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*Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel* by Dawn Coleman  
(review)

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Christianity & Literature, Volume 63, Number 4, Summer 2014, pp. 552-556  
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Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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Rogers' knowledge of Berryman's work is impressive, with careful attention to detail and painstaking analysis. His careful research encompasses Berryman's life and work but also includes consideration of Berryman's original sources to understand better how he wrestled with them in his own work. Though the book is laid out well with chapters clearly divided by collection being discussed, the amount of detail did make following Rogers' argument challenging within the chapters. The analysis would have been benefitted from more direct guidance in explaining how discussion of individual poems within collections related to conclusions that Rogers had drawn about the spiritual concerns of the collection of which they were a part.

The introduction is the book's strongest chapter; in it, Rogers has some of the most sensitive discussion of Berryman's work. Reflection on the poet's suicide in that chapter, for example, anticipates hesitations that readers might have about fully accepting Berryman's embrace of the God of Rescue and affirming his full conversion. This discussion is sensitive to theological questions beyond the bounds of Rogers' analysis, and rather than offer any conclusions himself, Rogers judiciously offers interpretations of others and Berryman's affirmation of the *Catholic Catechism* that, surprisingly perhaps, leaves room for God's provision of "salutary repentance" after the suicidal act. A return to this discussion at the end of Rogers' analysis, in light of his discussions of Berryman's final poems and his continued struggles with mental illness and the repercussions of his alcohol and drug abuse, would have bolstered that final section which concludes somewhat abruptly.

Overall, however, Rogers' analysis of Berryman's poetry in *God of Rescue* is worthwhile. Readers with interest in John Berryman would, of course, appreciate Rogers' careful analysis of Berryman's work. Readers with interest in contemporary poetry would do well to mark the significance of the spiritual search in Berryman's poetry. Beyond those narrow audiences, however, *Christianity and Literature* readers of all stripes would appreciate Rogers' careful handling of theological issues and their implication and manifestations in Berryman's work.

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***Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel.*** By Dawn Coleman. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-8142-1205-9. Pp. vii + 293. \$69.95.

Perhaps following Robert Alter's lead in *Pen of Iron: American Prose and the King James Bible* (Princeton UP, 2010), two scholars have recently published works that examine, not authors' appropriation of the language of the King James Bible,

but novelists' appropriation of preaching in their works. In *The Novel as Church: Preaching to Readers in Contemporary Fiction* (Baylor UP, 2013), David Dickinson looks closely at preachers in English fiction in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Also taking as her subject preaching, but in an American antebellum context, Dawn Coleman offers *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel*, a thoroughly researched, clearly written, and largely convincing study of the ways antebellum luminaries such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Harriet Beecher Stowe adeptly use to their advantage the authority of preachers and sermonic rhetoric in their novels.

Coleman seeks to recover "a crucial moment in the neglected history of the intimate yet often contentious relationship between Protestant preaching and other cultural forms" (3). The crucial moment is the 1850s, a decade in which Americans witnessed a growth in the popularity of preaching and the concomitant slow but steady ascent of the novel to a position of "moral legitimacy and aesthetic autonomy" (4). George Lippard, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and William Wells Brown "resist[ed] preaching through mockery, irony, and satire" as they simultaneously "envied it, identified with it, and appropriated it as a distinctive authoritative mode of addressing audiences" (4). As Coleman makes clear, this "wrestling match with preachers" (4) complicates simplistic arguments that would see these authors' relation to preaching as merely antagonistic or scornful. A far more sophisticated and nuanced relation to preaching is put forth in these pages.

Despite "decades of scholarly dismissal" (4), preaching, Coleman argues in her introduction, merits attention because in antebellum America it "was the culture's preeminent voice of moral and religious authority" (7). Coleman approaches the cultural significance of preaching in light of "lived religion, a field of inquiry that looks beyond the official theologies and institutional histories of religious movements to analyze the practices that shape people's actual religious lives" (9). A study of lived religion as applied to preaching requires analysis of sermons "as a mode of embodied performance" rather than merely ascribing worth to their literary merits or formal components (10). Recognizing the immediacy of sermons and the consequent ability of sermonic rhetoric to stir audiences to action, novelists envied preachers and preaching and "sought to usurp the preacher's role while expounding their own moral and religious ideas" through "representations of preachers" and the use of "sermonic voice," which is Coleman's description of dialogue or narration that employs tropes of antebellum Protestant preaching (17).

Coleman's study is comprised of seven chapters. The first two—"Creating Authority in the Pulpit" and "The Slow Rise of the Novel in America"—establish the context in which the novelists under consideration wrote. The first chapter portrays the plight of preachers in post-disestablishment ministry. Finding themselves in "a private profession accountable to a changeable and demanding clientele" (24), conservative and liberal ministers "symbolically constructed their relationship

to their congregations" (26). Conservative preachers often fostered a paternal or an authoritarian relationship with the congregation while liberal preachers established an egalitarian or a familial relationship. Both, Coleman concludes, sought to maintain their authority. The second chapter purposes to challenge scholars' long-held belief in the novel's mercurial ascent to prominence by the mid-nineteenth century in America. Acknowledging Nina Baym's important work on the rise of the novel in America, Coleman offers a compelling counterargument to the accepted narrative of the novel's history by revealing resistance to novels in several conduct books of the mid-nineteenth century. Although she finds in some of these books "an emergent pro-novel rhetoric" (54), the guarded nature of these comments reveals that the novel was met generally with skepticism and rose to prominence with far more resistance than critics have acknowledged. Each of the remaining five chapters—"The Radical Protestant Preaching of George Lippard," "Secularizing the Sermon in *The Scarlet Letter*," "Playing Preacher in *Moby-Dick*," "The Unsentimental Woman Preacher of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," and "The Borrowed Robes of *Clotel; or, The President's Daughter*"—situates a particular author within the contest between preachers and authors for moral authority in the 1850s.

Coleman first challenges readings of George Lippard's "moralism and religiosity as a virtual fig leaf for his scandalous content" (68) to contend instead for "Lippard's religious and moral ideals as an animating force behind his fiction" (69). Coleman argues that Lippard's early literary career reveals a "predilection for religious satire and sense of literature as a high calling" (71), contextualizes his later fiction within debates regarding Universalism in Philadelphia in the 1840s, and devotes most of the chapter to analysis of preaching episodes in Lippard's *The Quaker City* and *Memoirs of a Preacher*. These episodes reveal Lippard's uneasiness with and admiration for preaching.

In the next two chapters, Coleman establishes Hawthorne's and Melville's appropriation of preaching primarily through analyses of Dimmesdale's Election Sermon and sermonic voice as utilized by Ishmael and Father Mapple. She examines select early short works by Hawthorne to argue he considered fiction a viable substitute for the sermon. Focusing on Dimmesdale's sermonic discourse in the famous Election Sermon, which suggests that sin instead of sanctity elevates one's preaching, Coleman contends this secularized sermon is "a fantasy of authorial success" (124) and Hawthorne's "vision of *The Scarlet Letter's* own reception" (125). Readers' reactions to the ambiguity of the novel, like the reactions of hearers of the Election Sermon, mirror Burkean notions of the sublime, and, according to Coleman, reveal that the novel may achieve the sublime as readily as religious or other artistic genres. In chapter five, Coleman turns to Melville. After tracing the democratization of sermonic voice in Melville's early works, she offers analysis of Ishmael and Father Mapple. In Ishmael, Melville alters sermonic voice through Romantic irony and champions a morality not founded upon Christian principles but derived from Platonism and stoicism. According to Coleman, through Mapple's

Jonah sermon, Melville makes explicit similarities between the preacher and the author, and Coleman marshals forth a compelling case for Melville's faith in the novel's ability to help people make sense of their world more effectively than the sermon.

The penultimate and final chapters situate preaching in relation to issues of gender and race. Contextualizing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* within debates about the propriety of female preachers, Coleman asserts that this novel juxtaposes Stowe's hesitancy to transgress gender boundaries with Stowe's overwhelming belief in preaching as a means "to effect individual and social transformation" (157). The "sermonic interventions" of the narrator in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, then, "move steadily from the culturally feminine to the culturally masculine—from sentimentality to theological vision" (157). Paying particular attention to the afterword of the novel as serialized in the *National Era*, Coleman also argues that Stowe successfully criticizes male preachers and reassigns pulpit authority to a variety of characters outside the ordained clergy. This "democratic ubiquity of sermonic rhetoric" makes possible the social and political transformations Stowe sought (158). The final chapter draws attention to William Wells Brown's preaching in *Clotel* but notes that Brown's sermons are hardly original. Brown's "complex tapestry of verbatim excerpts" from a variety of genres, particularly sermons, reveals more than his "resourcefulness and artistic ingenuity" (177). *Clotel's* borrowing reveals Brown's profound understanding of his audience, for through his subtle and nuanced satirizing of proslavery sermons and his lifting passages from "a vast chorus of fellow [abolitionist] laborers," Brown utilized sermonic oratory to convert people to the cause of abolitionism through "their own moral and religious idiom" (178).

Each chapter of Coleman's book is logically organized and helpfully divided into sub-sections, and her prose is clear, vivid, and consistently in a register that makes the argument accessible to a wide audience primarily (but not exclusively) within the academy. The argument, however, is not without some minor weaknesses. For example, in the chapter on Hawthorne, Coleman argues that Dimmesdale's "most immediate clerical inspiration" was Reverend John Emery Abbot of Salem's North Church (113). The analogy is plausible except that Abbot was never convicted or suspected of sexual sin. Coleman concedes this point, but one suspects that had readers of *The Scarlet Letter* recognized Abbot as Dimmesdale's inspiration, some would have criticized Hawthorne for besmirching Abbot's character without cause, much like readers of *The Blithedale Romance* criticized Hawthorne for his uncharitable rewriting of Margaret Fuller as Zenobia. The absence of such responses, while it does not invalidate the argument, lessens somewhat the force of Coleman's claim. The chapter on Stowe is compelling and largely convincing. Certainly, by enabling a variety of characters to preach, Stowe "pushed the rhetorical limits of political sermonizing and symbolically empowered women and African Americans by having them preach to white men" (173), but the limitations of this conclusion need to be acknowledged more explicitly. Coleman briefly mentions

that, at the conclusion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, George Harris goes to Liberia, but she does not address this fact in the chapter on Stowe and does not deal with the problem that Harris (and his political oratory) and Topsy (and her missionary work, presumably including preaching resonant with Eva's preaching) are excluded from the empowerment characters find in preaching to white men. Addressing this exclusion in relation to her argument would make Coleman's claim in this chapter potentially more persuasive.

*Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel* offers enough intriguing and significant insights so as to make the weaknesses mentioned above relatively minor. While Coleman's study presents fresh readings of seemingly over-criticized works, such as *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*, the greater contribution is in opening up a method of inquiry that would yield astute scholarship outside the adequately narrow scope of this study. As Coleman demonstrates in her conclusion, her theoretical approach can be applied to select postbellum works also, such as William Dean Howells' *The Minister's Charge*. One can envision her approach similarly enabling shrewd readings of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* or *Light in August* or Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, works that both interrogate and revere preachers and preaching. The chapter that examines the ways conduct book authors deal with the novel is also a noteworthy challenge to scholarly assumptions regarding the rise of the novel in America. The chapters on George Lippard and William Wells Brown should likewise prompt further investigation, Lippard's chapter for its attempt to redeem his prose from opprobrium and Brown's chapter for its contribution to discussions of oppressed peoples' imitation and appropriation of the language of the oppressors for subversive purposes. Meticulously researched and engaging, *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel* will certainly be of interest to students of history, literature, and rhetoric.

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***The Achievement of Wendell Berry: The Hard History of Love.*** By Fritz Oehlschlaeger. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011. ISBN 978-0-8131-3007-1. Pp. xii + 322. \$40.00.

The title of Fritz Oehlschlaeger's book ends with the word *love*, and this is only appropriate, for love permeates the volume: Wendell Berry's love for land, the Port Royal membership's love for their community, and particularly Oehlschlaeger's own love for Berry's achievement over the last half-century. As with many works about Berry, the book addresses a delimited readership, readers who are "anything but