

# Secondary Publication



**De Rentiis, Dina; Houswitschka, Christoph**

## Introduction

Date of secondary publication: 30.03.2023

Version of Record (Published Version), Bookpart

Persistent identifier: urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-irb-588503

## Primary publication

De Rentiis, Dina; Houswitschka, Christoph: Introduction. In: Healers and Redeemers : the Reception and Transformation of their Medieval and Late Antique Representations in Literature, Film and Music. De Rentiis, Dina; Houswitschka, Christoph (Hg). Trier : Wiss. Verl. Trier, 2010. S. 1 - 5.

## Legal Notice

This work is protected by copyright and/or the indication of a licence. You are free to use this work in any way permitted by the copyright and/or the licence that applies to your usage. For other uses, you must obtain permission from the rights-holder(s).

This document is made available under a Creative Commons license.



The license information is available online:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

## Introduction

**Dina De Rentiis and Christoph Houswitschka**

Redemption can be approached from a variety of different perspectives. As a theological concept it is God who grants redemption. In literature the redeeming agent might be either religious or secular. Both understandings of redemption are reconciled in anthropological interpretations of this either cultural and individual event or process.

The hope for redemption shows the will of human beings to heal despite of serious mayhem which is brought about by the weaknesses and failures of human nature. In religious terms this implies a renewal of the relationship to God after having fallen from grace into sin. "Theological narratives of redemption therefore include the story of the individual's fall into sin, the acceptance of salvation and forgiveness of sins, and the reconciliation of the human with God."<sup>1</sup> In a religious context, there is no redemption without sin. This gives sin a paradoxical status.

The Christian concept of redemption is closely interwoven with that of salvation, because the latter is usually regarded as an aspect of redemption. Therefore, the knowledge of salvation is an event in the process of redemption. The more spiritual these experiences of healing and redeeming are, however, the more they may bring about sacrifices and sufferings or even the end of the world rather than an improvement in the material sense. The improvement of spiritual insight, however, might be used for various immaterial goals which are usually shared with others thus forming a community that transcends individual desires and goals.

Redemption means the annulations of the evil and an improvement to the better. This improvement is often a promised or predestined one. By receiving unknown cognitions, impulses, opportunities for action and powers that enrich the redeemed person, new ways of religion, art, philosophy or other realms of human experience are opened to the questing person. In the religious sense redemption often means an experience of liberation or some kind of promotion which is linked to a religious formative impression, sometimes to the experience of loss and sacrifice as much as of gain and reward. Neither are all experiences of redemption linked to religion nor is every religious experience also redeeming. The boundaries between religious and secular concepts might be difficult to define.

---

1 Boscalion, Daniel, "Possibilities of Redemption through the Novel", in: Andrew Hass, David Jasper and Elisabeth Jay (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, Oxford 2007, p. 761.

When redemption is not a religious concept, it may emerge from social experiences such as dramatic social or political changes, the forming of fellowships or the building of even larger communities. Redemption and healing might also mark crucial changes in the lives of individuals. Individuals experience these changes as confessions, conversions, personal renewals, a mystery or a process of individuation. In literature the redeemer might either have committed a mistake himself or might sacrifice oneself for those who have fallen guilty to their social responsibilities. In contrast to theology, literature takes “the same theme of brokenness and renewal and places it in the context of life on earth, thus including understandings of redemption that may stray from those theologically defined.”<sup>2</sup> Consequently, literature tells stories of redemption:

By seeing suffering as more than a means to the end of salvation and by being able to explore agents of redemption other than a divine being, literature – which keeps the form of the theological construct while altering the content – is able to explore a variety of ways in which human suffering can be redeemed.<sup>3</sup>

Redemption is not original progress, but the restoration of a condition of the world which was lost. The typological structure of redemption and healing, the idea of eschatological improvement might even be understood as comfort in death and apocalyptic annihilation. In this sense, the idea of redemption appears to belong to an attitude that does not believe in secularized versions of revolution unless it is also a restoration. Improvement in this respect is the mending of errors and flaws by the redeemer who ends up accepting the responsibility others have evaded and who might grow beyond human powers. In the absence of the necessity to refer to a religious authority, literature “is able to explore how life on earth may be redeemed and how humans can mediate their own redemption.”<sup>4</sup> In a materialistic and secularized world healing and redemption challenge the dominant world view and define the perspective of an outsider whose way to the centre is neither intended nor protected. Experiences of redemption and healing mark changes and differences that transcend truths which would have been valid in a bygone world. All values and norms might be reversed, transforming sadness in joy, and hatred in love. The power of this radical reversal of everything familiar and certain, gives the concept of redemption a utopian force that nevertheless defeats all evolutionary ideas of undetermined and uncontrollable progress.

The Redeemer is a person who either successfully fights evil or accepts being sacrificed to restore order after human failure perverted it. In literature both varieties can be found regardless of their different theological validities. According to Gregory of Nyssa, God played a deliberate trick in order to secure the release of humanity when he sent Christ to the Devil as a ransom. This in return was justified because the Devil had deceived Adam and Eve himself. It was assumed “that God was under the obli-

---

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

gation to respect the Devil's right to possess humanity and that humanity could be freed and reconciled to God only if the Devil abused his power, which he did by killing the sinless Christ."<sup>5</sup> In opposition to this concept, Anselm of Canterbury abolished the fight against the Devil which has never stopped inspiring human imagination. Anselm of Canterbury changed this by assuming that redemption is "a drama with more of a human dimension in which Christ as man and God was the sacrifice or satisfaction for humanity's debt to God".<sup>6</sup> The Devil was stripped of all of his rights. Anselm eliminated the Devil from the process of Redemption. Southern suggest that this "satisfies every rational instinct, and the direct confrontation of God and Man in the work of Redemption gives mankind a new kind of dignity".<sup>7</sup> The cosmic struggle between God and the Devil had been replaced by a construction that eventually would emphasize man's responsibility and would "enforce more completely the submission of man to God".<sup>8</sup> The way evil is represented changed considerably. Anselm's interpretation of Redemption reveals "fundamental shifts in the way evil, or what is alien to human order and society, the Other, is perceived."<sup>9</sup> Redemption frees humanity from the power of the Devil and makes reconciliation to God possible. This new possibility of widespread Redemption had a strong appeal to people. Southern explains that Anselm himself did not accept the new opportunity of receiving Redemption without paying a price (to the Devil). Anselm could not prevent the new understanding of Redemption to provide people with a sense of easiness: "He did not reject the rights of the Devil in order to make Man's yoke lighter, nor to give Man a wider scope for self-expression."<sup>10</sup>

Anselm prepared major changes of the concept of Redemption which went beyond the struggle between Good and Evil and resulted in the development of a greater variety of narratives dealing with Redemption.

Taking the moves from these general thoughts, this volume offers a panorama of late and post modern artefacts picking up on ancient and/or medieval concepts of redemption. The choice of case studies is broad in regard to the languages (Anglosaxon, Roman, and Slavic) and genres (literature, film, music, and even urban sculpture) as well as in respect to the artistic forms and styles. This large variety is intentional, and the aim of this volume is not a conceptual or historical *reductio ad unum*. On the contrary, we regard the heterogenic nature of medievalism as its principal mark, and taking this mark into account as the best way of answering the question "why the Middle Ages?" Comparing the historical Middle Ages, or contrasting "original" medi-

---

5 Marx, C.W., *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England*, Cambridge 1995, p. 4

6 Marx, *The Devil's Rights*, p. 1.

7 Southern, R.W., *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 209.

8 Ibid.

9 Marx, *The Devil's Rights*, p. 9.

10 Southern, *Anselm*, p. 216.

eval concepts and representations with modern ones, is not our goal, and ontological thought is not our frame or base; nor is, however, a-historicism. Deconstructing, or practicing medievalism, and simply not taking historical past into account is not the same to us, or to our authors.

That is why the first contributions go as far back as one can get in the matter. Pegging the field, Peter Bruns gives an introduction to the early Christian concepts of redemption, and Sabine Föllinger offers a survey of antique healers and redeemers focusing especially on Dionysus, Orpheus, and Prometheus. These contributions do not only pursue the aim of “uncovering the roots” at least up to a certain extent, but also of punch-marking the difference to the modern configurations of redemption that are studied in the following articles.

These articles are arranged by the grand genera to which the artefacts treated are to be subsumed: literature, film, and music, with a final glimpse at urban monumental sculpture. Krystina Kujawinska sets the outer literary marks in West and East examining the “healing and redeeming aspects of Shakespeare’s work” in Polish literature and culture, focusing especially on the concepts of “con-temporaneity” and “meta-contemporaneity”. Anja Müller and Christoph Houswitschka sound the depths of redeeming and healing in fantasy literature, concentrating on Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* and Clive S. Lewis’ narrative. William Paden, Andrew J. Johnston, and last not least Michael Düring and Dirk Vanderbeke offer a wide range of representative filmic healers and redeemers, medievalist allegories of postmodernity, and deconstructions *in actu* of modernity, reaching from Wajda’s *Gates of Paradise* to Lars von Trier’s *Dogville* and *Breaking the Waves*, Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *La passion de Jeanne d’Arc*, and Ingmar Bergman’s *Jungfrukallan*. Dina De Rentiis closes this group with an article on two very different films which, however – or rather: because of their diversity – have much more in common than meets the eye: Robert Bresson’s *Lancelot du Lac* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. While all these articles work out new aspects of medievalism, and develop new theses on the artefacts they examine, the last section of the volume is perhaps still the most innovative one in reference to the previous scholarly tradition. Whereas *Narnia*, *Dogville*, or for example *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* already are known objects of medievalist research, Igor Stravinsky’s *Œdipus rex* and the *Car Osvoboditel* monument in Sofia have not been examined so far within this context. Thus, the articles of Nils Holger Petersen and Sebastian Kempgen prove – as a *mise en abîme* of the volume – that well known, traditional objects of medievalist research can be seen under a new light, and new objects of research can be discovered by patiently grubbing out the layers of redemption that interstratify (post)modern thought without reducing them to a single historical paradigm, or to one measure of thought.

**Works Cited**

Boscalion, Daniel, "Possibilities of Redemption through the Novel", in: Andrew Hass, David Jasper and Elisabeth Jay (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, Oxford 2007, pp. 760-775.

Marx, C.W., *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England*, Cambridge 1995.

Southern, R.W., *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape*, Cambridge, 1990.