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Karmen MacKendrick, *Divine Enticement: Theological Seductions*

Divine Enticement: Theological Seductions by MacKendrick, Karmen

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they refer. “My hope,” he writes, “is that the small-scale experiment of my own readings of the woman’s words in the *Song* and the *Holy Word* also makes it impossible for us to stay put with words that hover safely above the realities of God and traditions” (43). In many places, as here, Clooney speaks of just one woman and one divine beloved in these two texts, Hindu and Christian; elsewhere, he distinguishes Christian commitment sharply from “other religions and their other loves” (124). More pressing than working out the precise nature of this relationship, it seems, is asserting the reality and specificity of the beloved(s), a reality and specificity not weakened but strengthened by the experience of absence.

It is on this point, perhaps, that we can identify the most significant departure from his prior works. In *Seeing through Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), the genesis of *His Hiding Place*, Clooney presses for a deferral of definitive judgments and comprehensive theologies of religion resulting from his encounter with the particularity of the *Holy Word*. Here, in a kind of reversal, it is the very experience of deferral, absence, and uncertainty that invites a turn back to the particular, to “specific faith commitments” (x) and a “way beyond the dichotomy of too much and too little religious belonging” (xi). In the second *entr’acte*, Clooney does address the widened, interreligious imagination and the new possibilities created by reading these intersecting dramas together. Yet, at this point in his career, he seems less concerned that readers will insist on one concrete, specific love to the exclusion of others than that they may not risk such loving abandon at all. And, “Loving God,” Clooney twice reminds us, “is always a risk” (139, 141).

Whether readers will be persuaded by this summons will no doubt depend largely on temperament. Some may find the dramatic form of the work too clever. In the judgment of this reader, however, this represents Clooney’s most convincing work since *Hindu God, Christian God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). It will richly reward careful study by students and scholars of comparative theology, theological aesthetics, and spirituality.

REID B. LOCKLIN, *University of Toronto*.

MACKENDRICK, KARMEN. *Divine Enticement: Theological Seductions*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. x+309 pp. \$80.00 (cloth); \$28.00 (paper).

A continental philosopher by training, Karmen MacKendrick is a prolific, exacting, and eminently readable author whose work focuses on the body, the senses, memory, pleasure, and, above all, the materiality and overdeterminacy of language. As adept with Eckhart or Cusa as she is with Bataille or Blanchot, MacKendrick opens her sixth monograph by confessing she’s been “seduced” by theology. “I wanted to resist being drawn into its constant uncertainty and intellectual discomfort,” she explains—coding the seducer as apophatic from the outset—“but was enticed by its history of gorgeous writing . . . and by the willingness of theological thinkers to take up thought at the limits of thinking, to say at the limits of language” (1). In this one introductory sentence, we find the major themes of *Divine Enticement*: seduction, uncertainty, vulnerability, beauty, and theology’s perennial effort to touch, call, and respond to that which both beckons and eludes it.

While *Divine Enticement* courts an impressive array of post- and premodern thinkers (Nancy, Baudrillard, Derrida, Plotinus, Klossowski, Levinas, Blanchot, Nietzsche, Eckhart, Cusa, Dionysius, and Aquinas), its favorite suitor is Augustine, whose matchless rhetoric, attention to beauty, and God-both-within-and-beyond-him sustain the seduction this book records and enacts. Through the writings of these limit-thinkers, MacKendrick traces “a theology more seductive than definitive, more enticed and en-

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ting than certain" (4). That having been said, the book does not set forth a theology so much as it thematizes and performs textual seduction, a phenomenon MacKendrick finds best enacted in theology.

For MacKendrick, the reason theology is so seductive, so seducible, is that it calls and responds to the infinite. Not to some transcendental signified, the unmoved mover, or an extra-cosmic *punctum*, but to an "eternal absent-present" that both suffuses and eludes creation (201). As MacKendrick elaborates in her inimitably personable prose, "In some sense Augustine and the semioticians after him seem to find God everywhere, inside themselves and out in the world. But we do not get any sense that they have found God in a nice, pin-downable sort of way: ah, okay, there it is, now I know. Or: there it is, and not in other places. Rather, we find God as we find what is not there, as neither present nor absent; as a trace" (22). To be sure, this proximate alterity has a name—it has many—but like all the divine names, "God" does not delimit or denote that which it names; rather, it calls, and insofar as it never fully grasps that which it invokes, "God" invites the caller into a seduction without end.

Each of the book's major chapters attends to what one might call a specific theocratic node: faith, sacraments, ethics, prayer, and scripture. These nodes mark concentrations of divine intensity: places, to put it crudely, where God shows up. Yet MacKendrick reminds us that their intensity arises not from the divinity's full presence in these signs, but from its not-there-thereness, from the unsatisfying slipping-away that sustains infinite desire. To cite one well-known example, Augustine's "highly textual seduction" in the *Confessions* culminates in his "taking and reading" the Pauline letters he's been carrying around with him (170). In a sacramental sense, God is in that text: Augustine finds God right there in scripture. And yet, MacKendrick cautions, "that same God eludes the very writing in which Augustine finds him" (175); after all, in the next major scene, Augustine is looking for God once again, asking the earth and the seas and the stars what and where his seducer might be. For MacKendrick, God's refusal of full presence throughout this text and Augustine's unquenched desire become the restless basis, not only of conversion, but also of responsibility: being ethical becomes a matter of being seduced.

Insofar as this position might sound counterintuitive ("wait, we get to enjoy ethics?") MacKendrick brings us back to Augustine's earth and seas and stars, which all tell him they are not God, but that God has made them. She cites Book X of the *Confessions*: "My question was the attention I gave them' . . . And the answer? 'Their beauty'" (7). At this point, MacKendrick entangles Augustine with Plotinus to propose an ethic of attending to beauty. For Plotinus, of course, we must ultimately withdraw from the senses and rise above the material world to contemplate the eternal, undifferentiated beauty of the One. Granted, Augustine too has similar moments ("let these transient things be the ground on which my soul praises you, but let it not become stuck in them" [*Confessions*, 4.10.15]); nevertheless, Augustine like Plotinus only develops an awareness of divine beauty by means of worldly beauty. A this-worldly Plotinian-Augustinian ethic would therefore begin with rigorous attention to the beautiful and nonbeautiful alike: to respond, MacKendrick insists, we must "train [ourselves] to be drawn in—and even amazed by—the world" (105); we must, in other words, "train ourselves in seducibility" (103).

As *Divine Enticement* draws to its open sort of closure, one lasting question for this reader concerns theology's exceptional status with respect to such seducibility. Throughout the book, MacKendrick appeals to theology as something like a linguistic limit-case: while all signs point beyond themselves, divine signs point infinitely; theology performs language at its most and least signifying, which is to say at its most seductive. Yet there is another strand of the book that suggests theology is

nothing special—at least not ultimately. Theology, after all, reveals each thing in the world as a sign of its infinite creator, so that “there is an excess to the sensory world” itself, “always more to draw us on” (20; cf. 135). In this other sense, then, theology dissolves its own exceptionalism, revealing earth, seas, stars, mountains, matchsticks, and groundhogs to be both more and less than “themselves.” Along this line of thinking, the “theological seductions” at play in this book are not primarily concerned with God, but with language itself. By means of and beyond theology, *Divine Enticement* pursues those endless, delighted frustrations of reading, writing, speaking, calling, and responding into which we’re drawn once we learn that “the whole world is signs” (214).

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WOOD, WILLIAM. *Blaise Pascal on Duplicity, Sin, and the Fall: The Secret Instinct. Changing Paradigms in Historical and Systematic Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. viii+243 pp. \$125.00 (cloth).

Scholarly work in English on Blaise Pascal is rare today. Even as Augustine is brought to bear on seemingly every question in dogmatic, political, and moral theology, the greatest Augustinian thinker of the seventeenth century receives little notice. Who will speak up for the pioneering probability theorist as a theologian for the age of big data?

William Wood makes a game effort in *Blaise Pascal on Duplicity, Sin, and the Fall: The Secret Instinct*. Wood’s thesis is that “on Pascal’s account, the Fall is a fall into duplicity because it is an evaluative fall,” the failure of the human’s ability to judge the good for what it is (42). What differentiates Pascal’s account of the Fall from Augustine’s is a matter of emphasis more than substance; Pascal is concerned less with the fallen will that cannot love what it should than he is with the fallen faculty of judgment that convinces the person that bad is actually good. Thus the evaluative fall is a form of self-deception, or of lying to oneself.

Wood is painstaking in examining the details of Pascal’s writing, returning often to a handful of significant fragments from the *Pensées* in his first four, mostly exegetical chapters. Self-deception manifests itself on all human scales: from politics to moral theology to the individual’s self-conception. At each level, the imagination enables self-deception. In politics, we deceive ourselves into thinking “that the social order is founded on justice instead of force” because we mentally conjure non-existent communal bonds (56). And because the “*moi*” declares things good according to its own lights, “The false self is best understood as a parodic imitation of God” (118).

The depth of Wood’s analysis will leave Pascal scholars with a fresh way to think about sin, but it will likely not win Pascal many new admirers. For Pascal, style matters as much as substance, yet Pascalian rhetoric is mostly absent from the book. In bringing Pascal to debates about self-deception within analytic philosophy, Wood concedes that “Pascal does not offer anything like a philosophical analysis of self-deception, of course, nor does he directly defend its conceptual possibility. In fact, he might even argue that any such defense presents yet another sinful example of the pride of the philosophers” (146). That does not stop Wood from offering “a Pascalian critique of contemporary analytic philosophy on self-deception” (147) in terms drawn more from analytic philosophy itself than from the gnomic fragments in the *Pensées*.

Wood argues that analytic philosophers’ account of self-deception is inadequate because it fails to appreciate human self-opacity. In Wood’s words (with quotations