David J.A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 205; Gender, Culture, Theory, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 172-86.

8

A World Established on Water (Psalm 24)
Reader-Response, Deconstruction and Bespoke Interpretation*

Let's talk of readers' response. Or, since I am doing the talking, let me talk of *this* reader's response.

There are things about this fine and famous psalm a reader like me cannot swallow. There is, for instance, the idea of the world being founded upon seas and rivers. The poet, for his part, actually believes (does he not?) that underneath the rocks and dirt of the earth's surface there is an underworld sea, fed by rivers, upon which the world floats. And I do not believe that. Or rather, to put it more strongly but more exactly, I know that that view is wrong.

But this is not the only point on which I cannot buy the ideology of the psalm. For me, this cosmological misapprehension is only the outcropping of a larger seismic fault that runs hidden beneath the whole surface of the psalm.

I will be arguing that the psalm is riddled with religious ideas as unacceptable as its cosmology, and further, that it is not even internally coherent. At the end I will suggest an answer to the question of what is to be done with a piece of sacred literature that is so ideologically and religiously alien today even to a person of goodwill toward it (like myself), and that speaks with so uncertain a voice. I will, in other words, deploy three strategies: an ideologically slanted reader-response criticism, a deconstructionist critique, and a new proposal for a goal-oriented hermeneutic, which I call ‘bespoke’ or ‘customized’ interpretation.

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1. *A Reader-Response Criticism*

Let me first speak of the reader that I am. Toward the poem as a whole I find myself ambivalent. All my life I have found the poem powerful and uplifting. This is partly due to the background music I inevitably hear when I read the poem, the singing of it by the Scottish Male Voice Choir, all the vogue in my religious neck of the woods in the fifties. But there is also something grand and elevated about its tone that attracts me—at least, that attracts a romantic and soulful part of me.

I also recognize and accept that the poem has been, and still is, a vehicle for worship in Jewish and Christian communities for two and a half millennia or more; and however unlovely those communities may have been, I have no urge to sniff at their religious experience. In short, I want to be able to say something positive about this poem.

The other side of it is that the poem is built upon two ideologies that I deplore: the first a notion that ‘holiness’ attaches to places, the second an idea of victory in war as glorious.

a. *Holiness*

According to the poem, only those who live blameless lives are entitled to enter the temple of the Lord—it is those who have clean hands and a pure heart who ‘shall’, or ‘should’, ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy place (vv. 3-4).[1] No doubt there is a sense of fit here, an idea that pure people and things belong in holy places, and that outside the temple, *pro fano*, is the place for the profane. But there is equally plainly a sense that the holiness which exists in the ‘holy place’ is in need of protection from the impure, that it is open to contamination by unholiness.[2]

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[1] Is this a prediction of who in fact *shall* enter the holy place, or who it is who is *entitled* to enter it?

In such an account, holiness is being understood both in a religious-cultic and in an ethical sense: holy places clearly cannot be holy in an ethical sense, but are holy only because they have been marked out as such by a divine signal.[3] Humans, on the other hand, need to match the holiness of the holy place by the kind of holiness that they can acquire, which is ethical purity (and not, of course, a religious-cultic designation, unless they happen to be priests). In the language of the poem, the place is 'holy' and the entrants to it are 'clean'. Ethical 'uncleanness' is unsuitable for a 'holy' place.

My question to myself, as a reader checking all the time on my responses to texts, is: Can I tolerate a notion of holiness that sees it as contaminatable? If the world contains relatively small pockets of holiness, like a hill of the Lord or a temple, surrounded by vast areas of unholiness, like (presumably) everywhere else, and if the unholy has the power to contaminate the holy but the holy does not have the power to infect the unholy, what future, I ask myself, is there for the holy? The holy is rather under threat, is it not, if it has to be protected from the unholy by the exclusion of unrighteous people from visiting the sanctuary. For if impure people are supposed to be kept out of the shrine, or keep themselves out, in order to protect its holiness, what happens if impure people are inadvertently allowed in? Does the holy thereby become unholy?

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[2]. Holiness is 'defined on the one hand as that which is consistent with God and his character, and on the other as that which is threatened with impurity' (David P. Wright, 'Holiness (OT)', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), III, pp. 237-49 (237).

[3]. 'We cannot make shrines and cannot select their "positions", but can never do more than merely find them' (G. van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* [trans. G.E. Taylor; New York: Harper & Row, 1963], p. 398). Typically the holy place in Israelite religion is 'the place that Yahweh your God shall choose to put his name there' (Deut. 12.5), that is, the place of theophany. And Israel is to 'take care' that it does not choose its own holy places (Deut. 12.13). Cf. also my paper, 'Sacred Space, Holy Places and Suchlike', in *Trinity Occasional Papers: Essays Presented in Honour of Revd Professors Hans Spykeboer and Bruce Upham* 12/2 (November, 1993), pp. 19-30.

In a word, Is the holy to be at the mercy of doorkeepers? Would it not be better, I say to myself, to think of holiness, as a symbol of the divine, as incapable of being damaged by humans? If it is worth the name of holy, must it not in any case be more powerful than its opposite, whatever *its* name? Why not think of the divine presence as a powerful purifying influence that can quite easily cope with sinners and can in some way annihilate their impurity? A temple, then, if it is to be conceived of as a dwelling of the divine presence, would be a place where the unrighteous were confronted by the contrast between their badness and divine goodness, and thus it would function as a locus of ethical transformation. Holiness would be viewed, not defensively as it is here, as a substance in need of protection, but as a force for positive change in the community.

But if I 'buy' the psalm, I 'buy' its ideology of holiness, and I had better be aware of what I am doing.

b. *War*

The second ideology sustaining this poem which I find myself unable to accept is of the glory of war, or rather, of victory in war. It is not that the humans are warlike, but that the deity himself is. This only makes it worse, from my ethical perspective at least.

It comes, in fact, as something of a shock to the first-time reader of the poem (or, shall we say, to the curious and close reader) that it moves in that direction. For in its first strophe the poem has breathed a pacific air of stability and constructiveness. At its beginning, what is reported is a creative act of 'founding' and 'establishing' that has overridden any cosmic tendency to instability, and there is not a hint of conflict in the world order that results. And in the second strophe, there are no real villains nor any sign of organized opposition to the forces of good that needs to be put down by force. It is in this context of world stability and personal goodness that we encounter what is the principal truth, for this poem, about the God who dwells on the holy hill and whose face the generation of the righteous are seeking. This God is celebrated, not for his creative powers (strophe 1) nor as the fount of human goodness (strophe 2), but because he is 'mighty in battle' (v. 8) and 'Yahweh of armies' (v. 10). What makes him ‘glorious’ is that he is ‘strong and mighty’ enough to achieve military victories. There is no glory, in this poem, in creating the world, there is no glory in being the object of worship by clean-living toilers up the steep ascent of Zion. The glory that gains him the right of access through the ancient gates is his glory gained on the field of battle.

Now, as we all know, glory and honour in war is nothing other than victory. The victors always retire in honour, the defeated in disgrace. But what makes victory, and what makes defeat? Not the rightness of the cause, not the gallantry of the combatants, not the prayers of the faithful. Victories are won by superior numbers, by alliances, by tactics, and by chance. And a victor deserves praise for nothing other than winning. This is not my idea of glory, and the fact that someone says military prowess is what makes God glorious does not impress me.

We had better know what we are doing. In subscribing to Psalm 24, we are writing a blank cheque for war, for the validity of war imagery to describe the deity’s activities, and for the unexamined assumption that war solves problems. If I ‘buy’ the psalm, I ‘buy’ its ideology of war.

So, a reader-response approach to this psalm highlights elements in it, quite fundamental elements, that raise uncertainties, if not hostilities, in the mind of the modern reader, this one at least. These have proved to be uncertainties about whether *we* can affirm what it is the psalm seems to be affirming.

2. *A Deconstructive Critique*

The problems with this psalm are greater than those, however. We next must consider, not whether *we* can affirm the psalm, but, whether the *psalm itself* affirms what it affirms. Are there aspects in which it is at odds with itself, perhaps even to the extent of undermining what it is professing? Does it deconstruct itself at all?

Yes, in these four respects.

1. *Although the whole world belongs to the Lord (v. 1), it is not all ‘holy’.*

Now according to the cultural conventions in which our text participates, the ‘holy’ is generally defined as what belongs to the deity. In the Hebrew Bible, a temple, heaven and priests are ‘holy’ because of their attachment to the deity. It follows that if the whole earth is ‘the Lord’s’, the whole earth is ‘holy’.

This view affirmed by the poem in its opening lines is subsequently undermined by the reference to the ‘holy place’ belonging to the Lord, presumably upon the ‘hill of the Lord’ (v. 3). If all the world belongs to the Lord, in what sense can *one hill* ‘belong’ to the Lord? And if all the world is holy by virtue of his possession of it, in what sense can *one* place be ‘holy’?

I conclude that while the poem wants to maintain that the world as a whole is undifferentiatedly the Lord’s possession, it cannot sustain this view, but allows v. 3 to deconstruct v. 1.

2. *Although all those who live on the earth ‘belong’ to the Lord (v. 1), some of them must be his enemies.*

Again, the two affirmations undermine one another. For in what sense could it be said that the deity ‘owns’ his enemies? If he finds it necessary to engage them in battle, and if battle against them is so difficult that any victory over them is ‘glorious’, how could they already be said to be ‘his’?

So the reference to warfare deconstructs the assertion of Yahweh’s ownership of and lordship over all the earth’s inhabitants—and vice versa.

3. *Although ascending the hill of the Lord proves one’s innocence, those who who ascend are in need of ‘vindication’ from God.*

Those who ascend the hill of the Lord are promised ‘vindication’ from God. The implication is that at present they lack such vindication and stand in need of it.

In the eyes of whom do they stand in need of vindication? Presumably both God and themselves are well aware of their moral virtue, so it must be in the eyes of others that they need to be vindicated. But where are the people who are refusing them recognition, and before whom their virtue must be demonstrated? There is nothing in this poem about any assaults on the integrity of the righteous by the wicked, nor any complaint that these people of clean hands and pure hearts are being persecuted or otherwise maltreated by those less upright than themselves.

So the poem craves vindication for the innocent worshippers, but, deconstructively, cannot find any respect in which they might need it.

Furthermore, since it is only those of clean hands that are permitted to ascend the hill of the Lord, the very act of participation in worship is sufficient testimony of their uprightness. They already have their vindication, and so the promise of a future vindication becomes nugatory.

4. *Those who worship on the hill are expected to have clean hands and not to have lifted up their soul to vanity. But the deity is not.*

A double standard in ethics is in operation here.

The worshippers must have clean hands or they will contaminate the holiness of the hill. But the deity ascends it straight from the battlefield, his hands dripping with blood. Does ‘lift up your heads, O gates’ perhaps then mean ‘Look the other way’?

The worshippers must not have lifted up their souls to vanity, but the deity has been soldiering away, seeking the bubble reputation even in the cannon’s mouth. ‘Reputation’ is nothing but Shakespearean for ‘glory’, and the quest for glory in war is surely a quintessential lifting up of the soul to vanity.

In short, the qualities demanded of the worshippers are deconstructed by the qualities praised in the deity they worship. And vice versa.

These are not the only places in which this poem deconstructs itself, but they are pretty central. The question arises: What is to be done with such a text?

3. *Bespoke Interpretation*

In the rest of this chapter I want to offer a framework for dealing with such a question. I call it a goal-oriented hermeneutic, an end-user theory of interpretation, a market philosophy of interpretation, a discipline of ‘comparative interpretation’. This framework has two axes.

First, there is the indeterminacy of meaning. Second, there is is the authority of the interpretative community.

First, then, comes the recognition that texts do not have determinate meanings. Whatever a text may mean in one context, it is almost bound to mean something different in a different context. ‘Bus stop’ will mean one thing when attached to a pole at the side of the road, another thing when shouted by an anxious parent to a child about to dash into that road.

We may go further. Nowadays we are recognizing that texts not only do not have determinate meanings, they do not ‘have’ meanings at all. More and more, we are coming to appreciate the role of the reader, or the hearer, in the making of meaning, and recognizing that, without a reader or a hearer, there is not a lot of ‘meaning’ to any text. Psalm 24 means whatever it means to its various readers, and if their contexts are different, it is likely that it will mean different things to different readers. There is no one authentic meaning which we must all try to discover, no matter who we are or where we happen to be standing.

The second axis for my framework is provided by the idea of interpretative communities. If we ask who it is that authorizes or legitimates an interpretation, who it is that says something may count as an interpretation and not be ruled out of court, the answer can only be: some group, some community. Solipsistic interpretations may be fun for their inventors—you meet a better class of reader that way—, but if there is no group who will accept them, they don’t survive. Some interpretations are authorized by the Society of Biblical Literature, some by the ecclesiastical community, but most by little sub-groups within these communities, the Intertextuality in Christian Apocrypha Seminar and the like. The market for interpretations is getting to be very fragmented these days, and I sometimes count myself lucky if I can sell an interpretation to six people.

What we call legitimacy in interpretation is really a matter of whether an interpretation can win approval by some community or other. There is no objective standard by which we can know whether one view or other is right; we can only tell whether it has been accepted. What the academic community today decides counts as a reasonable interpretation of Psalm 24 *is* a reasonable interpretation, and until my community decides that my interpretation is acceptable, it *isn’t* acceptable.

Of course, what one community finds acceptable, another will find fanciful or impossible. A faculty of theology in a modern university will not approve of the interpretations of our psalm made by St Augustine and his community, for example, neither would St Augustine think much of the interpretations of the faculty of theology. There are no determinate meanings and there are no universally agreed upon legitimate interpretations.

What are we exegetes then to be doing with ourselves? To whom shall we appeal for our authorization, from where shall we gain approval for our activities, and above all, who will pay us?

The simplest answer for academics has long been that we will seek the approval of no one other than our fellow academics. If our papers get accepted by *Vetus Testamentum* and *New Testament Studies* they are valid, and if they don't they're not.

This safe answer has started to fall apart, though. We are beginning to realize that what counts as a valid interpretation in Cambridge, England does not necessarily do so in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and even less so in Guatemala City or Jakarta or Seoul. The homogeneity of the 'scholarly world' is proving fissiparous, and many smaller interest groups are taking the place of a totalitarian Bibelwissenschaft. More and more scholars are seeking their legitimation from communities that are not purely academic.

Where does that leave us?

If there are no 'right' interpretations, and no validity in interpretation beyond the assent of various interest groups, biblical interpreters have to give up the goal of determinate and universally acceptable interpretations, and devote themselves to producing interpretations they can sell—in whatever mode is called for by the communities they choose to serve.

This is what I call 'customized' interpretation. Like the bespoke tailor, who fashions from the roll of cloth a suit to the measurements and the pocket of the customer, a suit individually ordered or bespoken, the bespoke interpreter has a professional skill in tailoring interpretations to the needs of the various communities who are in the market for interpretations. There are some views of Psalm 24 that churches will 'buy' and 'wear', and others that only paid up deconstructionists, footloose academics and other deviants will even try on for size.

There is nothing unethical in cutting your garment not only according to your cloth but also according to your customer's shape. Even in a market economy, no one will compel you to violate your conscience, though it may cost you to stick to your principles. As a bespoke interpreter responding to the needs of the market, I will be interested, not in the 'truth' about Psalm 24, not in a universally acceptable interpretation of it, but in eradicating shoddy interpretations that are badly stitched together and have no durability, and I will be giving my energies to producing attractive interpretations that represent good value for money.

In such a task interpreters of today do not have to start from scratch. For this programme has a green angle too.[4] It is ecologically sound, because it envisages the recycling of old waste interpretations that have been discarded because they have been thought to have been superseded. In this task of tailoring to the needs of the various interpretative communities, interpreters can be aided by the array of interpretations that have already been offered in the course of the history of the interpretation of the Bible. In fact, what has usually been called the 'history of interpretation' is ripe for being reconceived as a discipline of 'comparative interpretation',[5] providing raw materials, methods, critiques and samples for the work of designing intelligible and creative interpretations for end-users. For too long the interpretations of the past have been lumped together under the heading of the 'history' of interpretation, with the unspoken assumption that what is old in interpretation is out of date and probably rotten and the hidden implication that what is new is best.

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[4] 'Green' interpretation has already a long history, as Mark Love and Ruth Anne Reese, Sheffield graduate students, pointed out in their study of inner-biblical exegesis, '"Green" Texts: Recycling in Jude and Zechariah', a paper in the Literary Approaches to the Bible Section, Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting, Budapest, July, 1995.

[5] On this concept, see also *Telling Queen Michal's Story: An Experiment in Comparative Interpretation* (ed. David J.A. Clines and Tamara C. Eskenazi; Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 119; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), esp. pp. 7, 61-63.

It would be far more modest to allow that anyone who has had serious thoughts about our text at any point in history may have something to contribute to someone's understanding today, and to put on our shelves beside Weiser and Dahood the commentaries of Origen and Augustine, Rashi, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin. So long as their books survive, they are our contemporaries, and their writings provide alternate raw data for our business of interpretation.

In conclusion, I offer some samples of Christian interpretation (by way of example) of the last verses of the psalm, the entry of the King of Glory through the ancient gates.

Let us suppose—as all the modern commentaries would have us do—that in ancient Israelite times the poem celebrated the transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem for the first time, or perhaps, accompanied an annual ritual in which the Ark, symbolizing the presence of Yahweh, was taken out of the city and then restored to the temple amid festal rejoicing. This may or may not be true. Is it treasonable to say, as a reader of the Bible, Who wants to know this? Must I, as a Christian of the last decade of the twentieth century (if that is what I am), care so much about ancient Israelites, dead every one of them, that I must forever read this psalm, in my own Bible for which I paid good money, as somehow belonging to them more than to me?

May I not ask, Who for me is the King of Glory? What have these words to do with me and with the central figure of the Christian faith? And if you, interpreter of the Old Testament, cannot tell me that, or if you think my question illegitimate, will you kindly tell me what you are doing with my money from the church collection plate?[6]

Suppose that I say, For me, for my interpretative community, the king of glory is Jesus Christ, as the centre of my religious devotion. The question that then arises as I read Psalm 24 is this: To what moment in the story of Jesus Christ do these words attach themselves? What is this psalm telling me of the character about whom my principal interest revolves? J.M. Neale, in his *Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Mediaeval Writers*

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[6]. I am assuming here that most interpreters of the Old Testament are paid by the church rather than the state.

(1869),[7] mentions seven interpretations that have been offered by ancient writers that are suitable for a Christian reader of that type; three or four of them will do for the present.

Most common among the Latin church was the view that here are the gates of Hades which Christ triumphantly enters in his descent into Hell, in the days between his death and his resurrection. For example, in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* (not later than the mid-fourth century CE)[8] we are transported to the scene at Hell gate. Satan, who has successfully had Jesus crucified, now expects to keep him fast bound in the underworld. The personified Hades, however, is afraid of the arrival of Jesus, since he knows of the raising of Lazarus, and fears that Jesus may now be about to perform a similar miracle on all the inhabitants of the underworld. Thereupon, we read, '[T]here came the voice of the Son of the most high Father, as the voice of a great thunder, saying: Lift up, O princes [which is how the Vulgate reads], your gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in'. Hades replies, 'Who is this King of glory?', and the voice sounds again, 'The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle'. Thereupon the gates and bars of hell are suddenly crushed, and the King of Glory enters hell in human form. Satan is bound in chains, while Adam, the patriarchs, the prophets and the martyrs ascend to heaven following Jesus. Hell has been harrowed.

Another interpretation sees here—not the harrowing of hell, but—the ascension of Christ. The gates become the gates of heaven, the voices are of angels addressing one another, the

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[7] J.M. Neale and R.F. Littledale, *Commentary on the Psalms from Primitive and Mediaeval Writers, and from the Various Office-Books and Hymns of the Roman, Mozarabic, Ambrosian, Gallican, Greek, Coptic, Armenian, and Syriac Rites* (London: J. Masters, 1860–74). See also Louis Jacquet, *Les Psaumes et le coeur de l'homme: Etude textuelle, littéraire et doctrinale* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1975), I, p. 577, and Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* (The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea, 1; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), pp. 83-84, 210, 259-63, for bibliographical references to the use of Psalm 24 in the Christian tradition.

[8] *Gospel of Nicodemus* (*Acts of Pilate*), II.5 (21).1 (Greek version), in Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament, Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 132.

King of Glory is ascending to the heavenly Mt Zion, and the scene is one of welcome. Says Augustine,

> The heavenly spirits beheld Christ all-glorious with his wounds; and bursting into admiration at those glittering standards of divine

> virtue, they poured forth the hymn, *Quis est iste Rex Gloriae*? They called him not King of Glory because they saw him glorious, but because they saw him wounded.[9]

There is no need to stop there. There is no right interpretation, though there may be bad ones. Gregory of Nyssa finds in the two challenges, 'Who is the King of Glory?', two separate scenes: for him, the first ocasion is the descent of Christ to earth, whereupon the heavenly powers 'inform [the gatekeepers] that it is he who is strong and mighty in battle, who is going to battle with the one who has reduced mankind to servitude'; the second occasion is the return of Christ to heaven as the Lord of hosts who has obtained power over all things.[10]

At such a point we have only begun to enter upon the metaphorical meanings of 'gates' and 'entry' and 'raising up'. The Mozarabic Missal uses the words in yet another sense, in the course of a collect said just before the consecration of the elements into the body and blood of Christ. And so on. The poem has, in its Christian interpretation, then, transcended its original significances in the history of ancient Israel, whatever they were, and has become multivalent.[11]

Every new interpretation creates an access of meaning for the poem. There are no barriers to the development of fresh interpretations, since every new group of readers creates a new reading location. Your place or mine? becomes the question for bespoke interpreters, who will always have on hand a clutch of ready-made interpretations but will do their best work when making house calls, fired up by the challenge of a new market.

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[9] I have not been able to trace this quotation.

[10] Gregory of Nyssa, *Patrologia Graeca*, XLIV, col. 693. Similarly Gregory Nazianzus, *Patrologia Graeca*, XXXVI, col. 657; Ambrose, *De mysteriis*, 35.

[11] The Mozarabic Missal is contained in *Patrologia Latina*, LXXXV. For the interpretation that the moment in view is the descent of Jesus to earth for the incarnation, see, for example, the charming little book of the third or fourth century, *Physiologus*, ancestor of the mediaeval bestiaries; in its first chapter, on Christ as the lion, we learn that '[T]hose that are on high not knowing him as he descended and ascended said this, "Who is this king of glory?" And the angels leading him down answered, "He is the lord of virtues, the king of glory"' (translation by Michael J. Curley, *Physiologus* [Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979], p. 4). In the Apocalypse of Peter, the opening of the gates of heaven is referred to the moment of the transfiguration (James, *The Apocryphal New Testament,* p. 519).

Here now is a brand-new interpretation, fresh from your friendly corner bespoke interpreter. Come and buy. It is not a Christian interpretation, but rather a non-religious interpretation that attends to the connotations rather than the denotations of the language, and, since the language of the psalm is so over-determined anyway, it doesn't require you to give up any other favourite interpretation you may already have.

Let's say Psalm 24 is about world-building and world-orienting, about locating oneself at the centre (the Lord's hill), up it (ascending) and in it (entering the gates). And let's say the world that is being built is the world of meaning, and the poem concerns making a world of meanings, meanings secure enough to be going on with. So in Psalm 24 we are celebrating a world that is founded, established—a world where we can find the direction to the Lord's hill, for example, a world where Wittgenstein could say, Now I can go on. It has orientation and it has elevation: it is three-dimensional space—which is to say, a world for living in.

Now in the world of meaning there is undifferentiated space—the earth at large—and there is a particularity of space—a specific hill, the hill we seekers for meaning are interested in ascending. To ascend the mountain of particular meaning, we need a pure heart, of course, because purity of heart is to will one thing—and no swearing deceitfully by the false gods of theory. Now each of us sets out on the quest for meaning alone: 'who (singular) shall ascend the hill of the Lord?... The one that has clean hands... We ascend the mountain in our singularity; but when we attain the blessing, which is the vindication of our quest, we find ourselves in the company of a whole generation of seekers for meaning, a veritable Fishian interpretative community: 'This is the generation of those who seek your face...'

The one who ascends the hill is, himself or herself, personally a king of glory. There is nothing glorious in itself; glory signifies the esteem of others. Glory is the recognition by a public who acclaim success in the quest for meaning. Yes, it *is* a struggle, though a demilitarized one, against the intractability of experience and the bewildering array of interpretations already in the field.

Centring ourselves, knowing which way to turn, is a construction of a reality, a world-ordering enterprise. But if we even ask for a moment how firm a foundation we saints of the Lord have laid for ourselves in this world-ordering enterprise, we recognize that the world we have established is founded not upon pillars but upon seas and rivers. We float on a raft of signifiers under which signifieds slide playfully like porpoises; but we have to live *as if* the foundations were solid all the way down to bedrock. We cannot peer too long into the deconstructive underworld waters.

I have often wondered what one should do after deconstructing a text. A true deconstructionist would say, Start deconstructing the deconstruction. But there is another answer, which is truer, I think, to the experience of readers who have performed, or witnessed, a deconstruction. It is very difficult to forget a deconstruction; it is hard to get it out of your head. But the mind demands more order than deconstruction will leave us with, and will go on wilfully constructing, inventing new connotations, new contexts, new interrelationships which will shore up the text, even if only temporarily.

That is what I feel the course of this essay has done. I wanted to expose the fragility, the volatility of the text, its weakness and its incoherence. It was not in order to recommend its abandonment or replacement by some other stronger and less questionable text, but to point up the fragility of texts in general, the inconclusiveness of interpretations, and the impulse nevertheless to stitch them together again no matter how. Weaving and interweaving of interpretations that mean something to someone, that meet with a cry of recognition or at least a grudging assent from some interpretative community—that resolidifies texts. It is the best we can hope to do. It is something like building a universe, intelligently knit together but resting ultimately on unpredictable and ever shifting underground waters. Which was itself an interpretation of Psalm 24.