing his audience with the prediction of the sicknesses and eventual deaths of two disbelievers in the crowd. It begins with prophetic speech – "Brothers and sisters in God: I come with glad news, from the mouth of the Lord himself. This world is in its final days: we shall see it end" (82) - and towards its conclusion it intensifies prophecy with apocalyptic images: "God's order has been destroyed. The devil is out and about among us, his crooked hand is evident in all things: in the disturbances of the heavens, the eclipses and shooting stars in the weather..." (83). But the main part of the sermon as reported to readers begins when Wroe encourages his listeners to "Look at earthly signs"; he then uses the *lexis* of Luddites and social reformers, for one of the signs is "the power ... machines made with the devil's cunning to steal work from the hands of our good weavers, spinners, woolcombers," another is the drugging of infants so that poverty-stricken mothers can go to work, another is the fatigue of the eight-year old child toiling in "contagious heat and hellish noise" unable to stay awake and falling into "the monster machine" while his able-bodied father, unable to find work for his hands or buyers for his cloth, "slumps in the alehouse for very shame" (83). Thus, Rogers's chosen *lexis* locates the novel in the social, economic, political and religious history of the early nineteenth-century England and establishes common ground of

[33] Dalziel, Pamela, "Strange Sermon: The gospel according to Thomas Hardy." in *Times Literary Supplement*, London, 17 March 2006, p.12.

understanding for readers, thereby overcoming one of the problems of historical fiction.[34] Aware that "the past is made not found,"[35] Rogers overcomes the problem of our lack of experience of living in Wroe's time by employing sufficient contemporary linguistic schema and interpretative repertoire to "unfold, discover and reveal" a "proposed world" in which both author and reader can believe.[36] Author and reader thus conspire to overcome the ontological 'seams' between fictional projections and real world facts that troubled Frederick Holmes in his book on historical fiction.[37]

In the case of *Year of Wonders* none of the actual rector's sermons are extant, so we are unable to see deviation when the author moves from actual to fictional, but the parish church at Eyam has published two of the rector's letters in pamphlets available to all who visit the church. One is William Mompesson's letter to his children on the death of their mother, dated August 31st 1666, in which he eulogises on her virtues, tells of the onset of her illness and narrates in detail the manner of her death. The other is his shorter letter to his patron Sir George Savile on Catherine Mompesson's death. These show Mompesson to be a devout man, in his letter to Savile expressing gratitude to God and concluding his letter to his children with an effusive doxology. We know from the Afterword of *Year Of Wonders* that Brooks consulted the local historian John Clifford and spent some time in the village (308); it is safe to assume that Brooks knows these letters so it is not surprising that the piety of Mompesson's letters accords with that of the fictional Mompellion. In the sermon that established Eyam's quarantine, he says "God in his infinite and unknowable wisdom has singled us out" to receive the plague as a gift, in response to which "we poor souls of this village may emulate Our Blessed Lord" (102). Contrary to the services of special prayers prepared by the Church of England in response to the Plague for use in times of trial which reflect the prevailing view to which Brooks's novel's more general precursor, Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* first published in 1722, witnesses, Mompellion does not believe that God

[34] Price, David W., *op. cit.*, pp.82f.
[35] *ibid.*, p.306.
[36] *ibid.*, p.28.
[37] Holmes, Frederick M., *op. cit.*, p.11.

has sent the plague in anger as punishment for sins; rather, using the imagery of smelting ore, the smithy at his furnace and the ease of ploughing after years of working the soil, he speaks of good yield coming through suffering (103). Here the language of Brooks's sermon constructs a pious persona for the preacher, more theologically 'advanced' than most of his pre-Enlightenment contemporaries. Clearly a remarkable man historically, Mompesson impressed Brooks with his saintliness and prescient heroism. She expresses this admiration through the sophisticated theology of Mompellion's discourse, more palatable to the modern mind and closer to Brooks's own view.

Unique among the sermons I have selected for this thesis are those of David Lodge's Austin Brierley, for their *lexis* is neither used to establish historical context nor to distinguish Brierley from other preachers. They do, however, distinguish his sermons from the text in which they are embedded and locate him in relation to the Roman Church in which he is an ordained priest. Because Lodge uses the novelistic technique of free indirect speech, readers read few of Brierley's actual words. This is especially true of his troubled sermon after Aberfan. On the other hand, in the case of his sermon at Dennis and Angela's wedding, discourse analysis of its lexical construction reveals his adoption of a preacherly voice in the pulpit; unlike Dickens's Chadband, Brierley is not a preacher at all times. Conscious that the wedding, in the view of Catholic theology, is a sacrament, Brierley speaks of Dennis and Angela's union as "holy matrimony" and a "nuptial mass" (67). He uses the specialised idiom of ecclesiastical language when he speaks of "the bark of St Peter", the cardinal's "secret conclave" and "the consummation of the world" that he implicitly compares to Dennis and Angela's vows made "till death do us part". When he lists the church's recent and current opponents - "rampant materialism", the "stormy seas of the Second World War" and the "teeth of Communist persecution" – he continues to use an ecclesiastical interpretative repertoire. Although Dennis and Angela have "prepared themselves prudently" they do not know what lies ahead for them; there may be "trials and tribulations", a phrase taken from the thanksgiving prayer in the funeral liturgy. Outside the pulpit, Austin Brierley's linguistic repertoire is more varied, less within the

conventional expectations of priestly talk and more worldly. Two instances will suffice: when he is worried because he cannot get the thought of Polly's stockinged leg out of his mind his response to the counsel of his parish priest shows he is aware of the *double-entendre* of ejaculations (29) and, when he seeks an interview with the Monsignor about his ministry, he abruptly says, "Well uproot me then. I can't face another week in that madhouse. Counting-house, I should say" (87). In other words, there is a real sense of his differentiated function in the pulpit: at base, he is an ordinary man.

In summary, these novelists have used differentiated language in their sermons for various reasons: to locate novels historically, to challenge religious cliché and the possibility of 'God-talk', to settle or unsettle readers in familiar or unfamiliar places and either to distance readers from, or draw them into, the discourse community of suasory speech. They have used the inadequacy of language to show the inadequacies of religion and religious people, to take issue with the transferability of religious ideas and concepts and to lead readers to question the sincerity of preachers. They have also used both undifferentiated and differentiated language to lead readers to admire the integrity of preachers.

Further to this, three subsections of my analytical toolkit, namely point of view, preacher status and intonation, have drawn my attention to the significance of pronouns as deictic words. As socially deictic expressions,[38] 'I' and 'you', 'us' and 'them', *et cetera*, give the situational coordinates of the preacher, indicating the point of view from which the sermon is given. They alert readers to the preacher's adopted stance in relation to God, text and audience and they fulfil a purpose as tone-setting, expressive aspects of the discourse.

For instance, Romans 3: 23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," a text whose understanding of the human condition underpins the evangelical Protestant kerygmatic paradigm, in preaching could be rendered confessionally as "I have sinned...", accusingly as "You have sinned..." or collegially, in which the preacher identifies with the congregation, as "We have

[38] Short, Mick, *op. cit.*, p.242.

sinned..." With each change of pronoun there is both a change of implied intonation and a change of inferred preacher status. Novelists – and their imagined preachers - employ this technique variously.

In *Easter*, Huxley Grieve's habit is to use the inclusive 'we' and 'us' with two exceptions. One is his wedding sermon when the 'I' in his discourse expresses his awareness of his status as officiant. The other is whenever in any of his sermons he addresses one of the novel's recurring themes - the issue of touching. On Maundy Thursday he says, "I ask you to move closer" and on Good Friday he regretfully says, "I have come to the conclusion that most of you want to keep God at a distance" (108). This breakdown of 'we' to 'you' and 'I' indicates the fragility of his invitation to reify inclusiveness and foregrounds what the congregation experiences as the sermons' danger points: invitations to get close.

When he speaks at Alice and Dee's lesbian union Blair unites the congregation in an implied invitation to live this uncomfortable liturgy by his use of 'we' (283), but does not maintain this throughout as he includes a section of personal testimony inevitably using 'I' (284). In his other sermon on Easter Day his use of 'I' and 'you' is particularly interesting inasmuch as it does not distance him from his audience, for he is asking them to identify with 'I' in common humanity (375). But he does distance himself from the 'you' he addresses in his wider audience, rumour-mongers who besmirch the parish's reputation (376). In a yet more exaggerated way the bishop uses 'I' and 'you' to set himself against his audience, anticipating the manner in which they will challenge what he says and ultimately antagonising factions of his audience by questioning the vocations of some of his diocesan team (80).

The normal deixis of some fictional sermons is indicated by a less involving use of the third person pronoun. One example is Wroe's sermon which initially uses the imperative mood to invite the congregation to look around then encourages them to accept what they see as evidence that God's order has been upset. Another, more striking example is that of Austin Brierley whose natural

métier seems to be to preach in the third person, distancing himself from his text, both in his discourse on Job and in his wedding homily. This is yet another way in which Lodge's preacher is distinctive and it may be that this is representative of the Roman style of homily.

Byatt distances many of her fictional preachers from the possibility of socially deictic analysis because, in *The Virgin in the Garden* and *A Whistling Woman* in particular, their sermons are filtered through the second-hand reports of other characters. However, we can infer an implied 'we' in that Ellenby was "solicitous rather than clerically hooting" (VG, 343) and the only instances of 'I' and 'you' I noted in Byatt's sermons were in Ellenby's polite invitation "I hope you will join me" (SL, 159) and Holly's moderation of his challenging theology with a polite, "I can see you are all thinking" (WW, 241). The inclusive use of 'we', characteristic of Byatt's preachers, Arditti's vicar and curate and Brooks's Mompesson in his rallying of community responsibility for outsiders, is clearly community-forming but it is less oratorically dynamic than the rhetor set apart from an audience. It does, however, establish a more humble concept of preaching than the dominating and more accusatory 'you'.

Murray's sermon begins with this aggressive 'I' and 'you' in 'I ask you what are you worth', slackens down to a third person discourse on which the preacher explains some historical theological developments (143) and unavoidably, but non-threateningly, uses 'I' for the section of personal narrative before resorting to 'us' in the final section on the doctrine of justification (214). These authors' awareness of the possibilities offered by flexibility in pronoun use can be a useful rhetorical tool for actual preachers: switching – to distance and draw in an audience, to set apart and to engage the preacher – 'moves' an audience because it shifts the situational coordinates.

The diversity of vocabulary evident in the linguistic repertoires used in Murray's, Byatt's, Arditti's, Rogers's, Brooks's and Lodge's fictional sermons leads me to question the specificity of religious language: is religious language peculiar? Or do these fictional sermons suggest that it is ordinary language put

to a particular religious use? Can *any* words be employed theologically? As religious language can be debased into profanities, is it inversely true that any language can be 'elevated' – or, to use Burke's term, transformed - to religious use? What is the nature of the "words, words" that tire Daniel Orton whilst invigorating many other hearers?

David Cunningham states that Kenneth Burke compared our theologising to our entering a parlour, there encountering a group of people already engaged in conversation, in which, after listening for a while, we make some contributions although none had paused to apprise us of what had gone on before, then as the hour grows late we depart, leaving the discussion vigorously in progress.[39] This is reminiscent of the Venerable Bede's celebrated image comparing human life to a sparrow fleetingly flying in and out of a great hall. Byatt used this in her dedication of *Still Life* to Jenny Flowerdew who died aged forty-two, and it is itself the only clue to Stephanie's shockingly unexpected death towards the end of the novel when a sparrow flies into her kitchen. I need to remember these images for they are pertinent to how I relate to all the primary sources of this thesis: although I do my best to read each of the novels as part of their author's corpus, I end up visiting them as individual books like the person who dips in and out of the discussion raging in the parlour. Indeed, this study has foregrounded selected sections of the novels – the sermons within them. Furthermore, we read only a small portion of the fictional preachers' preaching; the necessary selectivity of the fictional process hides from us the rest of their preaching or that of their creators, so we catch only what amounts to a puzzled sparrow's glimpse. Nevertheless, we attempt to draw from partially-heard preaching meaningful conclusions about "a discussion that began long before we arrived, and will continue long after we have departed."[40] If the proper subject of preaching is God, about whom Christian theology makes the fundamental assumption that God cannot be fully discovered by human power alone, then we should acknowledge that any words we use are inadequate to either the theological or homiletical task, for God is beyond the reach of human language.

[39] Cunningham, David S., *op. cit.*, p.2.
[40] *ibid.*

The dilemma for both preachers and novelists is that, although words are capable of giving us no more than a puzzled sparrow's glimpse, there is not much else available to us to speak about God. Preachers rely on "words, words," as well as on their transformability.

Byatt is what Michael Worton calls "a very 'wordy' writer"[41] and her entire Frederica quartet can be read as a sustained meditation on metaphor, in which her principle concerns seem to be language and truth, the representation of reality, naming and accuracy. In an essay on reality in the first Frederica novel, Juliet Dusinberre described the novel as both "experimental and realist, about images and about real people,"[42] a clash of the real and imagined which she felt was embodied in Frederica: in Alexander Wedderburn's play about Elizabeth I, whose first performance is planned to take place in the grounds of an Elizabethan mansion at the time of Elizabeth II's coronation, the young queen is played by Frederica and we are told that Alexander is fascinated with Frederica "as the embodied real form of his imagined heroine."[43] The complexity of real and imagined is exacerbated by Dusinberre's observation that "Alexander's imagined Elizabeth was a real temporal figure, while Frederica, who is to realize [*sic*] her in the play, is herself a figment of Byatt's imagination."[44] Writing, it seems, is a form of reality, although "the realities ... characters perceive [are] artifices which exist only in the mind."[45] Byatt parodies the writer's passion for the imagined in Alexander's preference for "imagined contact with real women", found in a salacious correspondence with Jennifer Parry, and "real contact with imaginary women" found in his proxy passion for his Virgin Queen. So, Dusinberre states, Alexander demonstrates "the incapacity of the image to encompass what is real"[46] and she concludes that, because it exists as a verbal artefact, the novel

[41] Alfer, Alexa and Noble, Michael J., eds., *op. cit.*, p.19.
[42] Dusinberre, Juliet, "Forms of Reality in A S Byatt's The Virgin in the Garden." in *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, 24:1, (Fall 1982), p.55.
[43] *ibid.*, p.56.
[44] *ibid.*
[45] *ibid.*, p.57.
[46] *ibid.*, p.59.

defines itself as a form of reality: "the real exists through the mediation of the unreal verbal form."[47]

This problem is taken up again in *Still Life*, whose main question, according to Julian Gitzen, is how accurately language can be made to represent actual phenomena. This time Byatt chooses to exemplify the problem through the alternative medium of painting, although she retains an immediate link between the painter's vision and the writer's art by centring the problem on Alexander Wedderburn again, as this time he works on a play entitled *The Yellow Chair* based on Van Gogh's final years.[48] It becomes apparent in this novel that for Byatt the most powerful feature of language is metaphor and Gitzen notes that her fascination with its creative and educational capacity leads her to "extensive outright commentary on the metaphorical basis of language in general and names in particular."[49] As an instance of this fascination, Gitzen cites the occasion when Alexander considers how he might accurately describe a damson plum and he realises that the terms he might employ – 'oval', 'purple-black', 'hazed with bloom' and 'marked with a pronounced cleft' - would lead readers to infer "flower-bloom, skin bloom, bloom of ripe youth ... human clefts, declivities, cleavages" (199). By some process in his brain these 'become' metaphors. Surplus meaning – or what we might call superfluity of signification – fills the language so that the metaphor, and indeed the entire fiction in which the metaphor is set, is able "to transform and transfigure reality."[50] In her essay *Still Life/Nature morte,* Byatt herself points to Ricoeur's work on metaphor as one of the intellectual influences on the discussion of metaphor within *Still Life*.[51] In an essay exploring Byatt's use of Ricoeur's theory, Alexa Alfer suggests that the last stage of Ricoeur's three stages of mimesis, that is the *new* configuration which may be either refiguration or transfiguration or both, is

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[47] *ibid.*, p.61.
[48] Gitzen, Julian, "A S Byatt's Self-Mirroring Art." in *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, 36:2 (Winter 1995), p.87.
[49] *ibid.*, p.89.
[50] Ricoeur, Paul, "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality." in *Man and World*, 12 (1979), p.129.
[51] Byatt, Antonia S., *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings*. (London: Chatto, 1991), p.15.

where, "the mimetic function of the plot rejoins metaphorical reference."[52] In other words, what Ricoeur calls 'mimesis$_3$' is where fiction represents reality.

I suggest that a by-product of Byatt's extended exploration of metaphorical language in novels that include sermons is that she establishes an analogy between writing and preaching, between novels and sermons, between literary language and religious language. At least twice in *Still Life* the author steps into the action to explain her attitude when writing the novel. Once, the author intrudes (131) and says:

> *"I had the idea that this novel could be written innocently ... without, as far as possible, recourse to simile or metaphor. This turned out to be impossible: one cannot think at all without a recognition and realignment of ways of thinking and seeing we have learned over time."*

Again, towards the end of *Still Life* when Marcus Potter is compiling a list of grasses, she intrudes (364) and says:

> *"I had the idea, when I began this novel, that it would be a novel of naming and accuracy. I wanted to write a novel as Williams said a poem should be; no ideas but in things. I even thought of trying to write without figures of speech, but had to give up that plan, quite early."*

She has reiterated these observations on at least two further occasions. According to her essay on *Still Life*, this was to be her "bare book" in that, in a very down-to-earth way it would attempt "to give the 'thing itself' without the infinitely extensive cross-referencing" of its prequel.[53] Twenty years later in an article reviewing an exhibition of still life pictures at the National Gallery, Byatt claimed that her novel *Still Life* was "meant to be without metaphors, a novel about things, related to William Carlos Williams's dictum, 'No Ideas but in Things' ... I discovered that it wasn't so simple."[54] However, like one of the characters in the novel, Raphael Faber, in writing *Still Life* Byatt discovered the necessity of metaphor. Faber's lecture on 'Names and Nouns' comments on the way language was once regarded as Adamic naming in that it was thought that words were somehow part of the thing they named, but now people tend to see

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[52] Alfer, Alexa, "Realism and its Discontents: *The Virgin in the Garden* and *Still Life*" in Alfer, Alexa and Noble, Michael J., eds., *op. cit.*, p.53.
[53] Byatt, Antonia S., *Passions*, pp.11 and 34.
[54] Byatt, Antonia S., "A life less ordinary," p.17.

that our language has become "unfitted", torn loose from the world, and metaphor is our perception of likeness, "a network of our attempted sense-making" (245). As I read about Byatt's writing and Faber's lecturing, I remember also that the narrator had earlier disparaged Daniel Orton as a preacher when the novel's prologue stated that, although Daniel "knew about the light shining in the darkness [he] had come, for reasons completely different from Alexander's desire for exactness, specificity, to mistrust figurative language. He never now made a sermon from a metaphor, nor drew analogies: he preached examples, cases, lessons" (11). When, after Stephanie has been electrocuted, he does think metaphorically of God, the image he uses either shows that he is blaming God for Stephanie's death or suggests his inability to select appropriate images: he goes to the church to pray to "the old, thick, undifferentiated God who held together the stones of that place, who *lived like electricity* in its heavier air, whose presence he had sensed only rarely" (423, my italics). As this seems an unlikely image for Daniel to employ, one wonders whether this is a lapse on Byatt's part or intentional. There is nothing else in the passage to alert the reader to an intended metaphor, so it might be that even Daniel cannot help but revert to the language of imagery and analogy.

In these ways *Still Life* shows that writing, speaking or preaching without recourse to metaphor simply cannot be done. For instance, Byatt imagines two futures for Frederica:

> *"There were two hypothetical future Fredericas - one closed in the University Library writing something elegant and subtle on the use of metaphor in seventeenth-century religious poetry, and one in London, more nebulous, writing quite different things, witty critical journalism, maybe even a new urban novel like those of Iris Murdoch"* (343).

Quite apart from the fact that Byatt felt that these two hypothetical Fredericas were in fact one, both futures mapped out for the character are to do with metaphor, one studying it, the other using it, for, as Raphael Faber argues, metaphor is inescapable. Furthermore, in a deliberate attempt to avoid metaphor Byatt found herself including in the novel classified "lists of simple denominated things"[55] where, for instance, Marcus Potter derives pleasure from nothing other

[55] Byatt, Antonia S., *Passions*, pp.17f.

than the taxonomic exercise of listing grasses and the author shows inexhaustible attention to detail when naming colours. These are both to do with what Michael Westlake recognised as one of the main concerns of the novel: "the relation between visual perception ... and its representation in language."[56] In the last novel of the tetralogy which brims with information,[57] the author's concern for naming and accuracy is obsessively directed to the life cycle and taxonomy of snails.

Why this sustained concern for naming and accuracy? Perhaps it is because the precision of language and superabundance of image are incomparably important – in writing as well as preaching, in novels as well as sermons, in literature as well as theology – and it is because, as Byatt claimed in a conversation with Iris Murdoch, *Still Life* is about "the hard idea of truth."[58] Indeed naming truth is the hard idea both for all fiction and for all preaching. Preachers in the novels are presented as people who seek meaningful convergence between faith and experience that enables us to live faithfully, whilst real life preachers seek the accuracy and density, opacity and polyphonality, wealth and superfluity of meaning in language that empowers believers to imagine, 'name' and realise their faith.

Sallie McFague, in her influential work on metaphor and theology, said that, because language gives us our sense of reality and we live only in the confines of our language, the language we use theologically, and I add homiletically, should be multidimensional and display "metaphorical aliveness."[59] Over twenty years later Walter Brueggemann, in a provocative book challenging the conventions of preaching, expressed a similar point differently. In an observation about preaching informed by Ricoeur's textual theory, Brueggemann said that because reality is scripted, that is shaped and authorised by text, postmodern preaching, unlike the thin, minimalist and

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[56] Westlake, Michael, "The Hard Idea of Truth." in *PN Review*, 15:4 (1989), p.33.
[57] Sturrock, Jane, "Angels, Insects and Analogy: A.S. Byatt's 'Morpho Eugenia'." *Connotations*, 12:1 (2002), p.93.
[58] Westlake, Michael, *op cit.*, p.37.
[59] McFague, Sallie, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp.22f.

superficial preaching of hegemonic communities, needs to be 'dense.'[60] What Brueggemann means by 'density' is informed by the theory of intertextuality: because neither the biblical texts nor the gathered community nor the preaching is anything other than intertextually 'thick', Brueggemann argues that sermons are the convergence of three 'densities' - intertextually dense texts, hearers with multidimensional memory both as humans and as church community and a God beyond simple definition, who is quixotically and enigmatically filled with contradictions. He thus refers to preaching as supplying the mutually understood "coded winks" that "reconven[e] the web of significance."[61] In Bakhtinian terms, because polyphony is the locus of all meaning, preaching is an ongoing argument between the polyphonic voice of God and the polyphonic voice of the world, an argument which is centred on the preacher and in which engaged hearers are caught up.[62]

In a chapter on preaching in a book about what Blair Ashley in *Easter* called "living the liturgy", Charles Pinches discussed the capacity of words to convey truth. In a statement reminiscent of Burke's image of theological discourse being like an interrupted conversation in a parlour, Pinches argued that truths in sermons do not start off anew but always build on what we have heard before,[63] so speaking wisdom in the pulpit involves connecting the gospel to human life in all its facets. Furthermore, a reader engaging with a fictional sermon builds on supposed unheard previous sermons and his or her actual experience of preaching to bestow meaning on what is read. Preaching, Pinches says, names the world and this, of course, requires the right use of words to describe the world truthfully.[64] In a comment, from which I infer that sermons are like metaphorical language both in metaphor's steady balance between the two 'knowns' in the metaphorical equivalence and in metaphor's ability to go

[60] Brueggemann, Walter, *Cadences*, pp.26 and 74.
[61] *ibid.*, p.76.
[62] Hobson, Theo, *op cit.*, p.37.
[63] Pinches, Charles, "Proclaiming: Naming and Describing." in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*. Hauerwas and Wells, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p.169.
[64] *ibid.*, p.176.

either way across the comparative tension, Pinches expresses the view that successful sermons go both ways: back and forth, from life to Word to life.[65]

Central, then, both to reading fiction and listening to sermons is our use of imagination, not flights of fancy but our readerly ability to invoke mental images, move them and move around within them, which, according to Peter Stockwell, is at the core of cognitive poetics.[66] This is what radical Methodist, John Vincent, called "imaginative identification in preaching."[67] Study of these fictional sermons supports the twin hypotheses that metaphorical language invites readers to use imagination and that imagination's refusal "to play in one key or on a single instrument, but [to] experiment with the whole range"[68] energises, invigorates and 'thickens' the texts. However, neither this polyphony nor the transformability of these key changes denies or detracts from the thought with which this chapter began – that the building blocks of religious language, sufficiently versatile to speak God to us, are just "words, words".

[65] *ibid.*, p.179.
[66] Stockwell, Peter, *op. cit.*, p.173.
[67] Vincent, John, "Imaginative Identification." in *Epworth Review*, 23:3, (1996), pp.14-20.
[68] Rollins, Wayne G., *Jung and the Bible*. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), p.104.

7: Religious community as discourse community

One of the assumptions behind the analytical toolkit described in chapter 2 is that sermons in fiction have been displaced from their natural discourse community resulting in defamiliarisation that 'makes strange'[1] and one of my expectations at the outset was that, because sermons in their native environment are constituent of community-shaping liturgies, an analysis of fictional sermons would indicate a series of problems for readers, including the notion of intended audience. Interrogating the fictional sermons with questions about addressivity (1.1 in the checklist for analysis), point of view (2.2), proxemics (2.3) and pragmatics (4.4), as well as speech forms in those instances where anterior oral texts have been translated into the chirographic world (4.1) gives results which suggest that these fictional sermons are potentially community-shaping. This chapter will test the hypothesis that sermons within fiction shape interpretive and imagined communities by considering the communities constructed in Rogers's *Mr Wroe's Virgins* and Byatt's *A Whistling Woman*, a novel in which a sociologically aware character observes that in the community she was studying, "[T]wo of the activities that weld groups into communities (cults) are well under way. One is hard work. The other is ceremonies." (WW, 224).

[1] Cook, Guy, *op. cit.*, p.131.

Zygmunt Bauman's gloomy prognosis for the future of community, in the introduction to his description of postmodernity[2] – that the only viable communities in contemporary society are imagined communities – seems an unpromising thought at the beginning of a chapter on religious community, but Bauman's pessimism is more apparent than real. Imagined is not the same as imaginary and the potential of imagined community was exploited in Benedict Anderson's study of nationhood, in which he argued that nations are imagined communities in that their members do not know each other yet there lives in their minds "the image of their communion" and "deep horizontal comradeship."[3] This has been recognised in positive terms and taken up recently by homileticians in the development of current homiletical theory. So before I look closely at the fictional sermons, this chapter considers first what some homileticians say about real-life preachers and the communities shaped by their preaching.

In a brief section about words and worlds David Buttrick argued, from the assertion that whenever a speaker speaks language constitutes a world, that preachers build symbolic worlds enabling congregations "to view the 'real' world in some new way, perhaps as a realm of God."[4] In effect he is arguing that the use of imagination in preaching is capable of "forming faith-consciousness"[5] and shapes a new world for congregations to inhabit.[6] This assumption lies behind most of the essays recently collected by Hauerwas and Wells in their companion to Christian ethics, whose common thread is the notion that worship forms a believing community which then behaves in a particular way. For instance, Scott Bader-Saye argues that, in a world which is an arena of conflicting autonomous wills, the conflict between authority and freedom is reflected in the conflict between community and individual, all of which is potentially reconciled in liturgy in which a community gathers around authoritative texts, namely the bible, the sermon and the creeds, respectively

[2] Bauman, Zygmunt, *op. cit.*, pp.xix-xx.
[3] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities*. (New York: Verso, 1991).
[4] Buttrick, David, *Preaching the New and the Now*, p.99, his scare quotes.
[5] Buttrick, David, *Homiletic*. p.26.

characterised as teaching, preaching and affirmation.[7] In a conclusion relevant to the argument of chapter 3 above, he expresses the view that any healthy community requires authority of this sort.[8] Charles Pinches's essay on preaching in the same collection[9] is based on similar assumptions.

Similarly, Mark Barger Elliott's chapter on 'imaginative preaching' in his general survey of styles and theories of preaching argues that the human capacity to imagine enables us to "envision new realities."[10] He illustrates this assertion with résumés of theoreticians and practitioners, among whom is featured Walter Brueggemann whose influence has spread further into British preaching than most American teachers. He was, for instance, the only contemporary American homiletician to appear in the responses to my survey of books on preaching owned by active Methodist preachers in my current circuit; two respondents expressed the view that their preaching had been influenced by his reflections on the art of preaching which he calls "the reimagination of reality."[11] For Brueggemann, seeing preaching as the reimagination of reality is informed both by his exposition of the Old Testament as a document for an exilic community and the partial dissolution of the church in the postmodern age. He argues that, because congregations are heterogeneous, the old monologic model of church absolutes can no longer be trusted and, although the Enlightenment persists in exercising a pervasive hegemony in the contemporary church, the Enlightenment script is no longer reliable.[12] Brueggemann traces the tradition of hegemonic preaching from the Constantinian establishment, which made Christianity an ally of power, through the Catholic system, which focussed power on the church, to both the Reformation and Counter-reformation that continued absolutist claims. He then suggests that such preaching had two facets. One is that it was propositional in that it claimed universal credence stemming from unquestioning certitude. The other is that hegemonic sermons tended to adopt a three-fold

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[6] Buttrick, David. *Preaching the New and the Now*, p.100.
[7] Bader-Saye, Scott, "Listening: Authority and Obedience." in Hauerwas and Wells, eds., *op. cit.*, pp.158 and 160.
[8] *op. cit.*, p.163.
[9] Pinches, Charles, *op cit.*
[10] Barger Elliott, Mark, *op. cit.*, p.150.
[11] Brueggemann, Walter, *Cadences*, p.33.
[12] *ibid.*, pp.26, 27 and 30.

structure, firstly describing a universal problem, then defining a clear solution which might be known everywhere before finally stressing that the new possibility is everywhere available.[13] Such hegemonic preaching, by which a hegemonic community trades in 'thin discourse,'[14] is now impossible in a decentred church, characterised by Brueggemann as an exiled community that has lost its mother-speech.[15] Inspired by thinkers such as James Muilenburg who argued for rhetorical criticism as the next stage in biblical interpretation after form criticism because, in originally oral texts, cadences of speech matter in determining their intention,[16] Paul Ricoeur whose concepts of the worlds behind, in front of and in the text became important interpretational tools and Phyllis Trible whose work as an early feminist interpreter of scripture successfully destabilised male authority over scripture,[17] Brueggemann argues for preaching which has been 'thickened' by the intertextuality of the sermon, the multidimensional memory of the hearers and the text's pointing beyond itself to the 'Primal Character.'[18] It follows from Brueggemann's argument that authentic preaching for the postmodern age is more dialogic than was once practised in Christian pulpits. Thus one of Brueggemann's theses - that "the work of preaching is an act of imagination ... through which perception, experience and faith can be reorganised in alternative ways,"[19] in which reorganising faith may be understood as constructing faith community from heterogeneity, or indeed, constructing imagined communities – may be posited as his conclusion on the nature of contemporary preaching.

Brueggemann's rejection of hegemonic preaching in favour of a more polyvocal type of preaching leads me to ask whether postmodern preaching is a site of what Jurgen Habermas called "unlimited conversation", by which he

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[13] *ibid.*, p.40.
[14] *ibid.*, p.74.
[15] *ibid.*, p.23.
[16] Muilenburg, James, "Form Criticism and Beyond." in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 88, (1969), pp.1-18.
[17] Trible, Phyllis, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
[18] Brueggemann, Walter, *Cadences*, p.76.
[19] *op. cit.*, p.32.

meant the capacity for all people to participate in the speech situation.[20] Similar to Brueggemann's view is John McClure's assertion that the tyranny of hegemony can be resisted by our employment of ideological suspicion so that the widest possible range of voices or input – which is how he understands the concept of unlimited conversation – is heard in the thematic content of sermons. This will involve gaining access to lost voices submerged in the tradition and establishing vibrant communication within and across congregations and other groups.[21] Such unlimited conversation in which many voices are heard is possible because, as McClure avers, "people inhabit *multiple* worlds *simultaneously*"[22] and effective preaching is conversation grounded in what Lucy Rose, quoted by McClure,[23] calls 'relational solidarity' or community. This unlimited conversation is properly located in the church which he and other homileticians recognise as a potentially unique anamnestic[24] and eschatological community, capable of both re-membering and imagining alternative 'lifeworlds', which is Habermas's term for the public arena of everyday communication. Such community is no less realised for being imagined than is the discourse community, or lifeworld, where we all daily negotiate and share common meanings and values.[25]

When the church is thought of as a community, some will take the view that community is a term that "plays a major legitimising role in our talk about institutions".[26] Others will worry that community has become such a buzzword in church circles, used with alarming frequency to refer often interchangeably and confusingly to wider society, local neighbourhood, congregation, fellowship or small interest group meetings and others, that it risks loss of significance.

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[20] quoted in McClure, John S., *op. cit.*, p.105.
[21] *ibid.*, p.108.
[22] *ibid.*, p.113, his italics.
[23] *ibid.*, p.111.
[24] Anamnesis is a continuous process of re-remembering – a "cyclical return to an earlier moment, re-remembered in the present, in greater detail and with greater effect at each recurrence." King, Nicola, *Memory, Narrative, Identity*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p.21.
[25] *ibid.*, p.103.
[26] Plant, Raymond, "Community: Concept, conception and ideology." in *Politics and Society*, 8 (1978), p.81.

In recent years Keith Ward's series of studies in comparative religion included a rigorous theological analysis of the church as community. He said that although the church looks like a sectarian community of disciples inasmuch as it is called by divine act and exists in tension with wider human society,[27] it is, insofar as it presents Christ through preaching and sacrament, an organic community known as the Body of Christ, an ascription satirically and troublingly explored by Michael Arditti in *Easter*. Ward then suggests that the church is primarily a teaching, charismatic, sacramental and moral community. He sees it as a teaching community because, although it does not "present itself as a defender of unchanging truths which resist new knowledge and critical enquiry [, it] present[s] itself as the bearer of a gospel of greater understanding, of freedom of enquiry, and of creative interpretations of tradition."[28] It seems to me that if the church is a teaching community, it is important to assert that it is also a learning community. At a time when there is a concern in the church about "a loss of the sense of being teachers and learners together", Frances Young's encouragement that the church regains Origen's sense of the learning process being for all and for the whole of life might be heeded.[29] Ward also sees the church as a charismatic community because it is meant to be "egalitarian, participatory, pluralistic and disclosive" rather than hierarchical, patriarchal or authoritarian;[30] this is to say that, although it is a diverse community, the church is a believing and sanctifying community in which shared beliefs provide what Raymond Plant called "a sense of mutual significance."[31] I think that Ward sees the church as a sacramental community because sacramental ritual lies at the heart of the community and participation in these rites is the defining sign of community membership. However, it could further be said that it is a sacramental community in that, in catechetical words, it 'outwardly expresses an inward reality'; it is a visible sign of invisible irreality; when it meets, its plurality is submerged but not concealed under its historical continuity and shared tradition. Finally, Ward sees it as a moral community but he regrets that

[27] Ward, Keith, *Religion and Community*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.133.
[28] *op. cit.*, p.157.
[29] Young, Frances, "School for sinners." in *Epworth Review*, 23:3, (1994), pp.66 and 70.
[30] *op. cit.*, p.183.
[31] *op. cit.*, p.82.

it tends towards authoritarian moral conservatism, because he feels this is a misdirection from its intended purpose as a body that gives moral leadership and supports ethical reform.[32]

Ward's theological appraisal of the church as community found implicit support from the perspective of another academic discipline, that of communication studies, in Thomas Lindlof's contribution to the inaugural volume of the *Journal of Media and Religion*, in which he wrote that there are four main characteristics of community. The first is that communities are based on a unity of shared circumstances, interests, customs or purposes leading to a strong drive towards the establishment of solidarity in the community. The second is that members of communities share common moral obligations expressed in social rules, etiquette or ethical codes. The third is that over time communities achieve some status of stability, usually cemented by the use of canonical texts, rituals or myths, so that unity and moral obligations can be formed. The fourth is that social networks develop communicative occasions and codes by which it becomes apparent who is inside and who is outside community membership.[33]

Broadly, sermons in Byatt's and Rogers's novels construct three types of community displaying the characteristics identified by Lindlof: sects, such as the Christian Israelites whose real-life founder is the fictionalised preacher in Rogers's *Mr Wroe's Virgins* and the Children of Joy, otherwise known as Joyful Companions, who belong to a religious community developed by Gideon Farrar in Byatt's *A Whistling Woman*; church, a more conventional, less extremist form of religious community both implicitly and overtly present at different times in both these novels as it exists in tension with the absolute claims of sectarian commitment; and readership, whose members, as a discourse or interpretive community, are associate or virtual members of the communities imagined or fictively constructed within the texts they read. How do Byatt's and Rogers's

[32] *op. cit.*, p.233.
[33] Lindlof, Thomas R., "Interpretive Community: An Approach to Media and Religion." in *Journal of Media and Religion*, 1:1, (2002), p.63.

fictional sermons function within these three types of community: sect, church and readership?

A Whistling Woman deals with this question most directly. Lisa Allerdice reads the novel as a satire of the sixties' romantic ideal of communal living and suggests that this is represented in three ways: "a Quakerish cult", "the joyless Joyful Companions" and the Anti-University.[34] Jim Barloon adds the television community to Allerdice's short list[35] and I might also add the academic community among whose members Frederica moves and the local parish church whose services the reader visits from time to time. I am conscious, too, that the novels are set in the context of the theological debates of the decades between the end of the second world war and the years covered by this study, most notably 'The Death of God' theology and 'Honest to God' debate. These theological movements have their followers among the clergy depicted in the novels. In the early stages of the formation of the Joyful Companions, three of the clergymen choose symbols for themselves which tend to associate them with certain theological trends: Adelbert Holly chooses a cross with a man-shaped hole, Daniel Orton chooses a leafless tree with deep roots and Gideon Farrar chooses an angel wielding a flaming sword, each choice justified intratextually (64). Of the five characters who exercise a priestly role in the Frederica quartet, these are three of the four who are associated in some way with the sect-like religious community of Joyful Companions. The other is Joshua Lamb also known as Joshua Ramsden, a lay member of the community with a charismatic personality, who puts himself in rivalry with Gideon Farrar for leadership. Byatt intentionally makes readers conscious that the narrative of the Joyful Companions is, in the world of the text, contemporaneous with the well-known Charles Manson story, about whom the clandestine ethnomethodologist Brenda Pincher, starved of news from the outside world, enquires in one of her letters to Avram Snitkin (387) and who is referenced in Byatt's choice of name for Lamb's charismatic and influential schoolteacher Miss Manson (103). I also note that the actual time of the author's writing was contemporaneous with the Waco siege of

[34] Allerdice, Lisa, "So much for freedom." *The Daily Telegraph*, London, 31 August 2002.
[35] Barloon, Jim, *op. cit.*

David Koresh's Davidian sect,[36] so the book's depiction of religious community is likely to be coloured by these real-life sects.

There are as many as six sermons in *A Whistling Woman*, more than in any of the earlier novels of the tetralogy which suggests that Byatt has become more ready to deploy them than previously. Seemingly incidental to the novel they are in fact neither incidental nor accidental: Gideon Farrar's first sermon in *Still Life* prompts Stephanie Orton to reflect that everything in a novel is there because it signifies something, not because it was there (SL161). In *A Whistling Woman* each sermon contributes to Byatt's fictive building of the Joyful Companions: although they are not main features of the novel they are authorially intended and, if I foreground them in this analysis, in the process deforming the text, their significance is revealed.

One of the sermons in *A Whistling Woman* is Gideon Farrar's final sermon in the quartet. Since he last preached in *Still Life*, readers have learnt that Farrar has been accused of child molestation and sexual malpractice: few women escaped the attention of his wandering eye and roving hand. We are invited to compare this with his sustained eye contact when preaching his first sermon in *Still Life* (158). Indeed, the last thought Stephanie had before her fatal accident was that Gideon Farrar was a dangerous sexual predator. In *A Whistling Woman* Farrar still uses the charge of sexual energy to manipulate those who belong to the community he has established. In the view of Brenda Pincher, who is observing the community for research purposes, Gideon's sexual manipulation makes people feel special because of the thrill of his attention (193). It is Brenda who, in a letter, gives a disturbing account of Gideon's sermon within the Community. The secretly-recorded tape that she sends to her correspondent begins with strange shufflings and snufflings, recording the touching and feeling that are required at the beginning of all meetings of the Community. What makes these snufflings particularly disturbing is Brenda's description of Gideon Farrar's overtight jeans that accentuate his ample buttocks and a straining fly zip.

[36] For a recent appraisal of this group, see Newport, Kenneth G. C., *The Branch Davidians of Waco: The history and beliefs of an apocalyptic sect.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

The sermon, which is about fellowship, one of his favourite words, ends when he approaches Lucy Nighby and puts his hands heavily on her shoulders. She writhes under the pressure for some time, before he lets go and she shakes herself like a dog shaking off mud or water and crossly walks out of the room. In effect, what Brenda has witnessed is ritual abuse. 'Laying on of hands' for ordination or healing has become in Gideon Farrar's manipulative and predatory community the more threatening 'laying hands on'. This is symptomatic of a problem with the novel form: it depends on making things materially present, so has difficulty representing spirituality without reductionism.

Joshua Lamb gives three sermon-like discourses in this novel. The first is the presentation of a paper on Kierkegaard which is given so eloquently that it provokes trembling among his hearers (122), an ironically appropriate reaction given that Kierkegaard's best-known work, about which Lamb's mentor had been speaking on the previous page, is entitled *Fear and Trembling*. The second occurs in the course of a discussion about the merits and demerits of television. Joshua's views on the matter are expressed in an impressive and ludicrously pompous speech reported in Elvet Gander's letter to Kieran Quarrell which concludes that Joshua sounded like a preacher (197). Later Brenda Pincher reports that Joshua gave talks and sermons on Manichean belief to members of the community to whom he refers as 'Hearers' (223), implying that the chief characteristic of belonging to a community is little more than passively hearing edifying words, although in a scriptural or liturgical context hearing also implies 'listening to with favour and granting a request.'[37]

The other preacher in *A Whistling Woman* is Canon Adelbert Holly whose themes are radical: the death of God, *deus absconditus* and the impossibility of the Church. The first is an impromptu sermon on St Lucy's Day around a campfire in which Holly hails Lucy Nighby as blessed among women for providing the Hall for the religious community and interweaves John Donne's *St Lucy Day* with a prayer to an absentee God (232-233). His second,

[37] *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd Ed.) 1989, prepared by Simpson, J.A. and Weiner, E.S.C., Clarendon Press: Oxford.

heard by the entire Potter family and the Hearers of Dun Vale Hall, is in response to the local vicar's invitation for Holly to preach at Freyasgarth Church at Christmas. Frederica's verdict on the sermon is that it was "*almost* meaningful, but ... [it was] ... in the end a game with language" (242).

In terms of these fictional sermons, the 'game' involves Byatt's use of point of view, proxemics, pragmatics and addressivity. First, the fact that many of the sermons are given from the point of view of letter writers reporting the activities of the Joyful Companions to absent but interested addressees distances readers from Gideon Farrar's sermon, most of Joshua Lamb's preaching and some of Adelbert Holly's preaching. Byatt 'permits' us to read them too. The effect of this multi-layered reading and focalisation is to enliven quoted sermons that otherwise, like quotations of other purported externally authoritative texts, would risk being dead quotations;[38] the variety of points of view achieved by this homodiegetical filtering[39] also skews what one reads but enriches the sermons or, to use Brueggemann's terminology once again, 'thickens' them.

Through Brenda Pincher's report of Gideon Farrar's sermon written in her letter to fellow-academic Avram Snitkin, Byatt tells us what to think about his preaching. For instance, Byatt foregrounds the preacher's problematic use of Jesus' invitation, "Come unto me all ye who are heavy-laden and I will give you rest," for Pincher's view is that it is not at all clear in Farrar's preaching whether it is he or Jesus who issues the invitation (202). She also expresses the view that because Farrar feels that his leadership of the community is threatened by Joshua Lamb, his preaching has become more intense and flamboyant, although earlier in the letter she remarks that Farrar has not really learned "not to deliver sermons" (201), which is less a comment on how he preaches than a comment on his Chadband-like persistently preacherly manner: the preacher persona has taken over this self-aggrandising former priest. Through Brenda's critique of the sermon, our attention is drawn to the discrepancy between Farrar's appeal for truth, by which he means full public confession of sin, and his consistent

[38] Bakhtin, Mikhail M., *The Dialogical Imagination*, p.344.
[39] See Kearns, Michael, *op. cit.*, p.101.

preference for locutions such as "'grievous faults', 'errors', 'mistakes' and even 'misfortunes'" (203) in avoidance of such a blunt term as 'sin'. When, at the end of his preaching, Farrar accosted Lucy Nighby supposedly to free her of her torment by laying his hands on her shoulders with the result that she jerked, writhed and almost collapsed before she stood up and shook herself free of his attentions, Brenda, in parenthesis, calls him a "twister" (203); readers reflect both that members of the community can observe that he is a twister in that in his hands Lucy writhes and that from Brenda's point of view, as an outsider pretending to be an insider, she can see through his pretence to his nefarious, manipulative motives. At this stage in her reporting of the event, Brenda's understanding of the event exceeds what she can in fact know: in her letter she is like an author who knows the inner thoughts, feelings and motives of her characters when she claims to know what Farrar was thinking when he tussled with Lucy, although she does so tentatively: twice Brenda says, "I think he thought..." (203), causing us to speculate whether, as one who listens to the subtext, she is hearer, listener or observer. Of course, Brenda is but one of several who hear Farrar's sermon, so what we do not know unequivocally is whether other hearers make the same judgements. By sermons like this those present are being manipulated, crafted or shaped into a community who hear and, hopefully, obey. At this early stage in the life of the community, we assume that Brenda's eyes are the only ones to notice the bulging fly zip in his tight jeans when he speaks about members of the community laying themselves open to each other, but readers share a privileged judgement, knowing more than the community.

Brenda is also the focaliser of, or filter for, Joshua Lamb's preaching in the novel. Once again she is writing to Avram Snitkin and reports that the community at Dun Vale Hall is emerging as an embryonic religious cult welded together by hard work and community-shaping ceremonies (224). These include Lamb's talks on the "'gentle Manichees'" which she calls 'sermons' (223). Another correspondent, Elvet Gander, writing about another occasion when Joshua Lamb addressed the Hearers, said that he sounded like a preacher (197), but Brenda makes no such claim, so why does she use the term 'sermon' for what

were in effect teaching sessions in which Lamb taught the principles of Manichaeism and applied them to the practices of the Dun Vale Hall community? Indeed, she reports some of the 'curriculum' matter-of-factly. Is it because as a sociologist she recognises that the latent function of these lessons is to form community, a function they share with sermons in the formation of religious communities? Is it because Byatt wants her readers to appreciate that, as they are a community gathered around a common text - her text – so the Hearers are a community gathering to listen to Lamb's lessons? Or is it, conversely, that she wants us to recognise that as readers are disparate with only one shared experience, that of reading the text, so Lamb's Hearers are disparate?

Earlier in *A Whistling Woman*, Byatt directly tells readers her view of Lamb's early preaching; this is not reported in a letter. As a young man in Durham, Joshua was under the tutelage of Father Burgess, who encouraged him to read Kierkegaard. Byatt tells us that the result of this study is that Joshua gives a paper which cautiously expresses Kierkegaard's understanding of the difference between tragic heroes and knights of faith such as Abraham (121). Both in her free drift between Free Indirect Speech and Direct Speech and in her (or Lamb's) quotation of Kierkegaard and Lamb's commentary on it, Byatt enables herself, as an intrusive narrator, to convince the reader that the young Lamb is capable of stirring those who listen to him. He has become "suddenly eloquent" (122), by which, through Byatt's intrusive parenthesis giving the etymology of 'eloquent',[40] we are told she means he was speaking 'out of himself' (122). This reminds us that Byatt had informed us only a short while earlier that Lamb always possessed the capacity, or we might say charismatic ability, "to see himself from outside" (120).

The other occasion on which one of Lamb's talks is reported to the reader is when there is a heated debate in the community about whether the television, a potential distraction from the purity of committed participation in community life, should remain. During the course of the meeting Elvet Gander

[40] This is *contra* Janet Soskice's warning that the historical facts of etymology are of limited value in determining the current significance of words, *op cit.*, p.81.

mischievously asked Lamb's opinion because he wanted to hear him speak. Gander later reports Lamb's contribution to the debate in a letter to Kieran Quarrell, apparently verbatim although he acknowledges the fallibility of his power of recall. Readers are persuaded by Elvet to regard this speech as being "on a knife-edge between the ludicrous and the impressive" (197) and, in telling his correspondent that Gideon Farrar murmured approval of the point Lamb was making, they are also able to surmise Gideon's view of the speech. Elvet opines that he feels Gideon can imagine himself using the medium of television to extend his congregation to the wider community of the entire English-speaking world. Elvet's report of this meeting includes both the assertion that Lamb sounds like a preacher and the implication that, in their intriguing eloquence, Lamb's silences are forms of preaching, too: at the end of his letter Elvet says, "Lamb ... returned to his normal courteous silence," and his audience looked at him, "like an unexploded bomb that might go off. What will he say next? What is he preaching?" (197).

The same letter writer, Elvet Gander, suggests what readers might think about Adelbert Holly's first sermon, which, although he calls it both impromptu and little, he admires (232). He understands Holly's achievement in the sermon to be that he successfully twists John Donne's poem of erotic despair into a prayer to the God in which he finds it difficult to believe, an achievement possible because, as Gander suggests in recognition of the ineffability of truth and the necessarily metaphorical nature of religious language, "religious men always twist" (232). Holly's other reported sermon, on Christmas Day, another festival of lights, is told from the novelist's point of view, although it is introduced by the local vicar who announces it as a sermon "on the meaning of the Incarnation in a time of doubt and trouble" (241) from "one of the most lively and up-to-date of our new dispensation of theologians" (240). This effectively colours how both the intratextual audience and the extratextual readership hear the sermon so that, when Byatt herself resumes the narratival voice for the sermon, she can be relatively neutral in its telling, using direct speech for much of the time. The effect of this is that its readers are almost as close to it as its intratextual hearers, less directed in our responses and more open to being caught

up in the act of imagination and being convinced by the preacher's presence and argument. This directness is tempered both by the novelist's free indirect speech at the beginning when she says Holly began the sermon with a degree of self-importance and her return to free indirect speech in the later stages of the sermon when she suggests his amiability with references to his beatific and blithe smiles. So readers are encouraged to choose whether to belong to the camp repelled by his overbearing beginning or the camp appealed to by his winsome smiles.

Second, the proxemics of these sermons also contribute to their community-shaping capacity, clarifying or blurring the boundary between preacher and congregation as well as the boundary around the community. In the case of Holly's Christmas sermon, for instance, the space used for the occasion is the conventional arrangement of pulpit and pews in Freyasgarth parish church. Above the congregation seated in formal rows Frederica notices that the roof space is decorated with small stone angels looking down on her; the preacher also looks down on her as he leans over the pulpit to address the formally ranked congregation. This formality and implied hierarchy, however, do not prevent the convergence of two congregations; indeed the enforced formal seating arrangement conceals from the casual onlooker that the congregation includes both parishioners and visitors from the community at Dun Vale Hall. Paradoxically, the formality of church blurred the two communities' edges so that sect and church merge.

When Holly had preached earlier in the novel, however, the proxemics more clearly defined the community he addressed. Gathered around a bonfire the Joyful Companions, wrapped against the cold in leather coats fringed with fleece and Tibetan goatskin hats, look like priests; their self-conscious shuffling and occasional prancing as they chant hymns whose words they do not know prompt their observer, Elvet, to draw attention to the absurdity of the ritual (233) although his account of the event cannot be entirely reliable because of acid-induced forgetfulness. The effect of a group of priest-like people, similarly attired, circling a bonfire in chant and dance is community-defining: the warmth of the fire sociofugally draws people in as its light rivals the speaker for hearers'

attention, but it also leaves outsiders in the dark. The circle looking inward excludes others.

A similar proxemic operated on the occasions Joshua Lamb addressed the Joyful Companions. In the letter in which Brenda Pincher remarked that any sociologist could see that the Joyful Companions were being forged into an embryonic religious cult (223), she tells of Lamb's talks on the 'gentle Manichees' whose community boundaries were clearly defined in that they were divided into the Elect and the Hearers, the latter group being those who accrued merit by serving the Elect. Moreover, in choosing to call the Joyful Companions 'Hearers', Lamb is setting the community's parameters in a manner reminiscent of Jesus who concluded many of his parables with the exclusive injunction "Let those who have ears to hear, hear."

The proxemics at work when Gideon Farrar preaches to the Joyful Companions effectively breaks down the barrier between the preacher and his congregation but obfuscates the borders of the community. Brenda Pincher ruminates on Farrar's oppressive presence: whereas he was once "the robed untouchable beyond the altar rails" and raised a symbolic wafer before a sacred altar (202), he has now, by a process of demystification and demythologisation, removed the distance between preacher and congregation so that there remains no space, only oppressive and invasive touch which "overstep[s Lucy Nighby's] boundary" (203). The hands-on 'therapy' intended to identify Lucy as a member of the community, or perhaps initiate her into an inner grouping, succeeds only in repelling her and Brenda Pincher regrets the loss of "mystery and distance and ceremony" on which she feels religion thrives (202).

As a result Farrar has to work much harder at his rhetoric to achieve the effects he desires and to win the enthusiasm of his followers. This may be observed in his more overt employment of performative speech acts compared with the other preachers in this novel, drawing attention to the role of pragmatics as a third contributory factor in a sermon's shaping of community. In the case of Farrar's sermon the intensity of performative speech acts when he accosts Lucy

seemingly terrifies and certainly angers her and, at this stage in the sermon, the assertive speech act, "The process is working..." (203) may also be seen as a directive speech act ordering whatever he thinks is possessing her to depart in "painful birthing" (203). On the other hand, some of the immediacy of the earlier speech acts within Farrar's sermon is dissipated by the way Byatt reports them to us through indirect speech within a letter between an observer and her correspondent. In prelude to Farrar's approach to Lucy, he says, "No matter what you have done, no matter what has been done to you, [...], sharing it will start up the healing process, confession will set you free" (203). This is an example of a speech act which is covert about its performativity:[41] in other words, it does not need to be communicated or identified as either a commissive or a predictive speech act to perform as such. Whether or not Farrar intended it as such and whether or not Lucy heard it as such, Farrar's utterance offers both promise and prediction for the reader and observer.

Because the account of Clemency Farrar's ritual pronouncement when the beasts of the field are ceremoniously freed is in the same letter as the account of Joshua Lamb's preaching, Byatt brings into question the nature of these utterances. How is Clemency Farrar's commission to the animals - "Go free, bless you" - like Joshua Lamb's reported description of his audience as 'Hearers'? Clemency's ritual pronouncement is a declarative speech act; they are words accompanying the actual unlocking of the gates and the shooing of the animals. Joshua's utterance is also a declarative speech act inasmuch as the thought therein is accepted by those who listen as a description of an actual state of affairs; from thereon they are, indeed, known as Hearers. Thus, Joshua's preaching contributes to the definition of community.

However, in Adelbert Holly's St Lucy's Day sermon, his utterances associating Lucy with the theme of light and calling Lucy the most blessed among women for providing the Hall for the Hearers is not performatively effective in the same way. Why is this? I suspect it is because Elvet's report of the sermon, in which Holly rhapsodises, "Lucy ... was Lux, Lucis, the Maiden of

[41] Sperber and Wilson, *op. cit.*, p.245.

Light and was blessed among women..." (233), skews our thinking so that readers interpret his ascription as hyperbolic: the fact that Clemency immediately pointed out that Lucy was not a maiden problematises the notion that she is blessed among women, for, if she is not one, she might not, or cannot, be the other.

If, on the one hand, calling people Hearers makes them Hearers, and if, on the other hand, calling Lucy blessed among women does not make her so, what about Canon Holly's words about God? Do his words about God, spoken in the context of a nihilistic ritual in which participants are encouraged to burn their treasured possessions so that they become "things that are not", resurrect a dead God and realise an absent God, *Deus Absconditus?* These are important questions for the practice of preaching. To what extent can preachers be said to realise God; to what extent can they be said to speak God into being? Do utterances image the existence of God? Does the imagining community image God? Does the theological subject matter of sermons contribute to the creation of a believing community? Holly fictively addresses these questions in the pragmatics of his Christmas Day sermon. In saying that he intends to "say something real" when he preaches, he implies that what is heard from many pulpits is "a few nice platitudes" (241), the existence of which is almost a denial of speech-act theory: the uttering of a platitude *is* just saying something. On the contrary, Holly believes he is doing something when he preaches: yet readers are left to consider for themselves what he achieves. Does he make real God's entry into History?[42] Does he enflesh supernatural concepts of God in incarnational terms? Does he make the finite infinite and the incomprehensible comprehensible? Or does he, as Frederica feels, simply play with words (242)?

The answer to these questions seems to be related to the way audiences respond to the discourse, either in their compliance with, or their resistance to, what is said in the discourse and what is done in the saying. Put bluntly, do you have to be a believer for the literary game of faith to work? So, fourth, I need to consider the audiences for these sermons, at which point in this discussion there

[42] The word 'History' is capitalised in his sermon.

enters the third type of community in this novel – its primary interpretive community, its readership.

Contrary to Byatt's repeated insistence that she writes for a general readership, critics have often expressed the view that her actual audience is an educated literary readership. For instance, *The Christian Science Monitor's* reviewer of *A Whistling Woman* rather cruelly divided Byatt's fans into two groups - those who cannot understand her novels and those who lie[43] - whilst Lisa Allerdice of *The Daily Telegraph* called the world of *A Whistling Woman* a "vast, erudite world" in which she implies what is on display above all else is the author's erudition.[44] Furthermore, *The Independent*'s reviewer and fellow-novelist, Stevie Davies, is fatigued by Byatt's "virtuoso cleverness" and presumes that she writes for "the cognoscenti."[45] It is true that full appreciation of her novels requires a readiness to enjoy, or at least tolerate, Byatt's ventures into literary and philosophical side streets tangential to her books' main concerns. The demands she makes on her readers are also evident in Farrar's, Lamb's and Holly's sermons, for their actual extratextual audiences require a developed theological, literary and rhetorical awareness.

Whereas the intratextual intended audience of Farrar's sermon comprises the Joyful Companions, most especially Lucy who is singled out as the recipient of Farrar's unsolicited attention, and its intratextual actual audience includes Brenda Pincher, the sceptical letter writer, and her correspondent, Avram Snitkin, its actual extratextual audience is the novel's readership, encouraged by Pincher, Snitkin and Byatt to adopt a position of suspicion about both the integrity of Farrar's leadership and the quality of the rhetoric by which he tries to establish his authority. Similarly, in the case of Joshua Lamb's preaching, the intratextual audience comprises both the Hearers and the ethnomethodological researchers who are more sympathetic to him than they are to Farrar. However, his preaching appeals particularly to an extratextual audience whose members are

[43] Charles, Ron, "Frederica in wonderland." in *The Christian Science Monitor*, 19 December 2002.
[44] Allerdice, Lisa, *op. cit.*
[45] Davies, Stevie, "A Whistling Woman by A S Byatt." in *The Independent*, London, 7 September 2002.

more questioning than accepting: readers, troubled like both Kierkegaard and his fictional interpreter by the terror of Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, are incorporated into a common audience wrestling with what Lamb calls the text's mystery, to which one can only respond with silence. The paradox, Lamb suggests, is that silence is both the "demon's lure" and "divinity's communion with the individual" (122). Sharing this common response with those who listen to Lamb intratextually, members of his extratextual audience, Byatt's readership, become Hearers, too. When Adelbert Holly preaches it seems that he is conscious that his intratextual audience is also a medley of characters: the atheist Bill Potter is there to hear his granddaughter sing; three clerics – the local vicar, Daniel Orton and Gideon Farrar - are collared, implying both a state of committed belief and theological expertise; the usual congregation is swollen both by people from the parish who attend only on high feast days and the Joyful Companions from Dun Vale Hall, whose religious faith and practices differ from those of the local congregation; Frederica, impatient with preachers who play games with words, although physically present absents herself from the purpose of the occasion; and the subject matter of the sermon implies that Holly expected that the intended intratextual audience would include both people who wrestle with their sense of God's absence and people who agree with the philosophy of Nietzsche. Holly is using his Christmas Day sermon, in which he proclaims "the mystery of His Birth ... repeated daily in historical time" (242), to attempt to shape a community of religious nihilism in which God, the irreal God, is incorporated, enfleshed, embodied with humanity in divine community, which Byatt extends to embrace any of her readership willing to suspend disbelief to grapple with God-as-human-construct, God of fiction, God of preaching, God – as Holly says – "infinitely finite" (242).

In concluding this assessment of Byatt's use of preaching to shape religious communities, it is worth mentioning that she is following the example of her mentor, Iris Murdoch, with whose work she is very familiar as she has written much critical appraisal of her novels, beginning with *Degrees of*

Freedom.[46] In *The Bell*, Murdoch used sermons given by rival community leaders, Michael and James, to encapsulate their alternative approaches to the spiritual life and leadership of religious communities. Their sermons provide the frame for the novel's debate between attempting to do the best you know and choosing the more achievable alternative - the second-best in which you are confident of acquitting yourself. Murdoch called this the conflict between the saint and the artist.[47] James's eloquent sermon to the members of the lay community on the outskirts of Imber Abbey, on the theme 'Be ye therefore perfect', charges Michael with having ideals but no principles. A week later Michael's sermon impishly begins exactly as James's had: "The chief requirement of the good life is...,"[48] yet the sermons are at variance with each other, for Michael's commends what James's had decried. Which of these two ways wins the hearts and minds of the sermons' intratextual listeners will determine the eventual shape of the Imber Abbey lay community; furthermore, which of these ways proves persuasive to the novel's readership will determine how successfully Murdoch has argued that it might be better for the wellbeing of humanity to seek slight improvement rather than neurotically pursue perfection. From this Byatt derives her technique of employing the rival preaching of Joshua Lamb and Gideon Farrar both to express conflict within the Joyful Companions and to determine the community's shape. Incidentally, Byatt owes another debt to Murdoch: Byatt has Bill Potter give an atheistic anti-sermon for Christmas in *Still Life* (44); this is a concept Murdoch introduced in *The Time of the Angels* in which Carel Fisher expresses his longing to be able to step into a pulpit and announce that there is no God;[49] what follows is a type of atheistic sermon delivered conversationally to his brother Marcus, parodying Murdoch's own religio-philosophical, a/theistic views.[50]

Turning now to *Mr Wroe's Virgins*, the other primary source featuring a sect, Rogers employs similar community-shaping processes in the preaching

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[46] Byatt, Antonia S., *Degrees of Freedom: The novels of Iris Murdoch*. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965).
[47] Conradi, Peter J., *The Saint and the Artist*, pp.147f.
[48] Murdoch, Iris, *The Bell*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), pp.135 and 200.
[49] Murdoch, Iris, *The Time of the Angels*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).
[50] Conradi, Peter J., *The Saint and the Artist*, p.175.

therein. Because this novel was discussed in my chapter on religious authority, I will focus only on the main sermon in the novel, Wroe's marketplace sermon.

Mr Wroe's Virgins is a novel with multiple narrators, each voicing part of the virgins' story in clearly-titled sections. Seven virgins, consisting of a cripple, a badly-beaten mute, two underage sisters who can hardly read, Joanna 'the Saint', Hannah the unbeliever and Leah who secretly mothered an illegitimate child, are taken in by Wroe and four of them - Joanna who is most sympathetic to Wroe, the sceptical Hannah, Leah and the particularly vulnerable Martha – are the novel's narrators, each unreliable in her own way. Wroe's open air preaching, in Huddersfield marketplace in the style of his real life forerunner John Wesley, is reported by Hannah, the woman most likely to use a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' on his preaching.

Before he starts preaching, she feels shame and embarrassment and expects a riot, but by the time he has finished she is impressed by his performance, both in the way he offered an analysis of earthly matters and in the power of his rhetoric (84). Unlike modern-day street preachers, who are so widely ignored that the satirical Scottish novelist, Christopher Brookmyre, amusingly lets Zal, his character in a popular 'airport' novel entitled *The Sacred Art of Stealing*, adopt the role of a street preacher when staking a bank in readiness for a robbery on the basis that nobody either bothers or notices a "Less-Than-Manic Street Preacher,"[51] Wroe is effective, not so much in the sense of what he says, Hannah feels, but in the way he says it. We gather from Hannah that Wroe is as self-conscious about his preaching technique as his better-known literary precursor, Chaucer's Pardoner, whose disrepute as a preacher is indicated in the way he took pains to speak loudly, showed his papal mandates before he began and larded his sermon with a few impressive Latin words to parade his learning; the last thing Wroe did before he preached was to wink at Hannah, surreptitiously inviting her to watch what he can do with the crowd. Hannah's narration of the events leads us to question whether the woman who called out from the crowd was planted by Wroe to assist his game (83). By deploying

[51] Brookmyre, Christopher, *The Sacred Art of Stealing*. (London: Abacus, 2002), pp.62f.

Hannah as the member of the sectarian religious community through whom the marketplace sermon is focalised, Rogers distances readers from the events: we share Hannah's suspicions of the preacher, we are resistant to what he says and we are little more than observers watching the crowd being manipulated and shaped; unlike many of the intratextual hearers, we, protected from Wroe's manipulative words by Hannah's unbelief, are not convinced.

Proxemically the marketplace, a bustling jumble of people milling around as they go about their various businesses, is significant: it is sociopetal, yet Wroe creates a formal sociofugal space within it. Wroe and his entourage "file" out of the house and the seven strangely-costumed women are "ranged" on the town hall steps with Wroe in the centre, the local Israelites in front and the smirking, pointing, chattering masses behind them (81). Moses-like, Wroe holds a rod aloft to silence the muttering, hissing crowd (82) which is compared to "a hungry sea [upon which] his voice set sail" (83). Wroe's secretive wink signalled to Hannah alone, trying to draw her into the conspiracy of the events, also contributes to the creation of a closed inner grouping focussed on the preaching whilst others on the edges of the marketplace are beyond earshot. Wroe's establishment of a temporarily fixed group gathered around his sermon within an informal place suggests the imposition of organised religion on disordered society and alerts us, as readers, to the inevitable failure of hegemonic religion to be adequate to the diversity and individuality present in the masses; sects, whose borders always clearly define those who are excluded, will only and always attract a restricted number of adherents. Rogers's novel thus expresses the inevitable tension of evangelical sects: they seek enlargement but also want to police the community.

Wroe speaks commandingly (82), yet only a few of the speech utterances are commands, such as his instruction for people to look around them at the poverty of the people and their appalling work conditions exacerbated by the advent of machines in the workplace. The command and control of the sermon are more in its rhetorical questions and silences than in its pragmatics: Wroe asks, "Who can show me ...?", "Is this God's will?" and, "Is this God's order?"

and Hannah reflects at the end that the power of the sermon that had impressed her was probably "in his use of silence, in the combined use of his musical voice and silence [...] An orator's trick, to make us hunger for the word" (84).

Although Hannah protects readers from being convinced by Wroe, Rogers tries to persuade the sermon's extratextual audience that it is convincing enough both to entertain its intratextual audience and appeal to the dissatisfaction resulting from their hardships. The intratextual audience, after all, includes a mother whose two sons were killed in the war with France, several able-bodied fathers without work and many with insufficient food in their stomachs. Although Wroe preached every day in the sanctuary, and three times each Sunday, this is the first time that Hannah hears him preach. She is usually present in the sanctuary but she never hears what he says for she, and at least half of his congregation, are mesmerised, entranced, enchanted, entrapped by the fine sound of Wroe's voice, the smell of incense and the sight of bright candle flames reflected in the wood and brass of the furnishings (80); the women's differing responses to his preaching are, thus, concealed by hypnotic ritual. The audience in the marketplace is much less acquiescent and its members are more obviously divided in their response to Wroe's preaching: some are moved; others remain unpersuaded.

This sermon distinguishes the sect and informs its readers that we are excluded; we are watching, and listening in on, an Elmer Gantry-type preacher at work.[52] His ministry does not inaugurate the new age he promised to the women he takes; rather, for Joanna, the new age comes in the shape of her Church of the Women and, for Hannah, it comes after she breaks her connections with the Israelites and sees that political and educational reform is possible through Union and Co-operative movements (269). In real life, the Christian Israelite movement spawned ignoble and debased forms of religion: Wroe's successors in the latter years of the twentieth-century and the beginning of the twenty-first are supremacist sects such as Aryan Nation associated with the Identity Christianity movement in America. Because we always see history

[52] Lewis, Sinclair, *Elmer Gantry*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967, orig. pub. 1927).

'backwards', Rogers enables us to ask whether we can see the seeds of this ignoble debasement in the behaviour of the fictional Prophet Wroe.

Wroe's fictionalised sermons are quite different from their anterior speech position, that is the real life John Wroe's extant actual sermons, with which Rogers seems to have been familiar, both in her recorded gratitude to the Tameside Local Studies Library which holds the Christian Israelite archive including collections of Wroe's sermons and in her nomination of a favourite account of a fulfilled prophecy in the historical note at the end of the novel (275). Wroe's sermons, published as a guide to the people surnamed Israelite for their own preaching, were clearly intended to be a systematic guide either to Christian Israelite doctrine or to the substance of Christian Israelite evangelism; like John Wesley's published sermons, they are unlikely to be a record of how and what he preached. They are to the Christian Israelites what the twelve volumes of Simeon's Skeletons were to nineteenth Evangelical Anglicans.[53] Characterised by excessive quotation of biblical texts, there are few, if any, indications of orality: rather, they appear to be texts for the student Christian Israelite preacher's careful study with an open bible at hand; their intention was definition of the community.

In the above discussion I have attempted to show that the communities in and around these two novels – the Christian Israelite sect, the Children of Joy, the congregation at Freyasgarth parish church, the onlookers in Huddersfield marketplace and the readers of both novels – are all to greater or lesser degrees shaped by texts, particularly the sermons they intratextually hear or extratextually read. The sermons establish the communities' borders, in a similar, but less overt, manner to that of Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, in which the preacher Richard Misner clearly distinguishes between the outside world - "Out There" as he calls it – and the "down here" paradise which, like the town in which the novel is set, can potentially be spelt with an initial capital.[54] I believe

[53] Drummond, A. L., "The Sermon in Victorian Fiction" in *The Churches in English Fiction: A Literary and Historical Study, from the Regency to the present time, of British and American fiction.* (Leicester: Edgar Backus, 1950), p.312.
[54] Morrison, Toni, *Paradise*, p.318.

that I have demonstrated that at least four aspects of my analytical toolkit based on rhetorical narratology – point of view, proxemics, pragmatics and addressivity – are community-shaping tools for novelists to use. However, the central question remains: what is the nature of the communities constructed by these sermons in British fiction? It seems to me that they are incomplete, responsive, interpretive and virtual.

First, they are incomplete. In an essay applying an appreciation of the rhetoric of faith argumentation to one of Christianity's foundation documents, the Gospel of Mark, David Jasper drew upon Donald Pease's insights into the nature of community to propose two models of interaction between communities and their self-entextualisation.[55]. One is the sect-like group deriving its cohesive power from the threat of alienation. In such groups the rhetoric of the defining text exercises repressive power, asserting truth for its worldview and keeping people in its grip for fear of being ostracised. Wroe, Farrar and (to a lesser extent) Lamb aspire towards the establishment of such communities in which the common self-defining texts designed to build the group and enthral their members are the sermons they preach or, in the case of Lamb, the talks he gives. But they fail, for the dominating preachers and their oppressing texts do not stand untroubled in the novels: in *A Whistling Woman* interlopers such as Brenda Pincher problematise Farrar's preaching and abused Children of Joy such as Lucy Nighby overcome anxiety about being alienated and, in *Mr Wroe's Virgins*, sceptics such as Hannah problematise Wroe's preaching and the presence of vulnerable women in the group leads readers to question the worth of Wroe's community. The authorial intention seems to have been both to construct and take apart the community.

I suggest, therefore, that the other model Jasper proposes – which Pease based on the Sartrean notion of a 'group-in-formation' – is applicable to the communities in and around Byatt's and Rogers's novels. In groups-in-formation each member of the community subsists in a state of mediation with other

[55] Jasper, David, "In the sermon which I have just completed, wherever I said Aristotle, I meant Saint Paul" in *The Bible as Rhetoric: Studies in Biblical Persuasion and Credibility*. M. Warner, ed., (London: Routledge, 1990), p.138.

members of the community and negotiates understandings of the group's purpose as expressed in any foundational documents it may have. In such groups, members are at liberty to respond variously to the group's self-identifying texts; indeed, in its application to Mark's Gospel as a foundation document, Jasper's essay demonstrates that such communities tolerate and welcome critical appraisal of texts constructive of the community because the activity of mutual reflection and self-reflection strengthens community.[56] He references Borknamm's groundbreaking work on the life and teaching of St Paul, sufficiently influential to be a set text for Methodist local preachers taking advanced diploma studies in the early 1980s. Jasper, thus, associates the Sartrean notion of the group-in-formation with the Pauline metaphor of the Body of Christ in that both are "unified yet many-membered organism[s] in which each member has its function and the whole could not remain alive without each."[57] Incidentally, this is an important theme in Arditti's *Easter*, where the novelist chose to set his satire in a church because, as he said in interview, under a church roof is the only place one can find such a wide cross-section of people;[58] however, *Easter*'s congregation is a body of people fearful of touch. The Pauline ideal, of which Arditti's congregation of St Mary-in-the-Vale falls short, is described by Jasper as a community in which "each individual in his or her uniqueness becomes a context for the necessary reflection upon the common project, so the group is not bound by the threat of alienation, but by a vital adhesion to a common task of mutual regard which both defines and ensures the well-being of the whole."[59]

Second, it follows from Jasper's description of the group-in-formation that the communities constructed by these fictional sermons are communities of response. This is Robert Detweiler's term related to his theory of religious reading. In *Breaking the Fall* Detweiler argued that a reader's absorption into a fictive world should not be denigrated as escapism, because when we read realistic fiction we are enticed into a role-playing game by which we are affirmed

[56] *ibid.*, pp.142f.
[57] Bornkamm, Gunther, *Paul.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), p.194.
[58] De-La-Noy, Michael, "A blast below the Bible belt." *Evening Standard*, London, 5 April 2000.
[59] *op. cit.*, p.147.

or challenged in our identities. Furthermore, the relationship between reader and author is akin to that between lovers, inasmuch as the most positive and productive result of the narrative experience is to provoke a compassionate reaction of mutual care and concern.[60] This is the reaction he dubbed the creation of a 'community of response'. According to Detweiler, 'religious reading' of a novel is neither about readers being persuaded to accept a particular interpretation of the text nor about readers being overpowered with a superior reading, but about their empathetic response. Applying Detweiler's argument more particularly to our reading of suasory texts such as sermons in novels, it might be said that although it is the rhetorical intention of the preacher to persuade, to read a sermon within a novel is to be neither persuaded nor overpowered by a superior rhetor but to be admitted into and included in the sermon's community of response with freedom to respond as one chooses.

Later in *Breaking the Fall,* Detweiler discusses the third characteristic of the communities gathered around fictional sermons, which is that they are interpretive. Stanley Fish's concept of 'interpretive community', which followed his identification of texts as events rather than entities on the basis of the joint responsibility of reader and writing in the making of meaning, has become attractive to both Christian literary critics and Christian biblical interpreters, partly because he uses religious language for his literary ideas. In his book first published in 1980, Fish understood an interpretive community to be one in which fellowship was an indicator of shared interpretive strategies, evident in "the nod of recognition" amongst readers.[61] I feel it is important to Fish's argument that the interpretive strategies, the sharing of which creates interpretive communities, are learned rather than inherent strategies and are based on assumptions held before the act of reading;[62] they do not result from the author's powers of persuasion, nor, in the case of sermons within fiction, do they result from the preacher's rhetorical power to convince. They are prevenient. It follows that

[60] Detweiler, Robert, *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction.* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p.27.
[61] Fish, Stanley, *Is there a text in this class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities.* (London: Harvard University Press, 1994), p.173.
[62] *ibid.*, p.171.

novels do not have a single interpretive community but several interpretive communities, groups of readers bringing to the text shared assumptions and interpretive strategies, based on many factors, perhaps including race, gender, creed, life experience, societal status and so on. Some interpretive communities are public, more or less stable and self-consciously named, whilst others are less intentional and less open to public scrutiny;[63] it is unclear to which of these two categories of interpretive community Christian believers belong. Detweiler, of course, allows that shared belief does not exclude variety of belief, and I do not believe that Fish intended to deny the possibility of either disparity or dissent: the communities gathered around Byatt's and Rogers's invented sermons are permitted to respond as they will and interpret them as they may, so within all the communities around the sermons there are dissenting voices, thus offering readers a variety of interpretative and responsive sites.

Finally, these communities are virtual. This is a significant point where current homiletical theory about the actual practice of preaching converges with my analysis of preaching within fiction. At the beginning of this chapter, I showed that many contemporary homileticians are implicitly sympathetic to the view that the only viable communities are imagined communities. They express themselves variously, but they are often found arguing that preaching constructs alternative worlds or communities for their hearers to inhabit. Because preaching constructs virtual worlds I venture to suggest that the preaching I have been examining forms virtual communities. In the same essay in which he identified four characteristics of community, Lindlof said that in the world of information technology virtual communities are established when people exchange messages and forge relationships with others across the globe with similar interests.[64] These communities are virtual in that "disembodied relationships are carried out *as if* they were a community in the usual sense" (original italics). As a result, these 'as-if' communities comprise a parallel world. To suggest that the communities around fictional sermons are virtual communities is, of course, not to say that their native sphere is cyberspace, but it is to say that their members' sense of belonging is often tenuous, the community's borders are both porous

[63] Lindlof, Thomas R, *op cit.*, p.64.
[64] *ibid.*, p.69.

and elastic and, like Anderson's imagined communities, the community only exists in that a number of people, with a sense of mutual significance, consider it to exist.[65] This is the character of all the communities in and around the novels, including the sects because they fail to achieve the closed status to which they aspire.

Incomplete, responsive, interpretive and virtual, the imagined communities shaped by fictional sermons are, above all else, religious communities. In creating these sermons, the fictional preachers and actual authors facilitate the possibility that around these sermons there may gather believing, learning, sanctifying yet diverse communities through whom new realities may be envisaged. Indeed, it may be that fictional sermons are more enabling in that they are open to greater discussion by more people over more time than most spoken sermons. This is in keeping with the theme of embodiment which recurs in many of these novels, but it leaves us with the notion that readers and hearers of fictional sermons constitute a paradox - a disembodied Body. This is a paradox I will explore in the next chapter.

[65] Anderson, Benedict, *op. cit.*, p.6.

8: Implications: Mimesis, Poiesis and Incarnation

Recapping the findings of the chapters above will demonstrate that this study has implications for readers and writers, as well as for religious believers and Christian preachers, particularly in the way that the latent presence of issues related to memory, imagination and embodiment determine our response to, and our engagement with both fiction and preaching.

In chapter 1 of this thesis I outlined the 'strangeness' of fictional sermons and raised several questions for consideration. How convincing as rhetorical and authoritative discourses can sermons be when they migrate from their native rhetorical environment into the realm of fiction? To what extent are reported sermons compromised by a performance that is unavoidably rendered perfunctory because the conditions for a full rendition no longer prevail? In a literary setting is preaching capable of retaining a semblance of oral vitality? Do sermons in fiction function only as didactic shortcuts for novelists, tools for establishing historical contexts or bases for satire? And what, if any, is their relation to the practice of actual contemporary preaching? Underlying these

questions is the hypothesis I set out to test: is there life yet in literary sermons as a genre – or, indeed, in preaching as an art form - when readers' first-hand experience of preaching is in decline in pluralist Britain?

Chapter 3 saw that sermons in novels problematise institutional, textual and preacherly authority inasmuch as, first, the preachers discussed in this thesis display ambivalence towards the bible as an authority, reflecting both its decaying authority in contemporary Britain and the range of views on biblical authority amongst Christians, second, various concepts of inspiration collide when inspired preachers cite "God-breathed"[1] biblical texts in the preaching that inspires some of their hearers, third, character foibles and lack of integrity in some of these fictional preachers compromise the authority of their preaching in that their fallible embodied delivery weakens the authority of dignity, which is the most influential authority on which rhetors can rely, and, fourth, novelists' attempts to present sermons as privileged texts within their novels are hazardous as fewer readers nowadays attribute authority to preaching. On the other hand, these problems can be creative tensions. Extending McClure's argument that there is "no unitary, transcendent and masterful (A)author behind every author of the biblical text" but that the ultimate authority of the bible is "somehow between the lines,"[2] questions of authority raised by the presence of sermons in fiction challenge readers to consider both the status of (A)authorship and (S)story and expose them to the possibility of both an Author "to whom all authors finally defer"[3] and a Story within which their own story is situated. When the sermons they are reading are being used either satirically or historically, this challenge is easier for readers to take up, for the satirical tone or the historical distancing more readily permits the reader to reject both the sermon's authority or (A)authorship and its metanarrative, allowing the reader to find his or her place either outside the world of the sermon or on its margins.

Chapters 4 and 5 showed that, although it is difficult for an author to achieve, preaching in novels is capable of enabling readers to acknowledge the

[1] 2 Timothy 3: 16, NIV.
[2] McClure, John S., *op. cit.*, p.14.
[3] Taylor, Mark C., *op cit.*, p.81.

validity of both other peoples' experience of Otherness and their awareness of Self, sometimes thought of as 'the ground of one's being', especially when the novel is polyphonous and the preaching contributes to the harmonies. This is true both of sermons in which preachers testify to what they believe and those in which they wrestle with existential problems of either a religious or a spiritual nature. In some cases and for some readers, sermons of either type can be the site of meaningful convergence where keeping faith with 'Faith' becomes possible in the multiculturalism that is a feature of contemporary society.

Chapter 6 saw that the presence of sermons embedded or inserted in the novels permits novelists to use essentially metaphorical language to name worlds other than the prevalent world of the novel. It noted that religious language is odd because, unlike metaphor, it cannot be reduced so that it can be replaced by a corresponding literal expression[4] and it is problematic because of the impossibility of language about ineffable God. Yet, despite its oddity and its limits, religious language in the fictional preachers' sermons permits their intratextual audiences to exit the prisonhouse of their existence and 'escape into' or adopt alternative worldviews; I ventured, using Breuggemann's terms, that it may also fund readers' imaginations to do likewise.

Chapter 7 demonstrated that sermons within novels are effective in constructing discourse communities of believers both intra- and extratextually; it is apparent that these communities may be cultic or open, sect-like or church-like. I insisted that although these incomplete, responsive, interpretive and virtual communities are imagined in that the 'image of their communion' exists in their members' minds even though they do not know one another, this is a positive feature of religious communities.

Latent within each of these case studies was the presence of three factors at work in readers' reception of fictional sermons – memory, imagination and embodied, or somatic, delivery. This chapter, in which I will discuss these under the more specialised literary and theological terms of mimesis, poiesis and

[4] Green, Garrett, *op cit.*, p.130.

incarnation, is an exposition of how these factors function in fictional preaching and how they relate to actual preaching.

Mimesis: a living practice of memory

In *On the Orator I*, Cicero described five conventional steps in the preparation and performance of a speech. The orator's theoretical and practical task begins with 'invention' when the orator thinks of what to say. The second step is 'arrangement' in which the material is organised and sequenced so that due weight is attached to the various elements of the speech and the 'right order' is established. In the third step, 'style', the orator devises "suitably embellished language to clothe the results of his thinking."[5] In the penultimate stage, 'memory', the orator commits the form of his speech to memory before the eventual 'delivery' of the speech. These, Cicero claimed, are procedures that good speakers instinctively employ: the rules are derived from the example of other orators' eloquence, as eloquence cannot be achieved simply by following the maxims. However, Cicero's treatise betrayed his concern for oratorical reputation and noted that only one error in performance is sufficient to ruin reputation.[6] Orators are rare, he said, because few are the people who possess the necessary combination of qualifications for this demanding task. He does not burden them with the superhuman requirement of omniscience, but astonishingly he does expect them to possess a memory "capable of retaining a host of precedents, indeed the complete history of past times;"[7] memory is "a universal treasure house."[8] This, however, is but a small part of the role of memory in preaching.

The late-twentieth century's renewed academic interest in collective or cultural memory has been prompted by study of the Holocaust and other twentieth-century atrocities, the emergence, on the dissolution of the communist bloc, of nationalist identities and the development of collective acts of memorial.

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[5] Grant, Michael, *Cicero: On the Good Life*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1971), p.284.
[6] *ibid.*, p.280.
[7] *ibid.*, p.241.
[8] *ibid.*, p.242.

The latter is evidenced both in the political pressure to observe both Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday and in the response to a princess's death in 1997, which was a public outpouring of grief disproportionate to the more muted official response to the greater tragedy of Aberfan that I discussed in relation to the preaching in *How Far Can You Go?* Concurrent with this there has been a rediscovery of preaching as "a stream of social memory"[9] or "a living practice of memory,"[10] of which preaching in fiction is illustrative.

First, preaching is a living practice of memory in terms of the self-reflexivity of preachers in their sermons. In the last decade of the seventeenth century John Locke recognised a relationship between identity and memory and worried about whether amnesia altered personhood:[11]

> *"[S]uppose I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my Life, beyond a possibility of retrieving them, so that perhaps I shall never be conscious of them again; yet am I not the same Person, that did those actions, had those Thoughts, that I was once conscious of, though I have now forgot them?"*

Continuity between past and present is as much an essential ingredient of cultural and collective identity as it is for the individual, for, as Bal, Crewe and Spitzer aver in the preface to their collection of essays on cultural recall, "cultural memory occurs in the present, continuously modifies the past and shapes the future."[12] They observe that we have learnt that memorial presence of the past may take several forms including conscious recall, unreflected re-emergence, nostalgia and polemic use of the past to reshape the present so that there is often a tension between the here-and-now and the there-and-then.[13] Crewe's own essay in the collection warns that memory, as conscious recall, is always subject to active social manipulation and revision[14] with the effect that it is unreliable as recovery of an actual past. Spitzer's essay on nostalgia, telling of his parents attending a Dirndl ball in Bolivia for Austrian refugees shortly after World War

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[9] Buttrick, David, *Homiletic*, p.179.
[10] McClure, John S., *op. cit.*, p.28.
[11] Nidditch, Peter H., ed., *John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.342.
[12] Bal, Mieke, *et al.*, eds., *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*. (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1999), p.vii.
[13] *ibid.*, p.xv.
[14] *ibid.*, p.75.

II, is one of several that convince me that a culture's collective memory is located in architecture including memorials, ruins and deserted buildings, in literature ancient and modern and in art from the memorialised past and the memory-filled present; it is located in ritual, dress and language, that is in performed rehearsal such as the Dirndl ball; it is located in nostalgic yearning for a lost past, the camaraderie and fellowship of a present community and longing for a renewed, restored or discovered future; it is also located in cultural narrative, of which preaching is a type.

Nicola King, recognising that each telling of a self-narrative changes the story, challenged the possibility of both an individual's autobiography and a community's self-narrative by suggesting that the narrative of memory has three stages – the event, the memory of the event and the writing of the memory of the event – and that the third stage constructs the only version of the first two that we can know[15] so that "memory of the past is continuously modified by experiences of the present and the 'self' who is doing the remembering."[16] Thus what is written is a version of the past, not the past itself. The autobiographical elements in fictional sermons in many of the novels in this study support this view. Ken Wright's testimony in *John Dory* is the most autobiographical of all the sermons yet its formulaic pattern leads readers to suspect that he is reordering events and modifying his own history for polemic effect. Less obvious autobiographical elements occur in all the other fictional preachers, yet their sermons are all related to the genre of life-writing because none can avoid putting something of Self into their words: in the self-doubt of Blair Ashley in *Easter* and Austin Brierley in *How Far Can You Go?*, in the strength of conviction expressed both by Wroe in *Mr Wroe's Virgins* and by Mompellion in *Year of Wonders* in their sermons, but not always in the way they live their lives, and in the manner in which Byatt's preachers pin their theological colours to the mast, the preacher's persona cannot be kept out of the sermon. In each case, the preacher's life writing as presented in the sermon, whether partial or complete, is subject to

[15] King, Nicola, *op. cit.*, p.6.
[16] *ibid.*, p.33.

readers' doubts: they ask, is the preacher merely, consciously or unintentionally, giving his version of the past and how trustworthy is it?

Second, preaching is a living practice of memory because hearers listen with remembrance of previous sermons. King reminds us that, in 1984, Peter Brooks argued that first-time readers of novels build up an understanding of the plot partly through the continuous action of memory and that when we re-read novels we engage in a process of reconstruction and interpretation facilitated by the knowledge of what happens next.[17] The act of reading involves the use of memory as words build into sentences, and sentences into narratives, in which the reader can think back and anticipate forward. The Freudian analogy of memory as an archaeological site is less helpful here than the Derridean metaphor of footnotes and codicils, which he mentioned in an essay entitled *Freud and the Scene of Writing*:[18]

> *"The text we call present may be deciphered only at the bottom of the page, in a footnote or postscript. Before the recurrence, the present is only the call for a footnote."*

It is as if memory functions, not only to enable us to remember earlier pages of the novel we are reading so that we can grasp the plot and identify recurring themes, but also to remember previous readings of the novel as well as previous novels we have read, such memory teaching us the rules of reading novels and locating this novel generically. These observations about reading books can be applied to listening to sermons: we listen to the preacher with memories not only of what s/he has already said but also of previous sermons s/he has preached, as well as sermons by other preachers in the history and breadth of the Christian tradition. Thus any current instance of Christian preaching has a location relative to the tradition. For instance, the last sermon we read in *Easter* is Blair Ashley's Easter morning sermon outside the burnt-out church. Arditti can be confident that his readers remember something of preceding sermons in the novel, including Blair's address at Alice and Dee's lesbian union behind locked doors in the side chapel. Arditti's motivation to write *Easter* as a retelling of the narrative

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[17] *ibid.*, p.22.
[18] Derrida, Jacques, "Freud and the Scene of Writing." in *Writing and Difference*. (London: Routledge Kegan and Paul, 1978), ET, Alan Bass, p.212.

of Christ's passion informs us that he is conscious of the reading public's increasing unfamiliarity with institutional Christianity; yet he can also expect that at least some of his readers will read Blair's sermon with echoes and memories of Easter sermons heard in services they have previously attended. Some might also read it with memories prompted by some of the allusions Arditti makes: for instance Blair's stepping onto the tomb might lead some to read his sermon in the light of what they remember about John Wesley's preaching after he was banned from many church pulpits. Moreover, Blair's habitual appeal to Christian tradition all the more encourages readers to consider this sermon in the light of remembered others.

Third, preaching is a living practice of memory in that preachers select and employ mnemonic markers – rhetorical topics or *topoi* - around which a flux of sacred kerygmatic memory may be formed.[19] McClure argues that these *topoi* are the words by which 'this' is named as 'this' and 'that' is named as 'that', which is an argument reminiscent of the concern for preaching's proper naming of the world which I expressed towards the end of the chapter on religious language above. He argues that key sacred words and images are the markers for what he calls kerygmatic memory; many of these words and images, usually from the authoritative texts of scripture, ritual and liturgy, require neither translation nor elaboration, for their embeddedness in the believing community's collective memory triggers imaginative recreation of the originary past.[20] Although what McClure is helpfully alluding to is a technique, or involuntary aspect, of preaching which all preachers can employ to associate their preaching with the 'great tradition' of preaching, among the fictional sermons I have studied it is best seen in two groups of preachers: those featured in historical novels and the 'conventional' preachers. The latter group would include the religious convention speaker in *How Far Can You Go?*, Ted Bishop in *Easter* and Ken Wright in *John Dory*, who 'trot out' the citation of biblical texts and follow formulaic sermon structures. In parody of preachers at large religious gatherings or conventions, Lodge's preacher at the Day of Renewal in Anaheim

[19] McClure, John S., *op cit.*, p.31.
[20] *ibid.*, p.32.

uses the acronym BEA for the structure of his sermon because in the course of flying BEA from Amsterdam to London it struck him that those letters could stand for true Christian faith: "Believe, Expect, Accept. Believe in God. Expect Him to come to you. Accept Him when He comes..." (176). Around the time Lodge wrote this novel I recall finding in Christian bookshops preaching aids in which sermon outlines based on handy acrostics and alliterative section titles were peddled. Similarly, the creaking conventional sermon structure of three points framed by an introduction and conclusion is still adopted by many preachers: the sermon Ted Bishop preached at the healing service in *Easter* has remnants of this structure in that its main body is an attack on humanists, atheists and liberals in turn, in between an introduction which includes the proclamation of a biblical text and a conclusion in which the bishop seems to get so carried away with his theme of the power of Christ that he declares that Jesus never caught so much as a cold (268). In each case, formulaic conventionality has the capacity to trigger 'the nod of recognition.'[21] It seems that writers of historical fiction find this particularly helpful in that the conventional sermon form may be employed as schema for cultural or historical contextualisation of the narrative; both Rogers and Brooks can be said to use the sermons of their central characters in this way so that readers accept their novels' imagined pasts.

McClure identifies a second, related form of memory at work in preaching: mimetic or imitative memory. In this case there is no kerygmatic selection or emphasis, only the repetition of original words from the sacred past in such a way that it is evident that this is an original to be copied. At first sight this seems of lesser importance to attitudinal suasory speech than kerygmatic memory is, but mimetic memory is a significant way of remembering the past: as McClure says, it means that the preacher must make use of some form of dynamic equivalence between the biblical text and contemporary life in sermons.[22] To this I add that, if sermons in fiction are to translate into the reader's world or have persuasive influence on the reader's way of thinking, it means that the preacher's author must also establish some analogy or

[21] Fish, Stanley, *op cit.*, p.173.
[22] *op. cit.*, p.33.

equivalence between the fictional world, the world of the sermon and the actual world. If it is true that "the past is made not found",[23] then the past is a fictive realm,[24] and, like these fictive pasts, the worlds of novels are similarly made through acts of the imagination building on the words of the text. These constructed and imagined proposed textual worlds are, according to Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative*, dependent upon three degrees of mimesis – prefigurative, configurative and refigurative. Detailed critique of Ricoeur is beyond the scope of this thesis, yet it is important to note how McClure uses Ricoeur's theory. Prefigurative mimesis, or $mimesis_1$, is what McClure calls descriptive mimesis,[25] which is to say that its chief characteristic is *memoria* or simply remembering; this prefigurative mimesis in preaching enables the church to recognise its imagined past as an original – and, I might add, its imagined future as an ultimate – both of which are worthy of imitation by "organising analogous acts into a coherent faith narrative involving the actual stuff of everyday life."[26] Thus, argues McClure, preachers gain access to lost memory, correct faulty memory and establish true memory for the Christian community.[27] Approaching Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy from his stance as an homiletician, McClure characterises configurative mimesis, or $mimesis_2$, as preaching sermons 'in the shape of scripture', that is configured in the shape of the texts they are mimicking;[28] this, he believes, opens to the hearer the 'as-ifness' of the kingdom, from which Christian believers have been estranged and towards which Christian believers aim. In choosing not to discuss Ricoeur's third degree of mimesis, refigurative mimesis, McClure misses a trick for preachers: my discussion of imagination below is underpinned by the recognition of $mimesis_3$ as imitation that is capable of refiguring reality – in another word, imagination.

In his discussion of historical fiction Robert Holton expressed ideas related both to what King says about the narrative of memory and to what McClure says about kerygmatic and imitative memory. Holton states that

[23] Price, David W., *op cit.*, p.306.
[24] *ibid.*, p.46.
[25] *op. cit.*, p.33.
[26] *ibid.*, p.34.
[27] *ibid.*, p.38.
[28] *ibid.*, p.35.

historical novels deal primarily with the divergence between *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*, that is events in the past and narrative discourse about them, between which there is necessary discontinuity.[29] According to Holton, novels such as the historical fictions discussed in this thesis articulate a struggle over 'point of view', or the power to select what may be accepted as legitimate testimony, and the authority to narrate. He goes on to argue that, especially when there are issues of class, gender or race, the legitimacy of the focalisers of the narrative may be questioned in terms of their narratival privilege mainly because marginalised groups have difficulty recovering suppressed history, keeping it alive, legitimising the testimony and living in the present whilst constituting a future with the legacy of the remembered past. It is better, then, for readers to have access to "a variety of narratives, historical perspectives and versions of common sense."[30] The "jarring witnesses" of the four narrators of *Mr Wroe's Virgins* supply what Holton calls "a plenitude of historiographic testimony" whereas the young woman who narrates *Year of Wonders* herself contributes various points of view as she is one who belongs to the servant class yet is a privileged observer of intimate moments in the lives of the people with influence in the village. Thus readers can assess for themselves the relative veracity of the narratives. Dealing with the radical discontinuity of the past and the discrepancy between *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*, Frederick Holmes noted that, since historical continuity with a desired past has been severed, idealisation of the past is a powerful recurrent urge and he inferred from his reading of Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*[31] that contributory to this urge is religious belief which, often expressed in inherited memory, is a significant factor in repairing discontinuity with the past. He carefully distinguished religious belief from the ontological existence of God or any existential sense of providential design.[32] To this I add that such religious belief – or religious memory, rehearsed, for instance, in the Eucharist as "a foretaste of the heavenly banquet prepared for all people"[33] as well as in

[29] Holton, Robert, *op cit.*, p 251.
[30] *ibid.*, p.257.
[31] Barnes, Julian, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. (London: Picador, 1989).
[32] Holmes, Frederick M., *op. cit.*, p.52.
[33] *The Methodist Worship Book*. p.197.

prophetic preaching – is also capable of repairing fractured continuity with a desired future. Thus, King sees memory or anamnesis as "making the past available for the self's future"[34] in creative collaboration between past, present and future and I see preaching as having this same anamnetical role. This may be compared to what happens in Anne Michaels's novel, *Fugitive Pieces*. In the years after a Greek archaeologist, Athos, rescues a child, Jakob Beer, from his fate in Auschwitz, Athos insists on the boy learning Hebrew because it is his future he is remembering.[35]

Fourth, preaching is a living practice of memory in that it allows the expression of what Foucault called countermemory, which speaks across or contradicts memory. In the complex argument of *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, Foucault suggested that on any given originary event there takes place a collective hesitation signalling a confrontation in which forces, not wholly benign, struggle. There follows "the hazardous play of domination,"[36] through which one representation of the originary event is asserted as orthodox and others are designated as unorthodox or heretical. Countermemory aims at liberating "effective history" from "traditional history" by focussing on the inscription of history on the marginalised body and reading backwards to the countless unremembered events that never became part of collective memory.[37] Thus, as McClure asserts in discussing Foucault's views, "countermemory moves behind historicist, mimetic and kerygmatic memory to encounter memory's others."[38]

In fictional preaching, this is seen, for instance in the way in which Blair Ashley, the curate in *Easter*, is able to 'preach sense out of' both his experiences in Holy Week when he disrupts the Maundy service at St Paul's Cathedral and his sexuality which pushes him to the margins of the church: counterculturally Blair recovers ancient submerged texts writing what is now known as 'gay theology' as well as liturgical texts for the authorisation of same sex partnerships. It is also seen in the struggle by which Austin Brierley, the curate

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[34] *op. cit.*, p.21
[35] Michaels, Anne, *Fugitive Pieces*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1997), p.21.
[36] Foucault, Michel, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." p.83.
[37] *ibid.*, pp.88f.
[38] *op. cit.*, p.43.

in *How Far Can You Go?*, is able to continue to preach with integrity against the dominant tradition that wants to suppress the questions that challenge religious faith in the aftermath of disasters such as the loss of lives at Aberfan, a tradition represented by Austin's parish priest who asks what good can come of making people doubt the goodness of God (108). Preaching experiences like these lead McClure to characterise homiletical countermemory as "a prolonged moment of erasure" in which the preacher's own well-formed memory and the collective memory of the sermon's hearers dissolve into "things unremembered" and contradict the patterns and processes of the past on which we have traditionally relied.[39] He goes on to argue that contemporary preachers, therefore, learn double-consciousness which dislocates their positions within the field of kerygmatic memory and releases an awareness of memory-positions that are, or could be, otherwise. In the early stages of this thesis when I discussed the characteristics of preaching, instead of double-consciousness, I used the term 'bifocality', in that one field of view is fixed on the tradition whilst another is on the countertradition, thus locating the church both culturally and counterculturally, an uncomfortable location which preachers such as some of Arditti's, Byatt's and Lodge's creations are able to inhabit. The bifocality of non-hegemonic preachers, which pays attention to the matter – or bodies – around them as well as to the bodies inscribed with the kerygmatic and mimetic, often painful and submerged, memories of the dominant church tradition, funds hearers' imaginations so that they are able to exit what McClure calls 'the house of tradition' and enter the strange land of the eschatological community of 'unlimited conversation.'[40]

Poiesis: Imag(in)ing godly worlds

Although Walter Brueggemann has most consistently championed imagination as the crux of the homiletical enterprise in a post-modern age, theologians such as David Tracy, whose publication twenty-five years ago[41] is a

[39] *ibid.*, pp.43f.
[40] *ibid.*, p.131.
[41] Tracy, David, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

recurring reference in much contemporary theological writing, and Gordon Kaufman, whose principal thesis is that theology, whose subject is 'God' or the ultimate concern of human beings, is human work,[42] have also recovered imagination from the world of 'make-believe' in such a way that their later critic, Garrett Green, readily named imagination as "the anthropological point of contact for divine revelation", its *locus* or *Anknüpfungspunkt*.[43]

Green began his book on imagination in theology by suggesting that the term 'imagination' that once flourished in theology only among practitioners of the academic discipline of 'religion and literature' is now receiving wider theological attention,[44] but for a long while imagination has been looked at with suspicion theologically because those who fail to distinguish between what is imagined and the imaginary think it tends towards a reductionist direction in theology. One of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's outstanding contributions to literary criticism and theological thought is his theory of imagination and its implications for religion, in which he effectively "desynonymiz[ed] Fancy and Imagination."[45] Coleridge established a distinction between primary and secondary imagination in which primary imagination, which is necessarily shared by everyone, mixes together ideas or images that are already present into a mere "mechanical juxtaposition of parts", whereas secondary imagination, a higher and more creative faculty, fuses ideas and images in a mark of genius into the creative unity of a "living whole or organism." Green notes that the combined effect of this "esemplastic power", as Coleridge called it, can be observed in one of the ways metaphor is thought to work: the primary imagination supplies the images that are then forged into creative unity by the secondary imagination.[46] So, arguing against a long tradition that regarded 'imagination' as equivalent to 'fancy', Coleridge saw imagination as "the mind in its highest state of creative

[42] Kaufman, Gordon D., *The Theological Imagination: Constructing the Concept of God.* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).
[43] Green, Garrett, *op. cit.*, p.40.
[44] *ibid.*, p.9.
[45] Willey, Basil, "Imagination and Fancy." in *Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), p.12.
[46] *op. cit.*, p.19.

insight and awareness,"[47] as the creative faculty that was the highest expression of truth.[48]

Later, in response to what was popularly heard as a challenge to the value of religion in that it is "the dream of the human mind" and "the illusory happiness of the people,"[49] a distinction between realistic and illusory imagination was established which helps us to cope philosophically with a problem common to both religion and literature: non-present temporal and spatial reality. In the case of temporal non-present reality, imagination facilitates memory of a past which is no longer present,[50] further to which, in keeping with what I said about memory, I will claim that imagination also facilitates anticipation of a future not yet present. In the case of spatial non-present reality, imagination lets us accept the existence of a table in the next room, an unseen Taj Mahal, microcosmic subatomic structures and macrocosmic astrophysics (to use Green's own examples), as well as, I suggest, the characters in a novel enabling us to write and read about the preachers in this study as if they were present, and the gods of their religion, enabling us to write and read about the 'substance' of these preachers' beliefs. Green argued that, in theology, paradigmatic imagination through which "we look for a pattern by which we can explore objects in a larger world"[51] assists us in our interpretation of experience and language and makes accessible something that would otherwise be beyond our linguistic grasp.[52] This is the very problem addressed in chapter 6 of this thesis which explores the nature of the language used in fictional sermons. In a phrase reminiscent of David Cunningham's definition of the rhetoric of preaching as 'faithful persuasion', Green calls the *Anknüpfungspunkt* of revelation 'faithful imagination.'[53]

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[47] Willey, Basil, *op cit.*, p.16.
[48] Green, Garrett, *op cit.*, p.20.
[49] Feuerbach and Marx respectively, quoted in Green.
[50] *ibid.*, p.64.
[51] *ibid.*, pp.69 and 78.
[52] *ibid.*, p.133.
[53] *ibid.*, p.145.

That such faithful imagination is the essence of reading is a concept whose origins may be found in the theology of Augustine, for whom desire is the prime motivator of intention. As Graham Ward argues, the desire to understand, which is much more than an intellectual desire in that it engrosses and affects readers' appetites, metabolisms, sleep patterns and physicality, circulates around the reader and the text in such a way that, in Augustine's theology of reading, reading affects both what we do and what we become: indeed, reading is a spiritual exercise; "When we read we engage with dynamics more powerful than we are aware, enter and extend the rich store-houses of our *imagination*, open ourselves to an exterior, an other which can injure as well as heal us."[54]

It seems, furthermore, that this creative and spiritual understanding of faithful imagination is related in some way to John Ruskin's concept of 'Imagination Penetrative'. Like Coleridge, Ruskin distinguished fancy from imagination and, according to Michael Wheeler, he regarded imagination as "the highest intellectual power of man [*sic*],"[55] but, unlike Coleridge, for Ruskin imagination was more interpretative than creative. Imagination, for Ruskin, was the mind's tongue capable of piercing through whatever substantial or spiritual subject is submitted to it, like a pholas (a sea mollusc that makes holes in stones); imagination penetrates the text with pathetic and interpretative consequences.

Convergence of these religio-literary theories of imagination with schema theory, as deployed in this study of fictional sermons, suggests a role for imagination in actual preaching. Brueggemann sees this role not as describing a coherent thought system but the voicing of pieces out of which people can put their lives together in fresh configurations; it is the provision of materials and resources which fund the imaginative shaping of a new world.[56] It is no coincidence that schema theory is built on the notion that "little pieces" of incomplete schemata may be adequate to fund readers' imaginations.

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[54] Gearon, Liam, ed., *English Literature, Theology and the Curriculum: Theology in Dialogue*. (London: Cassell, 1999), p.59, my italics.
[55] *ibid.*, p.198.
[56] Brueggemann, Walter, *The Bible and the Postmodern Imagination*, p.20.

Drawing on the work of both Mick Short and Guy Cook, I have employed schema theory in the analysis of fictional sermons and have found that the theory suggests that imagination functions as a tool in the way readers use pre-existing mental expectations to fill in gaps between key linguistic terms so that they can make sense of a discourse and imagine its world. Key linguistic terms act as triggers in the text enabling readers to retrieve from their memories organised packages of connected pieces of information that are stored either sequentially as a script or non-sequentially as a frame.[57] The mental typification of schemata is established and tested by what Cook calls schema reinforcing, preserving and refreshing, each of which is necessarily preceded by schema disruption.[58] If I take, for instance, the schema script for the preaching of a sermon in a typical English parish church, according to Cook's exposition of the theory, the culturally-remembered script will include situational aspects such as the gathering of a congregation, the use of a pulpit and the sermon's setting within a liturgy, personal aspects such as the preacher's self-presentation as a bold interpreter of culture, scripture and faith and instrumental aspects such as the wearing of a preaching stole. Schema disruption, which cannot be total as the loss of key linguistic triggers would prevent schema recognition, involves changes to one or more of these aspects: the preacher might, for instance, deliver the sermon from the floor of the church or wear a woollen scarf instead of a stole. The ensuing schema refreshment may be the result of the destruction of old schemata (for instance, the readers' recognition that old forms of preaching are out-dated and ineffective in the current age), the construction of new schemata (such as the realisation of new styles or patterns of preaching) or the establishment of new connections between existing schemata (perhaps finding a new connection between the schemata of lecturing and preaching).

This can be tested against the first section of Ken Wright's three-part sermon in *John Dory*, which was described by D J Taylor as a "spectacular amateur preacher's harangue at the local nonconformist chapel."[59] Its principal

[57] Short, Mick, *op cit.*, p.228.
[58] Cook, Guy, *op cit.*, p.191.
[59] Taylor, David J., "Messages from Magic Fish." in *The Spectator*, May 2001.

schema is that of the evangelical gospel hall rally with a largely quiescent audience attentive to a monological discourse. This schema is initially reinforced by the three-fold repetition of a rhetorical question designed to reel the audience into a sermon, as if the preacher feels the audience might not relate to it. The care he takes to engage the audience can be seen if I rearrange the first four sentences of the sermon, retaining the author's use of italics to indicate emphasis:

1. Tonight I want to ask you something.
2. ( ) I want to ask you ( ) what do you think you are worth?
3. ( ) *what do you think you are worth?*
4. ( ) what do *you* think *you* are worth?

So, when he proceeds to consider what manner of response he might receive to his rhetorical question from people on Maryport High Street, the conventional rhetoric that is part of the schema of gospel hall preaching gives way and is disrupted by his use of terms from the register and dialect of working class Cumbria: he says he might receive "a gobful of indignation" and be viewed as an "ugly old gadger" (141).

Other triggers that establish the gospel hall preaching schema, which readers can retrieve as a remembered genre, include, first, the critique of contemporary culture in which Wright, adopting a superior persona addressing an ill-educated working class congregation, scoffs at the "idolatrous world at large" peopled by "jet-propelled intellectuals" who overreach themselves (145). They include, second, his use of rhetorical figures of speech including co-ordinated list constructions such as "alcohol or drugs or sex or fame or notoriety" (145) and "[t]hey rant and they admonish and they rage and they explain" (146), hyperbole such as his claim to have heard clever people who could convince him he is Alexander the Great (144) and incongruous juxtapositions such as his observation that the brain can be useful both for mathematical equations and for constructing a good rabbit hutch (144). And, third, they include his frequent citation of bible texts. The schema, reinforced further in the way the narrator, George, observes a largely attentive congregation, is threatened by two interventions from Wright's hearers: one is Robert Brier's whispered comparison between the preacher and David Nixon, a famously understated

magician who often appeared on television, and George's own imperceptible and unheard musings first as he remembered his two girlfriends laughing at his attending the chapel then as he made fiscal calculations when Wright asked, 'What are you worth?'

The schema disruption is greater in terms of its situational aspects. The preacher is introduced as both unassuming and ordinary; he is smart, wearing a shiny navy blue blazer with a fish lapel badge and grey trousers. With an air of unrufflable serenity, the narrator remarks that Wright looks like either a volunteer in a Help the Aged charity shop or a freemason. The narrator notices the lack of clerical apparel (140) when, in readiness to preach, Wright removes his jacket and rolls up his shirtsleeves as if getting ready for work. The narrator describes this as "cloaking oneself in an austere lack of show" (140), which also characterises the building in which the meeting is held. Built in 1826, the North Quay Mission Hall is barn-like and has the dimensions, but none of the adornments, of a small church on a Greek island. George senses the strangeness and novelty of such a humble place of worship (136), for, in contrast with the omnipresence of religious images in the art and cinema of contemporary society where the 'everywhereness' of Christ, including Christ-figures in novels, celebrates him as a celebrity but, in one well-known art critic's opinion, reduces him to meaninglessness,[60] there are no religious images in the Mission Hall. It seems there is no pulpit in the room: Wright's use of a lectern, the immediacy of the audience and Wright's audience-awareness within the sermon establishes a conversational intimacy which disrupts the schematic conventions of preaching. This schema disruption refreshes the schema in such a way that it both widens the readers' interpretative repertoire and broadens their understanding of what is going on when a sermon is preached. Indeed, it could be argued that, with the exception of the intentionally satirical, each instance of preaching in any novel further broadens and deepens the preaching schemata for readers. If we make our world through acts of imagination to such an extent that we can claim that as well as the past being made and not found, our present and our future are also

[60] Januszczak, Waldemar, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" in *The Sunday Times*, London, 20 April 2003.

"made", then we can similarly claim that theists make their theology, the church makes its *kerygma*, religious practitioners make their *ethos* and preachers make their alternative worlds by acts of imagination. I repeat that this is not to say that they are imaginary but to say that they carry the potential to create the highest expression of truth as an alternative to the faulty world we inhabit. As David Price encouraged 'poietic history', so this study of fictional preaching may be seen as encouraging poietic preaching, by which I mean preaching that is capable of using language and "the voice of contra-diction"[61] to fund our imaginative construction of a 'non-presently real', godly world.

Part of the paradox of preaching is that the irreality[62] of its substance is unavoidably performed bodily. This is what I will move on to in the final section of this chapter, in which, in the light of the way preaching is represented in contemporary fiction, I will make some observations about preaching's somatic or embodied delivery.

Incarnation: embodying the Word

The body as a site of weakness, mainly but not exclusively in terms of human sexuality, is ably demonstrated in these novels. Austin Brierley, the Roman Catholic chaplain in *How Far Can You Go?*, faces the question in the novel's title whenever he considers the nature of the celibacy to which he is vocationally bound, as well as in the several episodes in the novel when he counsels Catholic students on sexual relations before and outside marriage and on chastity and contraception within marriage. The fact that this advice is being given by a celibate whose experience is presumed to be non-existent seems to bother Austin more than it bothers the students he is preparing for marriage. In the historical novels in this study, Mompellion, the hero whose moral stance has saved neighbouring towns and villages from the worst effects of the plague that ravaged Eyam, is ultimately revealed as a sexual predator, who had no sexual relations with his wife because he loved her, but lay with his servant Anna Frith

[61] McClure, John S., *op cit.*, p.51.
[62] A philosophical and theological term which, unlike the more familiar 'unreality', expresses the opposite of 'reality' without denying the possibility of existence.

to satisfy what he saw as the sexual appetites of lust (282). Love of his wife transcends the material world for Mompellion, as he, for whom the body is only a site of weakness and lust, has little sense of incarnated love. Both women are victims of Mompellion's self-induced misogyny which resulted from his perversely harsh interpretation of the Bible. Readers of *Mr Wroe's Virgins* are much more suspicious of Wroe than they are of Mompellion: from the outset the title prompts readers to question the nature of the possessive – what is the nature of the relationship between the preacher and the virgins he seems to 'own'? We find ourselves asking why he has gathered these women: is he an unscrupulous molester? One of them, Hannah, knows he is a performer (190) and he confides that his ministry is all fantasy and charade (225), yet the readers' experience of Wroe as we read this novel is to swing from being convinced that he is a wronged and misunderstood religious leader genuine in his intentions to feeling that he has been uncovered as a trickster who uses his oratorical skill and charismatic personality to manipulate people for his own ends. Ultimately the verdict on Wroe is that he has been compromised in his role as a religious leader by allowing himself to succumb to base desires: he abuses the most vulnerable of the women, Martha (168). Moreover, Leah, whom Wroe knows has had previous sexual experience from which she bore a son, alleges that he has made improper suggestions to her (232) and Joanna, who had more faith in Wroe than any of the other women, reaches her reluctant conclusion that Mr Wroe has sinned in that "the man in him, the male part" has betrayed all the higher spiritual trust the women had placed in him (236). Gideon Farrar in Byatt's tetralogy is a similar character, whose sermon on personhood in *Still Life* showed how he is conscious of the theological and sociological significance of presence, body and person and whose behaviour in *A Whistling Woman* unmasks him as a lecher with roving hands and eyes. Ironically it is the much more innocent of Byatt's clerical creations, Ellenby, who exposes the theme of bodily weakness when he preaches about "decomposition ... reversed" in the first of the four novels (202); the Word made flesh in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel is 'reversed decomposition' and so are the enfleshed words of preachers. This is, I suggest, an important theme of Arditti's novel, whose sermons make frequent references

to the risen Christ's warning to Mary that he should not be touched and whose setting is a church where people seem reluctant to have meaningful contact with each other, yet it may be read as midrash on the credal statement 'I believe in the resurrection of the body'. Moreover, this body of people, the Body of Christ, has AIDs (169). However, in different ways, some characters in the novel deny the essential physicality of being human. The Archdeacon, for instance, attempts to deny it in his masochistic practices, which, like the paradox of eating disorders such as anorexia, simultaneously hate the body whilst drawing attention to it, and, as I mentioned earlier, the Bishop's unorthodox christology is also flesh-denying.

Distinct from all the above preachers, the bodily weakness of the preacher in *John Dory* is not primarily sexual: Ken Wright's bodily weakness is his appearance. The first impressions made by this preacher on his audience are unprepossessing: he is unassuming and ordinary and he self-deprecatingly dismisses himself as an 'ugly old gadger'. In various ways, then, few are the preachers in these novels who do not demonstrate that the body is a site of weakness.

On the other hand, these novels also demonstrate that 'embodied or somatic delivery' is unavoidable. In the post crucifixion-resurrection era in which Christ is corporeally absent, preaching can be thought of as an exercise which 'speaks' the presence of Christ into being; it performs doctrine and belief in such a way that, as Claire Waters says in her study of preaching in the later Middle Ages, the preacher acts as the human embodiment of doctrine.[63] The preacher "re-presents God or Christ because neither is bodily present"[64] and the preacher becomes a "living book."[65] The twenty-first century is more accustomed to the concept of an abstract text than the Middle Ages when the Word may only have reached its audience through embodiment, yet it can still be claimed that preacherly performance is complete only when the sermon is

[63] Waters, Claire M., *op cit.*, p.ix.
[64] *ibid.*, p.27.
[65] *ibid.*, p.48.

enfleshed in the voice and body of the preacher;[66] like an actor the preacher cannot separate his or her performance of spiritual themes from his or her physical presence.[67] This means that, contrary to all attempts to distinguish spirituality from physicality and to compartmentalise body, mind and spirit, each is integral to the other. Indeed, it could be argued, as Syriac theologians did, that the body alone is the place in which Christians perceive and reflect the glory of God, for God created us with a body as a means of knowing God.[68] Even though bodies continued to be a battleground on which ascetics fought with bodily weakness – for instance, Symeon the Stylite is said to have amputated his own gangrenous leg – "the body remains our constant epistemological source in relation to God", for sense perception, located in our bodies, is the foundational experience of the human-divine encounter.[69]

Incarnational theology like this stresses the relationship between body and identity: we recognise each other by our bodies and with them we not only touch, taste, feel, hear, see and smell but we also think, speak, emote, adore and worship. The body contains our memory.[70] Indeed, as a site of pain and pleasure, the body also enables and controls imagination, driving it to project self, world and transcendence as realities, whilst simultaneously restricting imagination's projections to the realms of reason and probability.[71]

In recent years there has been increasing interest in what has become known as 'body theology'. This theology originated in John Robinson's New Testament studies, long before he instigated the Honest to God debate. His *The Body*[72] distinguished σωμα from ςάρξ, analysed Paul's image of the Body of Christ and established a common understanding of the church's organic unity embodying what he called the divine fulness [*sic*] of Christ. More significantly it

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[66] Ward, Richard, *op cit.*, p.3.
[67] Gearon, Liam, ed., *op cit.*, p.106.
[68] Harvey, Susan A., "Embodiment in Time and Eternity: a Syriac Perspective." in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings.* E. F. Rogers, ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp.3f.
[69] *ibid.*, p.17.
[70] King, Nicola, *op cit.*, p.27.
[71] Cooey, Paula M., *Religious Imagination and the Body: A Feminist Analysis.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.115.
[72] Robinson, John A.T., *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology.* (London: SCM Press, 1952).

prepared the way for a fresh theological appreciation of the human body and redeemed it from its ignoble past as the source of both fleshly temptations that should be overcome and sexual drives that should be beaten into submission. Contemporary body theology, which tends not to acknowledge openly its origins in Robinsonian New Testament studies, is theology which takes the body seriously as the site and sign of the revelation of God. Its chief proponent is James Nelson who defines his work from the mid-1970s onwards as "doing theology in such a way that we take our body experiences seriously as occasions of revelation."[73] For Rowan Williams, body theology depends heavily on the notion that God's concern about matter is expressed in the creation and salvation of the world and is a rehearsal of "the whole story of creation, incarnation and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body [telling] us that God desires us."[74] Furthermore, body theology concerns itself, with issues of sexuality, maleness and femaleness, the ageing process, illness and disability, reproduction and infertility, pain and pleasure and medical ethics.[75] In short, it addresses many issues of popular concern in the quarter century in which Roman Catholics such as Lodge questioned how far they could stray from traditional Catholic teaching on sexual matters while still remaining Catholic and when non-Catholics such as Byatt's characters explored the freedom they inherited from the liberating sixties.

Of course, there are obvious and inevitable difficulties about placing the body at the centre of theological discourse. In their introduction to body theology Lisa Isherwood and Elizabeth Stuart stress that, although it is the locus of divine revelation, the body is also fallible, complex and ambiguous, it is the object of exploitation and subject of abuse and its status as a site and sign of the divine Other is compromised by a self-regarding need to be cared for.[76] These difficulties are particularly evident when the Church is exercising its mission,

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[73] Nelson, James B., *Body Theology*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), p.9.
[74] Williams, Rowan, "The Body's Grace." in *Theology and Sexuality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. E. F. Rogers, ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, pp.311 and 320.
[75] Nelson, James B., *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology*. (London: SPCK, 1979).
[76] Isherwood, Lisa and Stuart, Elizabeth, *Introducing Body Theology*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p.151.

which Isherwood and Stuart express as "bodying forth" the revelation of God in Christ;[77] they are particularly evident when a preacher, in his or her essentially incarnational presentation of whatever s/he preaches, self-consciously embodies the Word, which is how David Day's recent British guidebook for preachers describes preaching.[78]

A comprehensive discussion of these difficulties, as a critique of body theology, is beyond the scope of this thesis, yet, when reading contemporary novels containing sermons, I became aware of three principal difficulties to do with the bodily presence of preachers. In brief, these are that the preacher's body is disabled, gendered and hungry. And it is within the scope of this thesis to discuss these.

First, preachers' bodies are disabled by what I choose to call their 'frail fleshiness', which is encountered in the novels as limitations of human self-expression, comprehension and physical frailty, the latter illustrated by the above discussion of Ken Wright's unprepossessing appearance. The clearest example of this limited self-expression in the novels is Daniel Orton. When, for instance, Byatt first introduces her readers to Daniel, who will abide throughout the Frederica quartet, he oozes clerical unction which sits uneasily with his strong Yorkshire dialect, but soon he is regarded merely as a bluff northerner sparing with words, so much so that he is often 'unreadable.' Daniel, a parson who rarely preaches, is an extreme example of limited self-expression. He stands out clearly in the Frederica novels, for most of the other characters share Byatt's own facility with language: preachers – both fictional and actual – and writers obsess about the adequacy or otherwise of language to express matters spiritual, supernatural and divine, so, in *The Virgin in the Garden* the difficulties encountered when producing Alexander Wedderburn's play about Elizabeth I, to be performed in the year of Elizabeth II's coronation, demonstrate "the inadequacy of the image to encompass what is real."[79]. The next novel, *Still Life*,

[77] *ibid.*, p.150.
[78] Day, David, *Embodying the Word: A Preacher's Guide*. (London: SPCK, 2005).
[79] Dusinberre, Juliet, *op cit.*, p.59.

is a novel of naming and accuracy,[80] in which the nature of the problem of how accurately language can be made to represent actual phenomena becomes plain:[81] the problem is that, as John Ottakar, one of the characters in *Babel Tower*, says, language is both portmanteau and empty (437). Amidst this concern for language recurrent in the Frederica novels, Daniel gruffly lurks, hampered by his inability or reluctance to speak at length in public. When he does speak out, at Stephanie's funeral in *Still Life*, he speaks "almost savagely" and his words are all quotations of some of "the more terrible" verses of scripture, uttered as "a thin defence between him and the pit", masking how he truly feels and drowning out what a more voluble and expressive Daniel might have said (412).

The limits of human comprehension may also be illustrated by alluding to the last of the novels in Byatt's tetralogy. In one of the many Murdochian episodes in *A Whistling Woman* Elvet Gander writes a letter to Keiran Quarrell describing several 'ludic' exercises played out by members of the community gathering around Joshua Lamb. One of these quasi-Ignatian exercises is to draw spiritual images of oneself (64). Gideon Farrar drew an angel with a flaming sword, Adelbert Holly drew a cross with a man-shaped hole and Daniel drew a leafless tree with deep roots. This is a convenient expression of the variety of spiritualities and theologies that the clergymen of the novel represent, diverse perceptions of God that are worked out at length in other episodes and dialogues in the novel. It also indicates the theological truism that no single human being can fully comprehend God: God is that than which no greater can be comprehended. It follows that no preacher can fully comprehend God; none is able to communicate God fully; and none can be a full embodiment of the divine.

The theological rejoinder to the problem that preachers' bodies are in so many ways disabled is offered by Isherwood and Stuart who observe that Christ in his resurrected state reveals, and is, the disabled God with impaired hands and feet as well as a pierced side, his wounds still visible above, as many Easter and

[80] Westlake, Michael, *op cit.*, p.36.
[81] Gitzen, Julian, *op cit.*, p.87.

Ascensiontide hymns assert. They thus make a theological assertion of what many disabled people may know from experience: full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability.[82] The medical or psychological rejoinder to the problem is the concept of 'remembered body map', by which it has been observed that amputees dream themselves as able-bodied. The frail fleshiness of limited comprehension and limited powers of expression do not prevent a preacher speaking of God; nor does the frail fleshiness of a less than perfect body - despite our innate tendency to represent the gods and, indeed, the Christian Son of God in the perfect human form - prevent a preacher embodying the Word in the pulpit. Using Claire Waters's imagery, earthly creatures may still be divine messengers.

A second problem with the somatic nature of preaching is that preachers have gendered bodies, so, as Elaine Graham says in summary of Walton and Durber's important work on women's preaching, preaching by both women and men is "a form of value-directed practice that self-consciously speaks from a gendered perspective."[83] This is to say that, contrary to the Pauline notion that in Christ there is neither male nor female, both preacher and audience are unavoidably conscious of gender in the embodied delivery of sermons.

One of the changes in the culture of preaching in Britain I mentioned in chapter 1 was a marked increase in the number of women preachers. Yet the preachers in these novels are all men, as a result of which the imagined world of contemporary British novels is one in which men continue to dominate pulpits, the convention of preaching as a male-gendered role persists and women witness, prophesy, minister and express their spirituality in other ways and places. Among the novels used in this study, this male-female division is best illustrated in Brooks's *Year of Wonders*. In this novel, set in the patriarchal seventeenth-century centred around the religious structure of the parish system and the economic structure of landlord and tenant, in the absence of the Bradford family

[82] Isherwood and Stuart, *op cit.*, p.93.
[83] Walton, Heather and Durber, Susan, eds., *Silence in Heaven: A Book of Women's Preaching*. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1994) and Graham, Elaine, *Making the Difference: Gender, Personhood and Theology*. (London: Mowbray, 1995), p.230.

who flee Bradford Hall in the wake of the plague, the rector Mompellion is officially the community leader in Eyam. It is he who sets the limits beyond which no citizen may venture and his success in establishing Eyam's anti-plague policy is given visible expression in the setting up of a Boundary Stone. However, throughout the novel, leadership is contested – and often it is 'wise women' who threaten the rector's status.

One of the boundaries explored in *Year of Wonders* is that between the Christian religion and other faith systems encountered in the novel including paganism, superstition, folklore and, in the novel's ultimate twist, Islam. If Mompellion is the town's principal representative of Protestant Christianity, then paganism, superstition and folklore are represented by its 'wise women'. Although at the beginning of the novel Mompellion is portrayed, in contrast with his Puritanical predecessor, as an unusually open-minded parson who sees paganism as part of God's wonderful creation (5), he is later brought into conflict with mainly, but not exclusively, female voices advocating alternative remedies for Eyam's crisis.

There are two spiritual centres to the town – the parish church and the secluded cottage where a long succession of women has tended herbs and prepared potions to remedy all human ailments. In the year of the plague it is occupied by Mem and Anys Gowdie. These are cunning women who listen to their own hearts; their sacred texts are recipes for herbal remedies, natural laws and intuition. We can sketch the conflict between patriarchal Christianity and the wise women's spirituality by referring to two brief episodes, the first of which was mentioned in my chapter on authority. When Anna's son Jamie is ill with the plague, she consults Anys Gowdie who recommends a cordial of feverfew and wormwood in a sugared sack which she administers while muttering an incantation; she also applies, with rhythmic strokes in time with a song, a soothing ointment that smelled of mint (84). The novel later offers the judgement that what Anys contributed was practical cures not worthless charms (146). The incantations and songs she tried on Jamie are not unlike, both in intent and effect, the prayers for healing that Christian ministers are expected to

employ. The women's songs are certainly likely to be more efficacious than the bag containing a dried toad that Mompellion offered to hang around the boy's neck. Thus the novel invites the question: who is better equipped to comfort the patient – priest or nurse?

The other episode is the disturbing scene in which Mem Gowdie is attacked by a mob blaming her for Edward Hadfield's death (although, in fact, our narrator is probably correct to lay the blame for Edward's death on the barber-surgeon who bled him with leeches). They try to drown Mem, but her daughter Anys saves her with what the modern world knows as the 'kiss-of-life'. In the eyes of the mob, she is now a witch for she can raise the dead – and they accuse her of lying with the Devil. Anys's response to this is to bait the mob further with a speech that taunts them into taking her life by hanging her from a tree. This speech, although lacking the conventions of Mompellion's preaching, is a form of sermon. It reminds me of defiant martyrdom speeches such as Stephen's sermon before his stoning in *The Acts of the Apostles*,[84] Becket's St Stephen's Day sermon in Eliot's *A Murder in the Cathedral*[85] and Joan of Arc's defiance in Shaw's *St Joan*.[86] Within five days Mem, too, is dead, either from grief or from injuries caused by the mob.

It is significant that, after the death of Mem and Anys, Elinor Mompellion and Anna Frith take their place as the 'wise women' of Eyam. They catalogue the herbs and potions in the cottage, they adopt a policy of 'prevention being better than a cure' by encouraging the prophylactic use of medicinal herbs and they become the town's midwives. They find themselves able to use what the novel calls 'mother-hands'.

Both the town's preacher and its chief wise woman, our narrator Anna, stumble upon important ideas that prove to be crucial for the way the town responds to the Plague. Mompellion's idea is to have a bonfire on which to burn clothes and possessions in which the plague's contagion may lurk. He claims

[84] Acts of the Apostles 7: 2ff.
[85] Eliot, Thomas S., *Murder in the Cathedral*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1935), pp.51-54.
[86] Shaw, George Bernard, *Saint Joan*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946, orig. pub. 1924).

God has given him this solution. Fortuitously, or providentially, it was effective preventative action. Anna, on the other hand, attributes her idea to more natural sources - an occasion when she stubbed her toe on a pebble. She wondered whether God had put the pebble in her path. Of course not. So why blame the Plague on unseen hands? In a belief system dominated by dualism – of body and spirit, as well as God and Devil, good and evil – she asks counterculturally, 'Why blame it either on God or the Devil?' Thus, there begins a shift of understanding by which some of the townspeople see the disease as natural and begin to look for natural, rather than religious or supernatural, responses to combat it. It is as if Anna, the wise woman, one of the few literate women in the town, is indeed midwife to much more than the babies borne by Mary Daniel and Mrs Bradford; she is midwife to the town's healing, midwife to Enlightenment thought and, in the last scene of the novel, Brooks portrays Anna wearing the Muslim veil as midwife to religious liberty of which she, and her mentor Elinor Mompellion, had been deprived in Eyam.

That there is insufficient representation of women preachers is partly because preaching is represented historically in many of these texts: women preachers were the exception rather than the rule and were usually under male patronage.[87] It is, however, in keeping with the older tradition of restricting women to the "non-citable role of prophet."[88] Furthermore, three of the novelists are women trying their hand at sermon composition: Byatt and Rogers, in the tradition of nineteenth-century women novelists of faith denied a pulpit voice, are 'preaching' a religious message to a non-church-going public although each denies being a religious person. This absence of women preachers in the imagined world of contemporary novels is out of step with real life: although women's preaching, as Walton and Durber's collection of women's preaching testifies, is changing the shape of the Christian Church, Christian preaching and Christian theology, in most contemporary novels featuring preachers, they are men whose exercised, almost unquestioned, power situates them as the dominant

[87] Waters, Claire M., *op. cit.*, p.123.
[88] *ibid.*, p.23.

interpreters of their communities' stories. These are issues of gender that novels might address in future.

The third problem to do with embodiment in preaching is that the human body has appetites. For most of the time this is not problematic, but when these appetites in any way deviate from accepted conventions, problems might arise. Arditti, whose novel directly addresses this problem, consciously placed *Easter* on a site of contention, what Sara Maitland called a "terrible tangle about bodies and sex,"[89] which leaves homosexual clergy stretched and twisted on a tortuous rack. In the last decade and a half, the ordination of homosexual ministers has exercised the minds of both churches with which Arditti has been associated - the Methodist Church in one of whose schools he was educated and the Church of England in which he used to be a regular, and is now an occasional, worshipper. 1991 saw the publication of *Issues in Human Sexuality – a Statement by the House of Bishops*, which, in short, expects homosexual Anglican priests to be celibate and to be prepared to declare that celibacy publicly if they are open about their sexuality. In the previous year the Methodist Conference in Derby adopted a report on human sexuality that also included guidance requiring ordinands to make their sexuality known. The debate has become lively once more with the threat of secessions from the Anglican Communion, a statement by the Episcopalian Church in Scotland contrary to the stated position of the Church of England and the various responses of the churches to the introduction of civil partnerships in December 2005.

As a homosexual priest Blair Ashley expresses himself unable to speak his mind in the pulpit where he believes the question mark should have pride of place (327) so he advises the confirmand, Lyndon, to bypass what preachers say and with a sceptical mind work things out for himself (260). Nonetheless, his sermons in the novel show his willingness to support a sexual ethic other than the "'lie back and think of England' norm" (283), for, as discussed earlier in this thesis, his first sermon is preached at a lesbian union in the side chapel and his second is preached outside the church on Easter Day after his behaviour in Holy

[89] Maitland, Sarah, "Sex, religion and a curate called Blair." in *Daily Mail*, 7 April 2000.

Week has become public. In his sermon at the lesbian union he utters a word of caution to the Church of England: there is unresolved incongruity when it is prepared to denounce homosexual relationships about which Jesus was silent whilst accepting its origins in the annulment of a royal marriage although Jesus expressed disapproval of divorce. Although Blair is courageous enough to officiate at this illicit event, Blair feels a need to find warrants for his action; he finds these in same sex relationships in the Bible and thus states that he believes Dee and Alice's union is validated by tradition as well as by the presence of family and friends. His concluding claim that God is smiling on the gathering sets him against the authority of the bishops and the church, reminding readers who are persuaded by his argument that, in being in the side chapel, a holy place, Blair is exposing himself to the possibility of disciplinary procedures and putting himself in a dangerous place.

As the last sermon in the novel, Blair's Easter Day sermon pulls together several of the novel's themes, most notably the theme of embodiment. The lips that have so recently kissed Oliver and the tongue that has so recently lapped his mouth, which, in Blair's own personal Easter, was "a resurrection of [his] entire being" (213), is now liberated to speak of the first Christian Easter. First, Blair reminds the sermon's intra- and extratextual audiences of the abuse that was done to Jesus' body, "stripped, scorned and scourged, spat on by [h]is torturers and spurned by the crowd, before being strung up" (375), each phrase of which was alluded to when, late on Good Friday, the Archdeacon went to his private chapel where a rent boy he had engaged to mortify his flesh stripped him, spat upon him and hung him up above the altar in a mock-crucifixion (330-9). The Archdeacon does not preach in *Easter*, but the body he abuses in private is before church congregations on several occasions as he shares in leading services. Blair's Easter Day sermon makes a theological assertion that ties together some themes of the novel: even the messy bits of humanity are to be honoured not reviled, because the Word became flesh (377); in less conventional terms Blair says, "God personified himself in Jesus." Consequently, Blair places himself before the congregation and asks to be accepted in his humanity with all his failings. He concludes with the hypothesis that eternal life is a state in which we

will be "free of all defects of our bodies and constraints of our personalities" (377). Ultimately this convinces his vicar – and I believe that Arditti, who writes satire out of a conviction that the world could be a better place and finds that humour resides between aspiration and reality, intends it also to convince us – that "Christ proved us worthy when [h]e took our skin, not our sin." (389). This incarnational theology answers problems that arise when the appetites of our physicality deviate from conventional norms. It also addresses the dilemma of the preacher's embodied nature being at the same time beneficial and potentially detrimental to the spiritual task of being a "living book" for the congregation.[90] It addresses the problem of impaired embodiment which cuts the flow of what Peter Hobbs's fictional preacher called "God's Word running through" the preacher.[91]

Neither Mompellion nor Blair is presented to us as a hypocrite, the easy target of much nineteenth-century fictional preaching. We find out about Mompellion's marital arrangements very late in the book and about Blair's activities on the heath quite late in *Easter*, so that their bodily actions do not compromise readers' appraisal of their preaching too soon. The complexity of the relationship between their physical presence in the pulpit and what they do with their bodies elsewhere saves their sermons from being invalidated by their bodily behaviour.

Foregrounding these difficulties associated with placing the body at the centre of theological discourse has implications for the academic disciplines informing this thesis. My analysis of fictional sermons can be seen to amount to a challenge to the premise and assertions, and suggest an inversion, of body theology, for the case studies in this project depend on a common factor: the primacy and prevenience of the Word in incarnational theology. The Word is before its embodiment. The Word, which was in the beginning and in time became flesh, is the origin of (A)authorship and authority, the source of religious and spiritual experience, the shaper of faith community and the inspiration before

[90] Waters, Claire M., *op. cit.*, p.48.
[91] Hobbs, Peter, *op cit.*, p.171.

and within faithful preaching. This has its match in literary studies: the primacy and prevenience of the text, inasmuch as texts, whether novels, sermons preached in church or fictive sermons embedded within a novel, are set loose to 'body forth' and speak other worlds into being. A creative correspondence ensues: as fiction relocates the reader as she or he indwells or inhabits the autonomous fictive world of the text, so preaching in fiction suggests the potential for sermon hearers to indwell the sermon's text-world, which this thesis has discussed variously as an emergent world-view, an imagined alternative world, Kingdom-come and what Brueggemann posited as one of preaching's partners: a better world given as fresh revelation, "a 'fiction' to which I must trust myself".[92]

No English novel has as much faith in the capacity of its readers to appreciate sermons as Toni Morrison's novel *Paradise*, in which the most effective preacher of the town preaches entirely somatically. In an unspoken sermon, which is entirely dependent upon the intra- and extratextual audiences' memories and imaginations as well as the somatic presence of the preacher, Misner simply stands before the congregation holding a cross.[93] Yet, in lesser ways, all preaching in fiction relies on sermons as a remembered genre, engagement with readers' imaginations and embodied delivery. The pulpit, both fictional and actual, remains a site of contention where theology is forged, sustaining the tradition, constructing new interpretation and embodying religion's alternative world.

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Although time alone will tell how much longer the vitality of literary Christian sermons will continue, times have changed since 9/11. News reports tell of Muslim preaching that has inflamed misguided radical Islamists to acts of terrorism. Had *Year of Wonders* been published more recently, this might have induced a fresh look at Muslim preaching in the under-used and problematic ending to Brooks's novel, in which Anna Frith travels to the Middle Eastern port of Oran and marries a renowned Muslim doctor. It might also induce

[92] Brueggemann, Walter, *Finally Comes the Poet*, p.10
[93] Morrison, Toni, *Paradise*, p.307.

'multicultural' writers such as Monica Ali, Zadie Smith and Salman Rushdie in future novels to scrutinise the relationship between faithful suasory speech and the formation of our multi-faith culture.

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