

**THE HATEFUL EIGHT.** Film. Directed by Quentin Tarantino. The Weinstein Company, 2015.

Hell is where justice ultimately gets meted out. Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight* opens in contemplation of a crucifix in a winter landscape to an overture by Ennio Morricone; a stage coach, chased by a blizzard, passes obliviously by this lone symbol of salvation, headlong for damnation. In *Pulp Fiction*, a pistol-pointing Samuel L. Jackson pretends to quote Ezekial on the wrath of God. Here, Jackson unforgettably portrays Major Marquis Warren, "Black Man" in a "White Hell" (as Tarantino titles his film's final chapter). Jackson's Major is a raconteur, an amateur detective, and a self-appointed avenging angel against racial injustice. Tarantino's prime interest in *The Hateful Eight* is not eschatology but earthly justice, Augustine's "City of Man," or in this case Minnie's Haberdashery. Tim Roth, delightfully impersonating a professional hangman, explains the difference between civilized justice and frontier justice. Frontier justice recklessly seeks revenge. Civilized justice employs professionals: sheriffs, bounty hunters, hangmen. The difference is indifference. Too often on the frontier the zealous avenger kills the wrong man. Yet not only must capital punishment be meted out with care to protect the guiltless, but (*The Hateful Eight* insists on this larger point of political philosophy) some—a small incorrigible inimical some (such as the villainous Daisy Domergue, played by Jennifer Jason Leigh)—do need to die for the sake of social order and security: "You only need to hang mean bastards, but mean bastards you need to hang!" pronounces the principled bounty-hunter John Ruth played by Kurt Russell. *The Hateful Eight* presents its conservative vision with shuddering gore, wicked laughter, and bitter irony. It makes the case for Thomas Hobbes's theory of the origins of political order, where humans in a state of nature find life, nasty, brutish and short, and out of a reasonable fear of violent death, come together for mutual preservation under the protection of a monstrous and powerful governmental entity, what Hobbes names, after a monster from the Book of Job, "Leviathan," or what in the wild west was called "the law." Without honest hardworking hangmen, *The Hateful Eight* argues, we can all expect hell. This film would suit any class on religion and political philosophy or even eschatology. (Trigger warning: Tarantino pulls every trigger!)

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## Religion, Arts, and Culture

**UNQUIET THINGS: SECULARISM IN THE ROMANTIC AGE.** By Colin Jager. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. Pp. viii + 332. Cloth, \$75.00.

This work offers a contribution to the important area of religion and Romantic literature. In this book, Jager builds upon his previous publication, *The Book of God: Secularization and Design in the Romantic Era* (2007), which challenged the secularizing reading of the previous generation of Romanticism scholars, including M. H. Abrams. Drawing upon the idea of the loss of "fullness" explored in Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007), Jager explores how the privatization and depoliticization of religion produced new anxieties in secular culture, and how these anxieties manifested themselves in the works of major figures such as Jane Austen, Horace Walpole, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, and Percy Shelley. The first section of the book identifies this loss with the English Reformation, explored through the historical character of Henry VIII, and Shakespeare's representation of him, and then elaborated through readings of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and Austen's *Emma*. The book's great strength is its middle section, which considers Coleridge, Walter Scott, and James Hogg's *Justified Sinner* (1824), as three examples that manifest the disquietude of religious sensibility in a secular age. The final section offers an interesting examination of how both Byron and Shelley pursued and shaped the secular. As a text written from an English studies perspective, and for a literary studies audience, there are moments when its approach sits uneasily with those who would take a more historically and theologically informed approach. However, Jager's useful book has much to contribute to the important project of re-reading and re-interpreting the Romantic period.

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**GOD IN THE MACHINE: VIDEO GAMES AS SPIRITUAL PURSUIT.** By Liel Leibovitz. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton, 2013. Pp. xii + 144. Cloth \$19.95; paper, \$10.47

Though it inquires into an important phenomenon, *God in the Machine* does not go far enough in its investigation into games, gamers, or game designers. The book is written in lucid prose and tackles some complex philosophical ideas with generally clear explanations. However, the extent of the book's engagement with games, game culture, and scholarship about games leaves the reader wondering why gaming is a "spiritual pursuit" or what dynamics connect games, players, and designers. Leibovitz eschews theoretical work in key areas (religion, ritual, game studies) in favor of autobiography and the occasional dip into phenomenology. This absence (visible in that the author cites a mere five academic sources from 2005 forward, of which only three address video games) is accompanied by a lack of empirical evidence from surveys or interviews. Leibovitz makes sweeping statements about games; many of these generalizations are incorrect—for example, the claim that players are never culpable in the

mistakes made by the game heroes, or that games cannot have unhappy endings. Many games allow choices that affect the games' outcomes, and in the 1980s the unhappy ending was integrated into some games, such as *Ultima IV*, in which a player who fails an ethical test cannot achieve true victory. The linear and mechanized vision of play described here bears little upon the complexity of contemporary games or the many ways in which players create new ways of playing games, especially but not exclusively in massively multiplayer games. Ultimately, the book ignores scholarly work on games and on religion, investigates only a very few games, offers little empirical evidence, and never defines key issues, such as "spiritual pursuit" or the religious ramifications of gaming. As such, this reviewer wonders who the intended audience might be, and what the author hopes the audience will learn from the reading. Neither gamers nor scholars of games will find much here, and scholars of religion will wonder about the ways that theology appears *ex nihilo* and without consistent integration.

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**PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE IN TIMES OF CRISIS: CHALLENGING OUR INFATUATION WITH NUMBERS.** By Michael Mack. New York: Bloomsbury, 2014. Pp viii + 234; index. Paper, \$29.95.

Mack's project in this important book builds upon his previous work, especially that in *How Literature Changes the Way We Think* (Continuum, 2011). Here he reveals the pseudo-theological foundations of the belief in numbers that ground the current cultural value of the social sciences and in particular economics and medicine as purely rational and objective. The carefully organized and developed argument locates in literature a "space wherein we can recover a lost political dimension." Mack's introduction lays out this argument clearly and accessibly. The ensuing chapters are dense with literary criticism of such writers as Augustine, Shakespeare, Sylvia Plath, E. L. Doctorow, Bernard Malamud, Franz Kafka, Phillip Roth, and Spinoza (subject of another previous book), as well as engagement with Adorno, Arendt, Barth, Judith Butler, Deleuze, Lyotard, and C. P. Snow, taking to task postmodernism and neo-liberalism. This is not easy reading. Mack makes it easier to access the unfolding of his argument, however, by italicizing statements expressing it: "*literature uncovers the affective and fictive ways of living, which govern our day-to-day activities*"; "*Literature focuses on the ethical negotiation between ideas and the messiness of their performance in the embodied and thus affect-ridden context that shapes our actual lives.*" In a particularly nice interpretation of *Hamlet* demonstrating these claims, Mack concludes that "Without validating or de-validating the real presence of Hamlet's father as non-substantial

ghost, the play discloses *how our substantive lives are sometimes driven and shaped by ghostly, subjective, ephemeral and dream-like occurrences.*" Throughout his persuasive deconstruction of the West's belief in economics, science, and medicine as value-neutral, Mack further shows how these have appropriated Christian theology's emphasis on eternal life, sin, and redemption as structuring concepts, bearing "witness to theology's persistence in a non-theological age." To move away from the "detachment" of the postmodern, he refers to the promise of the "newly evolving field of affect theory" and argues that literature is not merely representative and consolidating of the past but rather "scoops out the mental space in which we can rethink what it means to be human and live in our world." Mack effects a change of perspective on not only economics and medicine but also on literature and, by the way, on theology. This book is worth reading with care, pencil in hand, and time.

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**SPORT AND THE SPIRITUAL LIFE: THE INTEGRATION OF PLAYING AND PRAYING.** By Anthony Maranise. Preface by Kevin Lixey. Foreword by David Knight. Afterword by David Carney, Jr. Collegeville, MN: Order of St Benedict, 2013. Pp. 125; glossary; bibliography. Paper, N.P.

Sport and spirituality is an emerging field of study, one with rich possibilities given the prevalence of sports in American culture, the "religious" devotion of fans, the traditions of team prayers before games and players thanking God for their victories, and the history of Christian athletic organizations. That both serious athletics and spiritual development require discipline that the discipline for the one resembles that for the other, is the premise on which Maranise builds this program for athletes to cultivate a rich spiritual life. Maranise draws upon Pauline use of sport metaphor and other scriptural sources, as well inspiration from Pope Francis's call to athletes to live their sport as a gift from God. For Maranise, however, sport is more literal than metaphorical, a training ground for the spiritual life rather than mere language to talk about it. This is not a scholarly study of the subject but rather an instructional manual for use in a course on the topic, suitable for Christian educational institutions and organizations, particularly Catholic ones. There is an intensely and rather charmingly personal aspect to the book's project, underscored by the enthusiasm expressed by the writers of the fore and after words, mentors of Maranise who were among the first to discern the value of the project and his pastoral gifts.

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