

Foreword

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Christopher Hitchens, one of the Four Horsemen of Atheism,¹ once described the *Harry Potter*-series as “a kind of secular dramatization of the battle between good and evil.” Regardless of whether one agrees with Hitchens’ antitheism or whether one has read *Harry Potter*, Hitchens’ remark is indicative of a larger trend, and not just in fantasy writing: we are currently experiencing a worldwide, “unprecedented wave of secularization” (Zuckerman). The non-religious fantasy world of *Harry Potter* distinguishes J.K. Rowling’s fiction from that of her spiritual predecessors, the most prominent being C.S. Lewis’ *Narnia*-series and J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*. Although all three series are heavily influenced by Christian narratives and values—the difference is in degree rather than in kind—there is no equivalent distant magical land or wizard god in the *Harry Potter*-series: no Aslan, no ice queen, no land beyond the cupboard; no evil all-seeing eye, no Middle-Earth, and

¹ The other Horsemen are the likeminded Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett. The name, an ironic nod to the Biblical Horsemen of the Apocalypse, was coined after the four met at Hitchens’ residence to discuss their stances on religion and atheism, recordings of which can be found online (cf. “The Four Horsemen”).

no elves (except house-elves). The magic of the characters is theirs and theirs alone, requiring no devotion of any kind. It is a natural force, to be wielded and manipulated in a world that clearly mirrors our own rather than a safely distant fantasyland.

And yet, others have described Rowling's fantasy series as "the best and most powerful contemporary retelling of the gospel narrative [they]'d encountered" (Garrett qtd. in Weppler). Still others have accused it of occultism and Satanism, calling for the series to be banned from schools and public libraries on these grounds (cf. "Top Ten"), and some go so far as publicly burning the series for sacrilege and sorcery (cf. "Incendio!" and Walker). Clearly, there are mixed feelings about *Harry Potter*, with some calling it secular, others comparing it to gospel, and still others banning and, in some cases, even burning it. As such, the series is a contemporary example of the many different interpretations and responses that literature can evoke from various religious and non-religious perspectives, even (or especially) when it is not explicitly concerned with religion.

This issue of *FRAME* explores the relationship between religion and secularism today, drawing on literary studies, cultural studies, philosophy, ecocriticism, and law. Recent events, most prominently the upsurge in acts of violence both in the name of religion and against specific religious groups, attest to the challenges of living in what Jürgen Habermas has dubbed a "post-secular" society. Habermas defines the postsecular society as one where "religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground," which raises the question of how we might "remain civil despite the growth of a plurality of cultures and religious worldviews" (21). In a time when religious practice and attendance are at an unprecedented low (Zuckerman), it is important to recognise that secularism and the freedom of religion are not mutually exclusive. Secularism entails the separation of religious and state power and the equal treatment of beliefs and worldviews, religious and non-religious alike. As such, it is "not the opposite of religion, but the opposite of theocracy," and aims to ensure not only freedom *of* religion, but also freedom *from* religion (Lee). Thus, the arti-

cles in this issue all formulate answers to Habermas' question: what are the respective roles of religious and non-religious groups in a postsecular society and how can they coexist in this changed political landscape?

This issue opens with Magdalena Mączyńska's "From Religious Nostalgia to Eco-Postsecularism: Scriptures for Climate-Changed Futures in Fictions by Richard Jefferies, Will Self, and Octavia Butler," in which she explores the role of religion in climate-altered futures. Through a comparative analysis of Richard Jefferies' *After London*, Will Self's *Book of Dave*, and Octavia E. Butler's *Parable* series, Mączyńska demonstrates how these climate fictions each "explore the relevance of scriptural texts to climate-altered societies, inviting reflection on the benefits and hazards of reading, re-reading, and un-reading religious tradition under conditions of climate pressure." She ultimately argues that even scripture is subject to change: in order for it to remain relevant in climate-altered futures, it must adapt to survive.

From eco-postsecularism, we move to Christian Postmodernism with Christopher Douglas. In his article "What Is Christian Postmodernism?", he explores the role of Christian fundamentalist apologetics in the epistemic crisis among American conservatives today. Analysing the apocalyptic Christian novels from the *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, Douglas exposes how the novels adopt fundamentalist rhetorical strategies and (mis)interpretations of the Bible to destabilise existing (academic) consensuses. As such, the *Left Behind* series serves as a somewhat ironic attempt to plug some of the many holes in "Christian Postmodernism's epistemic bubble."

Finally, Manav Ratti places postsecularism in a postcolonial context, in his article "'The God of the Imagination': Postcolonial Postsecularism and Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*." Through his reading of *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Ratti shows how Rushdie's magical realism provides a way of thinking through the tensions between religion and secularism, and their distinct ways of knowing and being. By bringing together the concept of enchantment with that of self-determination, Ratti shows how "literary postsecularism can gesture toward the generative lifeworlds of both secularism and religion."

In our masterclass section, Jerrold Cuperus uses an object-centred approach to analyse the construction of a Dutch-Christian identity through the sacralisation of art and heritage in museums in his article “Narrating Dutch Christianity: Secularism, Heritage, and Identity in Museum Catharijneconvent.” Through an analysis of the religious and secular demands on the museum and its objects, he concludes that “the sacralization of art and heritage figure into the construction of a national Dutch identity which privileges a specific cultural form of Christianity.” Finally, for our second masterclass article, my co-author Tom Huisjes and I analyse how Marta Minujín’s *The Parthenon of Books* reflects on present-day blasphemy laws. Through an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together the fields of law and literature, we argue for a secular approach to the artwork and demonstrate how it contributes to the ongoing debates regarding blasphemy legislation.

All articles in *FRAME* 32.1 engage with the relationship and tensions between religion and secularism as expressed in contemporary literature, objects, and artworks, and offer various perspectives on the role of religion in democratic societies today. On behalf of the editorial board, I would like to thank our authors for their contributions and express the hope that our readers will enjoy the current issue.

Works Cited

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