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The JCRT's introductory essays over the past two years have focused on the status of religious studies in the context of critical theory. The editors have traced these developments, provided analyses of religious theory, and modeled critical discourse. 'Desire and Mourning: Theology and the Literary Imagination' follows the last of these, bringing theology into literature by investing theology with a critical force to open an analysis of literary language. Subsequent introductions will return to these and other issues in our continued effort to reshape the discourse of cultural and religious theory.

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For Charlie

Theology inhabits the edges and cracks of the dominant culture. It is a nomad discipline wandering, wondering, and erring.

'Charles E. Winquist, *Desiring Theology*¹

It is always an Other who speaks, since words have not waited for me, and there is no language other than the foreign; it is always an Other, the "owner" of the objects he possesses by speaking. It is still a question of the possible, but in a new fashion: the Others are possible worlds, on which the voices confer a reality that is always variable, depending on the force they have, and revocable, depending on the silences they create. Sometimes they are strong, sometimes they are weak, until a moment arrives when they fall silent (a silence of tiredness). Sometimes they separate and even oppose each other, sometimes they merge together. The Others—that is, the possible worlds, with their objects, with their voices that bestow on them the only reality to which they can lay claim—constitute "stories." The Others have no other reality than the one given them in their possible world by their voices.

'Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*²

Theology belongs to the population of all discursive practices. There is no special privilege to its discursive formations that comes from outside of the text production. The theological exigencies inscribed within its texts are effects of the metonymical placing of extreme formulations throughout the texts. . . . Theological texts introduce an incommensurability into discursive practices that is an internal trace of the other.

'Charles E. Winquist, *Desiring Theology*³

How can one imagine a whole that holds everything together [un tout qui fasse compagnie]? How can one make a whole out of the series? The aporia will be solved if one considers that the limit of the series does not lie at the infinity of the terms but can be anywhere in the flow: between two terms, between two voices or the variations of a single voice—a point that is already reached well before one knows that the series is exhausted, and well before one learns that there is no longer any possibility or any story, and that there has not been one for a long time.

'Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*⁴

¹Charles E. Winquist (1995). *Desiring Theology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 133.

²Gilles Deleuze (1997). *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Daniel W. Smith and Michael Greco trans., Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 157.

³Winquist, 124.

⁴Deleuze, 157-8.

Desire and mourning are folds⁵ in theological and literary discourse, limits to our ability to make present an object or mourn its loss. As surfaces the theology of literature and the literature of theology remain held together through a mutual limit, an interval in which the nomadic quality of each flows across distinct “incommensurabilities.” While desire and mourning, exhaustion and erring persist as elements of both “surfaces,” the return of the desired object or the restoration of narrative plenitude through mourning escape recovery and reconciliation, performing instead, as Deleuze notes, the “limit of the series” as a condition of possibility: “But the image is more profound because it frees itself from its object in order to become a process itself, that is, an event as a ‘possible’ that no longer even needs to be realized in a body or an object, somewhat like the smile without a cat in Lewis Carroll.”⁶ Desire and mourning occur concurrently. One begins as the other begins, yielding a condition of possibility that was, is, or shall be nothing more or less than a ‘fold,’ “movement,” or “cut,” “passage,” or “cloud.”⁷

Man is the son of an infinite source: a son of that Father not by the flesh but by the spirit.

Therefore man should serve that source in spirit.

If theology is a folding practice, then so too is literature⁸ or the literary, with one moving across the other, expressing the other’s limit. Does literature free theology? Does theology create a possibility for literature, a possibility that only can exist, as Deleuze observes, as a “smile without a cat”? “The reader must not forget,” writes Leo Tolstoy⁹ in *The Gospel in Brief*, “that it is the teaching of Christ which may be sacred, but in no way can a certain measure of verses and syllables be so; and that certain verses, from here to here, say, cannot be sacred merely because men say they are so.”¹⁰ While Tolstoy’s endeavor to render the Gospel in brief arises from his profound existential despair over a lack of meaning in life, it is his desire to make the sacred available that he, as a writer, ultimately must mourn, however incompletely. The desire to find or unfold meaning in the depths of depression, to represent that discovered meaning to a Christian community comes at a high price for Tolstoy.

The life of all men has a divine origin. It alone is holy.

In moving to free himself from despair, Tolstoy must abandon the literary as a theological surface, displace the seeming metaphysics of literary language to establish a condensed theological language of “light.” As a writer of an abbreviated “Gospel” he must cast off or free theology from the literary, “measure of verses and syllables,” to bring about a depth of understanding that he believes is exterior to language: “I knew not the light, and I thought there was no sure truth in life; but when I perceived that only light enables men to live, I sought to find the sources of the light. And I found them in the Gospels, despite the false commentaries of the Churches.”¹¹ Tolstoy directs the reader to a spiritual understanding that is non-theological, ironically made impossible through the possibility of language. *The Gospel in Brief*, achieves its brevity, accuracy for Tolstoy,

⁵In referring to the Baroque painters Tintoretto and El Greco, Deleuze describes the visual fold, a division of space calling attention to an indefinite separating line: ‘The severing of the inside from the outside in this way refers to the distinction between two levels, but the latter refers to the Fold that is actualized in the intimate folds that the soul encloses on the upper level, and effected along the creases that matter brings to life always on the outside, on the lower level. Hence the ideal fold is the *Zweifalt*, a fold that differentiates and is differentiated (Gilles Deleuze (1993) *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 30).

⁶Deleuze, 168.

⁷Deleuze, 165.

⁸See Gregg Lambert (2002) ‘On the uses (and abuses) of literature for life’ in *The Non-Philosophy of Gilles Deleuze*. London: Continuum

⁹Leo Tolstoy (1829-1910), excommunicated (1901) Russian novelist who wrote a series of literary texts addressing religious belief. *The Gospel in Brief* and *Confession* represent his move to an existential Christianity.

¹⁰Leo Tolstoy (1997) *The Gospel in Brief*, trans. Isabel Hapgood. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 21.

¹¹Tolstoy, 23

through a synoptic mode of linguistic practice, a move heralded later by Ludwig Wittgenstein who praised Tolstoy's achievement.¹² The de-literaturization of the story of Jesus, for Tolstoy, is designed to return the lost object of/to theology. This Gospel written in brief and from "light" results in a condensed literalness and the result of this condensation is mourning which allows not for the return of the desired object, but for a partial or para/return of what has been cast out, excess. Desire and mourning in this instance begin with the literary attempt to exclusively bind "light" to word, when the literary and the theological can do nothing more than fold 'light' over word, drift across excessive, ironic, and synoptic forms.

Therefore man should serve that source in the life of all men. Such is the will of the Father.

Tolstoy's desire for theology, for a language of "light" necessitates a mourning for literature, a mourning that forces him to reluctantly reinstate the partial sacrality of the literary as a mode of theological practice. He does this, however, with a degree of confusion as the reader of *The Gospel in Brief* is reminded that the original "Gospels are the work of thousands of brains and hands of men."¹³ Nevertheless, the reader, according to Tolstoy, must not forget an element of the sacred in the Gospels: "The reader must not forget that, far from it being blamable to disencumber the Gospels of useless passages, and to illuminate passages the one by the other, it is on the contrary, unreasonable not to do this, and hold a certain number of verses and syllables as sacred."¹⁴ *The Gospel in Brief* is a para/sacred¹⁵ text, a linguistic compromise between a Word that is beyond language (excessive) and a word that is too easily adapted to the machinery of doctrine (depleted). More than accuracy, Tolstoy is uneasily committed to the objective use of language to reveal the "light" or message of religion, more precisely Christianity. By merging the four Gospels together into a single narrative, Tolstoy's meta-synoptic mode allows the literariness of theology to return as "light," with abbreviation functioning as a linguistic prism to focus the message of Christianity.

The service of the will of that Father of life gives life.

In its condensed form, *The Gospel in Brief* maintains the order of the four Gospels, with changes made to emphasize "the real sense of the teaching."¹⁶ However, the "real sense" of the teaching folds back against Tolstoy's condensing practice as he discovers to his astonishment that ". . . the Lord's Prayer is nothing less than Christ's whole teaching, stated in most concise form."¹⁷ The chapters, then, for *The Gospel in Brief* appears under twelve headings¹⁸ corresponding to the Lord's Prayer:

1. Our Father/ Man is the son of the Father.
2. Which art in heaven/God is the infinite spiritual source of life.
3. Hallowed be Thy name/May the Source of Life be held holy.
4. Thy kingdom come/May His powers be established over all men.
5. They will be done, as in heaven/ May His will be fulfilled, as it is in Himself.
6. So also on earth/So also in the bodily life.
7. Give us our daily bread/The temporal life is the food of the true life.
8. This day/The true life is in the present.
9. And forgive us our debts as forgive our debtors/May the faults and errors of the past not

¹²Ray Monk in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* recounts the significance of Tolstoy's text in existential terms. Wittgenstein's celebration, however, includes an element of philosophical-linguistic admiration insofar as *The Gospel in Brief* enacts much of the linguistic theory informing the *Tractatus*.

¹³Tolstoy, 21

¹⁴Tolstoy, 23

¹⁵See Victor Taylor (2000) *Para/Inquiry: Postmodern Religion and Culture*. London: Routledge.

¹⁶Tolstoy, 16

¹⁷Tolstoy, 17

¹⁸

10. And lead us not into temptation/And may they not lead us into delusion.
11. But deliver us from evil/So that no evil may come to us.
12. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory/And there shall be order, and strength,

Therefore the gratification of one's own will is not necessary for life.

The selection process, as Tolstoy explains, is remarkably simple insofar as "the Gospel according to the four Evangelists is presented in full."¹⁹ However, the fullness of presentation is qualified by a statement concerning omission: "But in the rendering now given, all passages are omitted which treat the following matters, namely,—John the Baptist's conception and birth, his imprisonment and death; Christ's birth, and his genealogy; his mother's flight with him to Egypt; his miracles at Cana and Capernaum; the casting out of devils; the walking on the sea; the cursing of the fig-tree; the healing of sick, and raising of dead people; the resurrection of Christ Himself."²⁰ Tolstoy's Gospel gestures to remove the literary from scripture, leaving for the reader a message that is free of "passages . . . containing nothing of the teaching, and [which describe] only events which passed before, during, or after the period in which Jesus taught, they complicate the exposition."²¹ The meta-synoptic narrative form yields a series of intensities as theology becomes non-theology and the literary or scriptural becomes message. With the omission of Christ's resurrection from *The Gospel in Brief*, Tolstoy formulates Christianity as a behavioral paradigm, free from the "complication" of a metaphysical source—much like the effect of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* which outlined the proper use of language in philosophy.

Temporal life is food for the true life.

The non-theological message of *The Gospel in Brief*, however, cannot sustain its unity or perform its "pure teachings of Jesus" without in some respects investing in a process of desire and mourning. That is, *The Gospel in Brief* attempts to recover the lost object of theology, the pure message, and in doing so, as an act of mourning, must desacralize or de-literaturize the Gospels. In negating the divinity of Jesus and the literariness of the Gospels, Tolstoy believes that he has provided the "source of light," separating, as he says, the "pure, life-giving water" from the "mire and slime unrightfully mingled therewith."²² This division initiated under the notions of "purity" and "contamination" work to rid, according to Tolstoy, the superadded elements from Christianity, namely the miracles. Excising the supernatural, Tolstoy composes a Gospel that purportedly is more pure in its rendering of events, more accurate to the "source light" that inspired him. This a/theistic gospel, however, in reducing message to an analytic language based on accuracy places "light" not in a concrete "reality," as Tolstoy believes, but in the "reality" of language, which is a series a differences, deferrals, or games.

Therefore the true life is independent of time: it is in the present.

The desire for the lost object of theology, the message, necessitates a mourning for that reality that is believed to be obscured by the improper use of language. The condensed gospel in brief moves to strip language of its multiplicity and metaphoricity, leaving it bare, disclosed, and purely functional. In mourning, as it gestures to retrieve in a "new" language that which is designated by desire, the awareness occurs that such a recovery is impossible. Tolstoy's Lord's Prayer illustrates this incommensurability of languages:

Our Father, without beginning and without end, like heaven!
May Thy being only be holy.

¹⁹Tolstoy, 19.

²⁰Tolstoy, 19.

²¹Tolstoy, 19-20.

²²Tolstoy, 23.

May power be only Thine, so that They will be done, without
 Beginning and without end, on earth.
 Give me food for life in the present.
 Smooth out my former mistakes, and wipe them away; even as I so do with
 all the mistakes of my brothers, that I may not fall into temptation,
 and may be saved from evil.²³

Time is an illusion of life; life in the past and in the future conceals from men the true life of the present.

Therefore man should strive to destroy the illusion of the temporal life of the past and future.

"May Thy being only be holy," redirects sacrality away from a metaphysical reality, "like heaven," toward "being" that is presented in a "new" language of precision. Removed from the supernatural, the Lord's Prayer, and the Gospel in total, must now participate in a "foreign" language, the objective linguistic order, an order that is no more available than the transcendent order of walking on water, casting out devils, or raising others and oneself from the dead. Where Tolstoy, and for that matter Wittgenstein, saw a clarity or purity in the condensation of language, correlated to a objective reality, one finds a much more dynamic series of events, of which both Jesus and the message become "moveable" limits. Ironically, the desire to restore the object of Christianity, the message, to a Christian community amplifies a sense of mourning, leaving a religious discourse that was once indexed to a supernatural reality fatally bound to the process of language—*The Gospel in Brief*, after the revision to the Lord's Prayer, is, in Deleuzian terms, "a smile without a cat."

True life is life in the present, common to all men and manifesting itself in love.

The revised prayer, while remaining in/as language, expresses a performative element, even as it de-emphasizes the supernatural reality of "heaven." This prayer as performance appears in the *Gospel in Brief* under a prohibition, however. Jesus in Tolstoy, as in the Gospel of Matthew, pre-empts the performance by saying, "when you pray, do not chatter with your tongue . . ." ²⁴ The speech-act is interrupted by the "event" of prayer, culminating in Jesus's statement that, "your Father knows what you want before you open your lips." ²⁵ In this disarticulated prayer, Tolstoy does more than make language more theologically accurate as to the "message" of Jesus, which is his purpose. He introduces a tension between performance and event, revealing the incommensurability of theology and literature, with prayer as theological performance and literature as interruption. To pray, then, is not to speak or perform, but to become an event in which the supplicant enters into a foreignness that is and is not his/her own—much like Alice in Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* in which Alice "becomes larger" than she was and "smaller" than she is. ²⁶ Becoming larger, but being smaller is prayer as event, requiring that Tolstoy return to the literary that he has attempted to leave behind. The condensed Lord's Prayer renders God not as a transcendent being, but a being only "like heaven." Tolstoy's Lord's Prayer leads to a linguistic God that is implicated in series of differences and repetitions "like heaven" without beginning or end, a process.

Therefore, he who lives by love in the present, through the common life of all men, unites with the Father, the source and foundation of life.

Tolstoy's *Gospel in Brief*, through condensed and object language, permits Christianity (proper) to end with the death of Jesus. The objective language or language not contaminated with "slime" reaches its limit as it approaches this death, which also becomes language's death since objective

²³Tolstoy, 81.

²⁴Tolstoy, 81.

²⁵Tolstoy, 81.

²⁶Gilles Deleuze (1990) *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester. New York: Columbia University Press, 1.

discourse remains silent once Jesus lets his head fall and gives up “the ghost.”²⁷ The silence, however, is not simply the inaccessibility of a supernatural reality, a reality dismissed by Tolstoy, but the folding of language. Tolstoy’s objective language must recognize its desire, purity of message, and, through mourning, open a surface for thinking that begins with a possibility of the impossibility of either bringing the desired object to presence or mourning its loss. The ‘Jesus event’ creates an aporia in condensed language, with the ghost that is ‘given’ up functioning as a figure of speech. It is, however, the figure in the figure of speech that points to an incommensurability between the word of objective reality and the Word of the supernatural. The word of objective reality, just as the Word of the supernatural, is a referential sign, a mark that points to something beyond itself. The death of objective language occurs when the sign has nothing more to point to, other than death and, in pointing, folds into death. Theological or theographical²⁸ inquiry addresses the limit of the ‘Jesus event’ and similar limits presenting a collision of incommensurable surfaces.

The question to ask is not what is this theological or theographical inquiry, but WHERE is it? For Gilles Deleuze, the collision or folding of surfaces means that language is not limited to referral or deferral of meaning, but about what event gives rise to meaning, even a non-meaning: ‘It is still a question of the possible,’ Deleuze writes, ‘but in a new fashion: the Others are *possible worlds*, on which the voices confer a reality that is always variable, depending on the force they have, and revocable, depending on the silences they create.’ The silence created by objective language in the *Gospel in Brief* is death; however, in silence something is created, an incommensurability directing us to exist in relation to a new world, a new surface in which possibilities for thinking are present. As one turns from the presence of God (metaphysics) or word (objectivity), one finds a silence of possibility, structures to be created, in search of ‘foreign’ languages to follow the ‘internal trace of the other.’ Desire and mourning are preparation for thinking, moveable limits that allow the recontouring of ultimacy not in reference to or in light of something else, but as a becoming something other. Literature moves across theology and theology moves across literature, colliding at times to form aporias, events, folds, as calls to thinking. If we begin with theology as nomadic, erring, then theology places us under an obligation to seek other worlds and other languages for writing, thinking, and forming ourselves along a series of possibility.

Notes

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²⁷Tolstoy, 215.

²⁸See Victor Taylor, ‘Theography: Signs of God in a Postmodern Age,’ in *Secular Theology: American Radical Theological Thought* (2001), Clayton Crockett, ed. London: Routledge.

