

God, Noah, Lord Byron — and Timothy Findley

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“The vast known and immeasurable unknown”

LORD BYRON, *Heaven and Earth*

“Hell can be survived”

TIMOTHY FINDLEY, “Alice Drops Her Cigarette”

TIMOTHY FINDLEY'S *Not Wanted on the Voyage* has a colour and boldness that differentiate it from the realism that in many ways is still the dominant idiom in Canadian fiction. The novel is a fantasy, yet it is fantasy founded on that most canonic of all texts, the Bible, the text that explicitly forbids change or addition. By contrast with *Famous Last Words*, *Not Wanted on the Voyage* takes a biblical event that is both fictional and sacred (“true”) and supplements it with a “realistic” core of human relations. As George Woodcock notes, Noah's flood is “a tale that to most Jews, Christians, and Moslems has been for centuries credible history” (171). Findley also adds an elaborate web of fantasy that includes singing sheep, faeries, and dragons. But the chief addition is something very un-fantastic: a complex of domestic power relations enacted in an un-exotic landscape that looks like the lush countryside of southern Ontario. *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is as original a novel as Canadian literature stocks.¹

But like most highly original works, it has a tradition. In this case, it is the tradition of reading the Bible in its infernal sense, as Blake put it, of recreating the Bible subversively, in effect deconstructing it by liberating a subtext of social oppression, mental repression. The aim is to reveal, forcefully and clearly, the power

relations in the Bible and in any culture that professes to take the Bible literally. This infernal tradition, as it may be called, is sociopolitical in emphasis (unlike Gnosticism). Hence it is not a matter of believing or disbelieving in the Bible as literal or historical truth, but rather of subjecting established social assumptions of what good and evil are to imaginative scrutiny. Thus Findley begins: "Everyone knows it wasn't like that." To take the flood story seriously—that is, think about what it would really have been like if it had actually happened—is to realize that it could not have been a simple matter of Good defeating Evil. This act of imaginative reconstruction—visualizing what it would have been like if indeed God had flooded the earth to "punish" people—subverts the idea of good and evil that the tale is meant to illustrate.

The tradition of *Not Wanted on the Voyage* originates in Blake and the Romantic writers. In the context of reconstructing the Bible—of reading it in its infernal sense—Blake, and especially his *Marriage of Heaven & Hell*, are familiar. But Blake's very familiarity tends to obscure the work of another Romantic poet, one whose use of the Bible is much closer to Findley in spirit than that of the great painter-prophet, and that is Byron, who is, somewhat unexpectedly, the most Biblical of the Romantic poets after Blake. Byron's adaptation of the Bible is not in Blake's revelatory and prophetic mode: it is playful, oxymoronic, shocking, humorous—qualities typical of Findley. Byron's Romantic exegesis of the Bible is evident in *Don Juan* and *The Vision of Judgment*, but is specific to two explicitly Biblical fantasies. These are *Cain* (whose Biblical action is supplemented with a fantastic space-age trip through the stars and into the past) and *Heaven and Earth*. *Heaven and Earth*—Byron called it his "oratorio"—is a fascinating anticipation of Findley. For *Heaven and Earth* is also a subversive dramatization of Noah's flood.²

In Findley's novel, Yaweh is visualized in Blakean images as a Urizen figure, an old man so debilitated he cannot clap for fear of breaking his arthritic hands. Yaweh visits Noah on a tour of the earth in which humans do not treat Him with proper respect. Hence His vengeful flood. We observe events through the eye of the cat Mottyl—surely one of the more remarkable character

creations of recent Canadian fiction—and of her mistress Mrs Noyes, Noah's rebellious wife. (The tradition of treating Noah's wife as a rebel goes back to at least the medieval mystery plays.) The plot encompasses the family wars that unfold in the course of Yaweh's visit; construction of the ark; the mass death of animals, plants, people; and the flood itself. Noah, observes W. J. Keith, "has already given Yaweh the idea of destroying the world by flood, thus making the event a human as well as a divine responsibility" (129). Another striking character creation is Lucy, short for Lucifer, who adopts female form, marries Noah's son Ham, and joins Mrs Noyes's party of resistance on the ark.

Noah realizes Yaweh has died, deserting him. He decides to act as if He still existed, and so founds a patriarchal cult of worshipping an absent deity. This is not simply, in René Girard's phrase, "élimination radicale" of God (114), but the disappearance of God and His replacement by a fiction—what the narrator of *The Telling of Lies* calls "a conspiracy of parasites" (232). This fiction may not be true, but it works. It validates existing power-holders (male power-holders like Noah, of course; as Mauberley puts it, "Women did not account for much in his scheme of things" [*Words* 134]). The novel ends with Mrs Noyes, Mottyl, and a few others bearing with them the positive energies of humanity—what W. H. New calls "a hint of hope for a humane future and a despairing reminder of the extent of human viciousness and suffering" (290). Or perhaps, as Don Murray argues, the "harmony of woman and nature that is established . . . at the end of *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, is Timothy Findley's blessing on the species" (222).

Byron's *Heaven and Earth* is dramatic in form, and works with the same motifs. While far shorter than *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, *Heaven and Earth* unfolds an action as complex, with a large cast of characters. Byron's dramatic instincts were formal and classical, and his scenario observes the venerable dramatic unities of time, place, and action. *Heaven and Earth* begins the night before the flood, and ends next morning as the deluge overwhelms the world. As it opens, the sisters Anah and Aholibamah, who are descended from Cain—and so are slated for drowning—meet their angel-lovers, Samiasa and Azazel, whom they have chosen

over Noah's sons Japhet and Irad. Samiasa and Azaziel have seceded from God's army; they are not evil demons ("fallen angels"), however, but alienated spirits. For they reject the hierarchical system that God likes, just as Anah and Aholibamah reject Noah and his familial system.

Noah's son Japhet is alienated too. But, as someone guaranteed a seat on the ark (like the decreed eight, no more no less, of Doctor Noyes's party in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*), he has a much bigger stake in the orthodox system. Japhet is shocked by the coming flood and miserable at losing Anah, and he vents his unhappiness in wilderness soliloquies. In the midst of a particularly purple patch, he is interrupted by the incongruous sound of rejoicing coming from a cave. A party of evil spirits is celebrating:

Rejoice!
 The abhorred race
 Which could not keep in Eden their high place,
 But listen'd to the voice
 Of knowledge without power,
 Are nigh the hour
 Of death! (3.75-81)

The bad spirits sing happily:

Rejoice!
 No more the human voice
 Shall vex our joys in middle air
 With prayer;
 No more
 Shall they adore . . .
 The prayer-exacting Lord,
 To whom the omission of a sacrifice
 Is vice. (3.161-69)

It is not clear which is more shocking to Japhet, their impiety—or their laughter.

He is even more shocked to discover Anah in the arms, as it were, of an angel. Anah's sister Aholibamah, irritated by his verbal clucking, launches into a fiery attack on him, his father, and their phallogocentric religion. Then Noah appears, angrily looking for Japhet, who should be on board by now; Noah is especially angry because Japhet's absence reflects badly on

Noah. When Noah sees Anah and Aholibamah—human women—with the angels, he is shocked, exactly in the manner of a white supremacist contemplating inter-racial sex.

Noah is followed by the Archangel Raphael, seeking the angels missing from his command. It is now Raphael's turn to be shocked, and in a new way. To him, for a spirit to love an earthly being is unintelligible and grotesque, like falling in love with an armadillo or a hamster. "Stung with strange passions, and debased / By mortal feelings for a mortal maid" (2.543-44), he says with disgust. He tries to restore their pride: "Together," he urges,

Let us still walk the stars. True, Earth must die!
Her race, returned into her womb, must wither,
And much which she inherits: but oh! why
Cannot this Earth be made, or be destroyed,
Without involving ever some vast void
In the immortal ranks? (2.558-64)

Now it is the reader's turn to be shocked: Raphael's casual manner would be comic if it were not chilling. "Earth must die" (and "her race"), he says, but that need not concern immortal spirits unduly. It is curious to find such inhuman indifference treated favourably, yet the attitude of the critic Martyn Corbett towards Raphael is not uncommon; Corbett calls him "humane" and "decent" even though regrettably "forced . . . to carry out cruel injunctions" (184). Corbett illustrates the conditioned reflex of respecting authority figures simply because they are authority figures. Just because a character wears the label of Milton's angelic doctor does not mean he is spiritual in any sense that really counts. This VIP clearly does not care, in the slightest, about "inferior" beings. Byron himself, like Findley, will have nothing to do with this veneration of authority; the absurdity—really the insanity—of authority is a major preoccupation of both *Heaven and Earth* and *Not Wanted on the Voyage*.

Findley had not read *Heaven and Earth* when he wrote *Not Wanted on the Voyage*; his immediate literary inspiration was Phyllis Webb's poem quoted in his epigraph.⁷ Yet Findley and Byron perceive the flood narrative in the same way, deconstructing it—

and reconstructing with similar materials, so as to render from it a radical, alternative spiritual vision.

The Genesis account is brief. Byron and Findley enlarge and develop it, and in very similar ways. The handling of the conclusion is especially conspicuous, because the concluding phase in plot construction is normally decisive for the whole plot. The Biblical account closes with a contract between God and humans in a patriarchal ritual structure: closure *par excellence*. Byron and Findley both reject this end. Byron's final scene shows Japhet, on a rock surrounded by rising water, torn between horror at the flood and duty to Noah and God. What Byron does *not* show is Japhet being rescued—thus the final words (a stage direction): "the ark floats towards him in the distance." We never learn what happens to him. *Heaven and Earth* ends with a non-ending. The incompleteness implies that psychologically Japhet never does get picked up but is enclosed permanently by the morally unintelligible flood and the horror of its victims. Findley closes *Not Wanted on the Voyage* with a similar non-ending; indeed, it is the same image of the ark floating on a flooded world—no end in sight—but seen from inside, not from outside, as in Byron.

What this final image suggests, metaphorically, is that the flood never recedes: we are still plunged in chaos (in Blake's metaphor, *underwater*) plunged in a monstrous world of struggle to survive. By so ending, both texts imply that the issues they present remain unfinished. After the flood, closure is impossible. The flood becomes a metaphor for, as Lyotard says, "la condition postmoderne," in which the "paradigme de la connaissance et de la prévision est en train de disparaître" (97).

In both texts, there is a high degree of stylization, even symmetry, in the way the characters are constellated. Especially noticeable in both is the effect of *doubling*, as if the reader were entering a world of disorientation where seeing double is normal. Thus, in Byron, there are two delinquent angels, two rebellious women, two obedient sons of Noah (and one disobedient), two patriarchs angry with subordinates (Noah and Raphael, with an absent, reinforcing God in the background), two choruses (one of "evil" spirits, the other of "evil" humans), and, among the

doomed mortals, two individual speakers (an old man and a young mother).

The same stylization recurs in Findley: there are two elderly male patriarchs (Noah and Yaweh), two matriarchal females (Mrs Noyes and Mottyl), two archangels (Lucifer and Michael), two sons loyal to Noah (and, again, one not), two lemurs (Bip and Ringer), and two cats of Yaweh (Abraham and Sarah). The symmetry of *Not Wanted on the Voyage* even goes beyond simple doubling to display two conflicting *arrays* of characters, divided roughly by sex; on one side: Yaweh, Michael, Noah, Japeth, Shem, Hannah (one female); on the other: Mrs Noyes, Lucy, Mottyl, Emma, Lotte, Ham (one male). The latter group is not so much a "side" as an alliance, a collocation of the different, of those who do not fit and so are "not wanted on the voyage." Indeed, they function by means of the Lyotardian "differend," where mutual ground is eliminated by the need of the group with power to maintain absolute control over the other. The "dialogues" of Doctor Noyes and Mrs Noyes thus resemble closely the "dialogue," if one can call it that, of Aholibamah and Raphael in Byron; mutual comprehension is impossible because the conflict is irreconcilable.

Byron and Findley both use intermediate beings conspicuously, notably angels—in Byron, the Archangel Raphael (Michael in the draft version), the rebel angels Samiasa and Azazel, and a variety of evil spirits, fallen angels. Findley has his archangel too, but his is the military one, Michael (along with attendant angels); there is also Michael's opposite, Lucifer, who has a prominent role in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*—he arrives at the same time as Yaweh's imminent visit is announced. In Byron, the angels fall in love with the human women; in Findley, Lucifer takes female form and marries Noah's son Ham. The theme of forbidden love—which surfaces tantalizingly in the Genesis account—is crucial in both. Findley's Archangel Michael is shocked at the idea of his brother Lucifer sleeping with a mortal human; Byron's Archangel Raphael is disgusted at the idea of angels having sex with human women.

In fact, patriarchal control of sexuality is a preoccupation in both. Doctor Noyes is obsessed with genetics, race, and ulti-

mately with the sexuality of his daughter-in-law Emma, whom he rapes with a unicorn's horn. This event has immense meaning; "Rape was not and never has been a sexual crime, but rather a crime of violence which is political in nature pitting man against women" (Pistoro 266). On one level, the rape represents the destruction of innocence (the unicorn, emblem of spiritual innocence and integrity, must be murdered before the rape can be performed). But it is also the mutation of male sexual identity into "Holy Virility"—the patriarchal "phallus," which is constituted as power over others and repression of emotion, emotion being an opening to control by others. "Power appears as domination not only of others but of parts of oneself" (Hartsock 203).¹ Noah recalls the figure of the "Sacred Executioner"; in fact, "Noah actually in the original stories was a practitioner of human sacrifice" (Maccoby 81, 45-46).

Doctor Noyes's anxieties about racial purity have a counterpart in Byron's Noah, who is equally anxious to segregate his son Japhet from the racially inferior daughters of Cain, whom God is about to liquidate. But it is not in fact *forbidden* love that is the problem here: it is really love itself. For love is by definition something that cannot be commanded. One also notices here the presence of a gay subtext: not only in Findley's "faeries" (the name of a radical eco-spiritual gay society) and the transvestite figure of Lucifer, who says he likes to dress up in women's clothes and who, in the manner of Michel Tremblay's Hosanna, becomes "Lucy." The presence of a related subtext in Byron (who was bisexual) is implied in the complex metaphor of love between angels and humans, above all in Anah's ringing declaration: "Great is their love who love in sin and fear" (1.67).

This love is a synecdoche for love itself because love as such is a forbidden or repressed force. The authority of love is non-coercive, as opposed to the established hierarchy, whose authority is based on compulsion. Significantly, angels in both texts voluntarily give up special privilege for love—Lucy in *Not Wanted on the Voyage* and Samiasa and Azaziel in *Heaven and Earth*.² In both cases, love expands into a complex *political* commitment. Lucy's speculation about another world (338) parallels the angels/lovers' quest for another world in Byron. Françoise Mo-

reux puts the point neatly when she observes of *Heaven and Earth*: “La soif d'éternel et d'absolu se manifeste dans ces amours hybrides” (357).

Byron and Findley share a predilection for humour—odd, it would seem, given the subject matter of annihilation. But that itself explains, in part, the humour. The humour in both texts, black humour mostly, is a means of psychic survival; it is not a dispensable decoration. Inevitably, therefore, it takes a satiric cast; often it is simply a matter of letting the ridiculous characters be themselves, talking without inhibition about what comes naturally. Here is Yaweh on after-dinner duty, defining love:

“*Love*,” said Yaweh—shifting His pastille lozenge from one side of His mouth to the other—almost losing it in the process—“is the greatest gift that one can offer. . . . *Love*,” Yaweh’s eyes were now ablaze with passionate emotion—“*love* is the one true bond . . . ”

“Hear, hear . . . ”

“Between God and His Angels . . . ”

“Hear, hear . . . ”

“God and man . . . ”

“Hear, hear . . . ”

“King and subject . . . ”

“Hear, hear . . . ”

“Lord and vassal . . . ”

“Hear, hear . . . ”

“Master and Slave . . . ”

“Hear, hear . . . ”

There was now a slight pause, as if Yaweh might be counting His fingers to make certain He had enumerated all the forms of love. (87)

The absurdity of arbitrary power (by which the “Master and Slave” relation is made to illustrate “love”) is central to both Findley and Byron. While every appearance of Yaweh is ludicrous, as here, when Yaweh indulges in angry denunciations, he becomes as horrific as he is ridiculous.

Doctor Noyes virtually replicates Byron’s Noah. Thus, the latter in a moment of exasperation urges the backsliding Japhet to “Be a man!” (3.694)—words Doctor Noyes could have used to rebuke his own Japhet (and for the same reasons: the sons Japhet and Japhet are both frustrated lovers). When Byron’s Japhet complains about the injustice of God’s holy flood, Noah explodes:

Peace, child of passion, peace!
 If not within thy heart, yet with thy tongue
 Do God no wrong!
 Live as he wills it—die, when he ordains,
 A righteous death, unlike the seed of Cain's.
 Cease, or be sorrowful in silence; cease
 To weary Heaven's ear with thy selfish plaint.
 Wouldst thou have God commit a sin for thee?
 Such would it be
 To alter his intent
 For a mere mortal sorrow. (2.684-94)

For Noah, sin means disobeying authority; for God, sin means changing His mind (especially for "a mere mortal sorrow"). When Japhet continues to protest, Noah frantically shuts him up: "Silence, vain boy! each word of thine's a crime, / Angel! forgive this stripling's fond despair" ("fond" being a pun on "foolish" and "loving"). The "Angel" here is Archangel Raphael, who uses the wrangling of Japhet and Noah as one more reason for angels to avoid mortals and stick together: "Seraphs! these mortals speak in passion: Ye! / Who are, or should be, passionless and pure, / May now return with me" (2.714-16). For superior beings, emotion is a sign of inferiority; the nasty Lucifer of Byron's *Cain* holds this view. "Men are men and only men," says Findley's Yaweh with bland egotism, and "even the wisest of men must fail" (100).

Of course, Raphael has no interest in the fate of the humans. When desperate people arrive seeking help, he suddenly discovers he has another appointment and must be going. His exit line is: "Farewell, thou earth! ye wretched sons of clay, / I cannot, must not, aid you. 'Tis decreed!" (2.803-04): orders are orders. To question the authority of authority is literally damnation, and is precisely what has brought down on the doomed mortals the horror of the flood. In Byron, the humour lies in the incongruities: rebel women (Anah and Aholibamah) versus Archangel Raphael; freethinking angels versus bigoted Noah; Japhet versus the evil spirits at the cave. In this context, one may recall the scene already cited: the devils' joyous celebration into which the serious Japhet oxymoronically stumbles.

Byron strikes an epic note for an epic story yet he works with a style so versatile it comprehends the tortured introspection of

Japhet, the bland condescension and carelessness of Raphael, the outrage of Aholibamah, and the control-compulsion of Noah. Findley carefully avoids the high style: the language is intimate, personal—the rhetorical point is that the center of the story is the repressed characters at the bottom of the hierarchy, notably Mrs Noyes, who is preoccupied with the contingencies of motherhood and housekeeping in a large household.⁶ In Byron, the characters do not so much speak as sing; the *dramatis personae* are not just people as we know them: Byron assumes the Biblical tradition that the “antediluvians” were different, much in the way that Eve and Adam in paradise had powers that were lost in the fall. Such characters cannot simply talk, for they are engaged in an archetypal drama.

Byron’s use of language is different, but he shares with Findley the sense of an epochal split in human development. Before the flood, humans, animals, angels, Yaweh, and fabulous creatures (such as faeries, dragons, and unicorns) mingle; after the flood, a complex separation occurs: Yaweh disappears (He is also absent in Byron); angels vanish—except Lucy, a special case (in Byron the angels are seen departing). Above all, the animals in Findley withdraw from the humans. The sheep stop singing; other animals stop talking. In some ways the most important split has to do with the animals—a subject that is extremely important in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, as indicated by Findley’s making one of the central characters a cat. His sensitivity to animals is also a metaphor for respect for all ways of life and for all ways of perceiving life; it is not adherence to an exclusionist ethic by which one group monopolizes truth.

While there are no animal characters in *Heaven and Earth*, there is continuous reference to animals, to the sickening casualness of their mass destruction. In Byron, animals have a value rare in premodern literature. They are not simply objects to trash casually. God and His angels clearly do not put much value on human life, and treat humans as humans do animals. The callous injustice of “higher” beings towards “lower” ones means that if it is wrong to treat humans as valueless, it is also wrong to treat animals as valueless; neither is spiritually null. Byron had more regard for animals and animal consciousness than other Roman-

tic poets. One thinks of the menagerie he kept in Italy. (Shelley has an amusing account of meeting an Egyptian crane on the stairs of Byron's villa.) Byron often refers to animals and even wrote an elegy on a dog. In "Darkness," an apocalyptic vision of destruction that is very close to *Heaven and Earth*, the only fully human or humane creatures are animals.

Clearly, both authors distinguish between two models of authority: authority conceived as a hierarchy of control (hierarchy as coercion) and authority conceived as genuine leadership (not dependent on control-power). In Byron, God's force is what makes God God, not love or creative capacity; His force in turn validates Noah, who, being chosen by God, can do no wrong, as long as he obeys God to the letter. In Findley, Yaweh rules by being all-powerful, Noah by acting as God's servant (not his "friend," as Noah naively wishes). The motif of brute force as the basis of power—"human viciousness and suffering" (New 290)—is present in Findley first, in bloody sacrifices that Yaweh likes, one of which opens the novel (animal sacrifice revolted Byron; it is a key motif in *Cain*, his other "mystery" and the companion to *Heaven and Earth*); second, in Japeth's ordeal with the cannibals; third, in Yaweh's revenge against human insubordination. Byron concentrates the use of force in one massive stroke: the instant inundation that closes the play. The flood is sudden and total, not gradual, as in Findley. (The difference stems from the generic difference: neoclassical drama as opposed to fantastic novel.)

Thus Byron's play comes to a focus on those who are, as Findley says, not wanted on the voyage, and who are seen desperately seeking rescue at the end, as in Michelangelo's famous Sistine Chapel fresco (which Byron had seen). One woman begs Japhet to take her newborn baby on board:

Oh let this child embark!
I brought him forth in woe,
 But thought it joy
To see him to my bosom clinging so.
 Why was he born?
 What hath he done—
 My unwean'd son—
To move Jehovah's wrath or scorn?

What is there in this milk of mine, that death
 Should stir all heaven and earth up to destroy
 My boy.
 And roll the waters o'er his placid breath?
 Save him, thou seed of Seth!
 Or cursed be—with him who made
 Thee and thy race, for which we are betray'd! (2.832-46)

Japhet rebukes her for blaspheming and does not take the baby. (The motif of the woman trying to save an innocent child has, again, a counterpart in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*: Mrs Noyes does everything she can to get Lotte on board and fails.) The combination of emotions that Byron's *Woman* expresses—love, shock, anger—are crystallized by the “chorus of mortals”: “If he hath made earth, let it be his shame, / To make a world for torture” (2.862-63).

A different note is struck in the speech of “A Mortal,” a speech that reminds one of Mrs Noyes's love of traditional hymns like “Rock of Ages”:

Blessed are the dead
 Who die in the Lord!
 And though the waters be o'er earth outspread,
 Yet at *his* word,
 Be the decree adored!
 He gave me life—he taketh but
 The breath which is his own:
 And though these eyes should be for ever shut,
 Nor longer this weak voice before his throne
 Be heard in supplicating tone,
 Still blessed be the Lord,
 For what is past,
 For that which is:
 For all are his,
 From first to last—
 Time, space, eternity, life, death—
 The vast known and immeasurable unknown.
 He made, and can unmake;
 And shall *I*, for a little gasp of breath,
 Blaspheme and groan?
 No; let me die, as I have lived, in faith,
 Nor quiver, though the universe may quake! (2.883-904)

Byron insisted that the Old Testament had no doctrine of immortal life: the abandoned humans face extinction. As Mrs Noyes

says, "who the hell do you pray to, I wonder, when you want to live and there isn't any God?" (182).

What is striking in the anonymous "Mortal's" speech is the faith he expresses; this is faith in a creative power that spans both the "vast known and immeasurable unknown," that contains both life and death, indeed all things. Clearly this is a faith that neither the patriarch Noah nor the Archangel Raphael could possibly achieve. Raphael has a cosy position; he has eternal job security, so to speak. (No wonder he finds the Angels' decision to leave heaven for mortal women so unthinkable.) This Mortal, however, has literally nothing; yet his faith is of a quality and depth that the established hierarchy, based on force, punishment, and reward, is incapable of. Hence the Mortal is using orthodox religious language to express a very unorthodox faith, a faith not in the "Lord" that Noah/Raphael serve, but a different conception of deity, another kind of power altogether.

In this, Byron and Findley again cohere; thus Mrs Noyes seeks Mottyl:

"We must sing for Mottyl," she said. "Especially for Mottyl—because she is lost and we don't know where she can possibly be. And if we sing loud enough, maybe she'll hear us . . ."

Just at this moment, the ark gave a dreadful lurch as the storm began to worsen. The lantern swung so violently that Mrs Noyes was afraid it would fall and start a fire. Dropping her pitchfork, she took the lantern down from its hook—and held it tight so it could not fall.

Very slowly, very tentatively, as if the old hymn was creating itself in the moment—Mrs Noyes began to sing:

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm doth bind the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep:
Oh hear us when we cry to Thee
For those in peril on the sea . . .

The Yaweh who unleashed the flood is not the same deity as the "Sacred Spirit" invoked here; hence the singing works:

The sheep were the first to join her—ewes and then rams and finally the lambs. Even the goats began to sing—and the oxen—who had never been singers in the past—began to hum—but only to hum because they did not know the words.

Oh Sacred Spirit, who didst brood
 Upon the chaos dark and rude,
 Who bad'st its angry tumult cease,
 And gavest light, and life and peace:
 Oh hear us when we cry to Thee
 For those in peril on the sea!

By the time that everyone was singing, the message, passed from the Unicorn to the Porcupine and from the Porcupine to the Weasel and from the Weasel to the Vixen, had begun to make its way from the lower levels to the upper, and as though in return for this message—that *Mottyl had been found and was safe*—the song and the singing of it made its way in the opposite direction, until all the animals were whispering and roaring:

. . . our brethren shield in danger's hour;
 From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
 Protect them wheresoe'er they go;
 And ever let these rise to Thee:
 Glad hymns of praise from land and sea! (231-32)

We come then to the final area of contact between Findley and Byron, and that is, somewhat surprisingly, spirituality. Neither Findley nor Byron are nihilists, nor do they merely attack orthodox belief. In fact, both display two kinds of religion: religion as a phallogocentric hierarchy that sees itself as outside the life cycle, and in control of it; and an oppositional spirituality that is dramatically different. The subject of spirituality is really the determining one in both texts, for this is where the assumptions that generate the two writers' treatments of the Noah story lie. That is because the oppositional spirituality they develop crystallizes the oppositional thrust of every other aspect of their work. A decentred spirituality demands a decentred politics, a decentred art, a decentred cosmology: a de- and a re-construction of social relations generally.

One of the striking features of *Heaven and Earth* is that there is no hero; really there is not even a protagonist. The obvious candidate for this role is Japhet, but Japhet is trapped in irony; his speeches epitomize the guilty liberal. He wants to help those that God has decreed will die; yet he accepts the code of behaviour sanctioned by patriarchal religion (for example, it is evil for angels to love human women); he is attacked by the female rebel-prophet Aholibamah, and he is attacked by father Noah; he does not accept or understand the flood; he cannot *not* go on the ark,

yet he cannot go on it; he delivers elaborate soliloquies, but he can *not* act. He is stuck. He represents a dead end. At the centre of the drama, Japhet is ironically submerged within it, unable to act, unable to achieve intellectual resolution, unable to feel anything but emotions of paralysis.

What Japhet discloses is the spiritual bankruptcy that attends the status of privileged minority in an exploitative and murderous social structure. In a more sinister way, the aporia of Japhet (and the similar aporia of Doctor Noyes) reflects an inauthentic feeling of alienation, that is, it is a feeling of defeat in the competitive struggle of males against others males for control. Here the flood is a metaphor for the ongoing universal struggle of male war, as in the dismal dictum of Hélène Cixous: "Man is projected on a scene where he has to be a warrior among warriors. He is assigned to the scene of castration. He must defend his phallus; if not, it is death."⁷

Byron's careful deletion of the role of protagonist from the play shifts the focus of interest; it decentres the plot, equalizing the other characters ranged around Japhet, both those who benefit from the hierarchy, and those who are dominated by it. Thus Japhet is upstaged by Aholibamah; he cannot keep the attention focussed on himself. There is nobody like Japhet in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, though Doctor Noyes comes oddly near Japhet's paralysis when he realizes that Yaweh, for whom he has done all, has abandoned or failed him. In the story of Noah, one expects Noah to be protagonist, and as far as the Noah of *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is concerned, he *is* the protagonist. But the novel denies him this role, focussing instead on his wife. It is as if Noah commits his ghastly rape as a way of gaining attention, of reassuring himself that he exists and that he is important, by forcing others to attend to him and his doings.

In the curiously decentred quality of the action, *Heaven and Earth* is a key to *Not Wanted on the Voyage*. By robbing the ultra-patriarchal flood narrative of its hero, Byron reduces the tale to chaos. Findley's novel assumes this chaos—the moral bankruptcy of male power—but goes on to develop a female-centred action from it, as if the spiritual powers of the earth were resisting. In Byron, female authority confronting genocidal oppres-

sion takes the form of one of his most original character creations, Aholibamah. At the same time, Byron shows a collective/anarchic (for it is leaderless) community emerging. Thus the pairs of human/angel lovers seek a better world, that is, a better way of organizing social relations, metaphorically. Likewise, in *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, the disappearance of Yaweh is accompanied by glimpses of an alternative social and spiritual vision, one that visualizes God, as A. N. Whitehead puts it, "as a multiplicity of actual components in process of creation" (350)."

Thus Mrs Noyes, "midwife to the world" (278), concludes that they should pray to one another. For her, there is a spiritual power present in all of them, a power that is not capable of enclosure by abstract reason—what *Heaven and Earth* calls the "vast known and *immeasurable* unknown." This power can be experienced, but it cannot be broken down and absorbed by reason. It is glimpsed early on when the faeries make the figure "∞" a symbol for eternity. Repeated throughout the novel (Findley uses it as a typographic marker to punctuate the text), this hieroglyph continuously, almost subtextually, emphasizes the presence of "eternity." The horrors are real but the power by which life creates itself is real too. Thus Byron's Aholibamah—a female, significantly—insists on something eternal within, something divine that is not contained by the Noah-God who confronts her (and, with her, virtually the whole of the human and the animal and vegetable world). "There is a ray / In me, which, though forbidden yet to shine," signifies a divine power—"Thou art immortal," she says to her lover, "so am I."

I feel my immortality o'ersweep
 All pains, all tears, all time, all fears, and peal,
 Like the eternal thunders of the deep,
 Into my ears this truth—"Thou liv'st for ever!"
 But if it be in joy
 I know not, nor would know;
 That secret rests with the Almighty giver,
 Who folds in clouds the founts of bliss and woe.

(I.102-04, 112-18)

The "Almighty" here is not the Yaweh-God of Noah and patriarchal religion, but the object of an existential, lived faith, and also, paradoxically, the source of that faith. For both Findley and

Byron, life is a mystery in which the divine is embedded; it is not a thing to control externally. By the same token, the divine cannot be an external, controlling master, a figure that validates hierarchy. Hence all beings, however humble or strange, have a value that no one has the right to obliterate. That is because, ultimately, no one, not even the Yaweh/God that Findley and Byron display, *can* obliterate it.

Heaven and Earth uses scripture to deconstruct scripture. It is daring and original, not because it attacks Christianity, but because it attacks the complex of sociocultural assumptions in which the Christianity of Byron's time was lodged, as its critique of patriarchal values implies. The fact that *Not Wanted on the Voyage* replicates this critique by adapting the same myth, in a very similar way, is a fact of real literary-historical importance. It demonstrates the way the matrix of contemporary culture, with its characteristic problems (and some of its characteristic solutions), is first laid out in the Romantic writers. The full significance of this fact has yet to be realized.

NOTES

- ¹ *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is "parahistorical," so "much more than a novel" (Woodcock 159, 170); it is "conspicuously post-modernist" (Keith 127). Timothy Findley himself insists that "this is what fiction is all about: achieving the clarity obscured by facts" ("Alice" 19).
- ² W. J. Keith finds "analogues" in Blake, Keats, and Shelley (128) but oddly omits Byron, who is much closer to Findley. The flood is one of the most ancient motifs in literature and one of special interest to the Romantics, from Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" and Wordsworth's apocalyptic flood in Book V of *The Prelude* to Baudelaire's "bateau ivre." (For an incisive account of relevant water symbolism in Blake, see Nesfield-Cookson 163-65.) It is not so much the image itself that concerns me here as the parallels between Findley and Byron in their use of a culturally privileged myth. The related motif of love between angels and humans was also of special importance to the Romantics.
- ³ Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman* is another important poetic treatment of the theme in Canadian poetry.
- ⁴ For "Holy Virility," see Reynaud. The ritual rape of Emma is a synecdoche for a range of disturbing themes such as the conversion of sexuality into ritual murder (see Caputi, Cameron and Frazer, and Leonard). Mary Daly terms this "gynocide." As a ritual castration of woman, this rape is designed to neutralize the primal fear of female reproductive power (see Kristeva) and assimilate reproductive power to male control. Aside from receiving intensive feminist scrutiny, this topic belongs to the area of Girard's theorem, whereby "human communities, prior and outside the Christian revelation, develop out of an act of violence which unites all over-against one" (Wieser 83). Doctor Noyes's "scientific" interests cohere with the kind of sadistic science that has been the subject of important feminist analysis (see

- for example Bordo, Donovan, Easlea, Harding, Jordanova, Mellor 89-114, Merchant, Zita) and are very close in spirit to the experiments of Dr. Ewen Cameron at the Allan Institute in Montreal upon which Findley's *The Telling of Lies* is based.
- 5 See Louis Crompton. Byron is usually regarded as sexist; in fact, he presents a line of powerful female figures articulating an alternative vision (see my "Female Emancipation" and "Indeterminacy in Byron").
 - 6 *Not Wanted on the Voyage* is obsessed with the symbolism of food, eating, and being eaten—the contingencies of physical life-process. For the power poetics of food in literature see Furst and the special issue of *Mosaic* (1991) on "Diet and Discourse."
 - 7 See Conley 134. Eve K. Sedgwick and Klaus Theweleit explore the horrors of the male competition that undergirds the oppression of women.
 - 8 In "The New Cosmology in Romantic Poetry," I explore the kind of model of reality that Byron and the Romantic writers (and their heirs) are actually working with. For the feminist elements in this alternative vision originally explored by the Romantics, see Holler and Demetrakopoulos (who stop short of an "ecofeminist" position). Byron's religion remains controversial, and has been the subject of extensive discussion, beginning with Kennedy's *Conversations with Lord Byron on Religion* (1825).

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