

Typological Realism in Contemporary Evangelical Fiction: Tragedy, Eternity, and *The Shack*

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The modern author who writes a novel based typologically on themes from the Bible ... is literally incapacitated by history and his own consciousness from writing out of the faith that was accessible even to the most sophisticated medieval authors. (Conversely,... any modern work that used typology seriously and naively would remain, almost by definition, sub-literary, like most Sunday-school readers.)

Theodor Ziolkowsky

Every human society requires a “theodicy,” an interpretation of the suffering and injustice endemic to the human condition. It is the absence of secular society to provide such, after the retreat of Enlightenment thought, the facile substitutions of consumerist hedonism, and the machinery of the secular therapeutic, that opens the door for a return to the evangelical theodicies.

Peter Berger

WILLIAM PAUL YOUNG’S HOMILETIC NOVEL *The Shack* is an originally self-published text that, as of September 2010, had over ten million copies in print and had been at number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list for seventy weeks.¹ *The Shack*’s story of self-help and healing through an experiential encounter with Christian doctrine instantiates a mode

1 www.windblownmedia.com, 15 October 2010.

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of representation (typological realism) that is prominent in evangelical homiletic narrative and fiction and that plays a key role in articulating a contemporary countersecular evangelical perspective or "worldview."

Mack, *The Shack*'s protagonist, is a regular guy from the Pacific Northwest who goes on a camping trip with his kids during which his five-year-old-daughter Missy is kidnapped, abused, and eventually murdered by a serial killer at an abandoned shack deep in the Oregon wilderness. Three years later, the profoundly disillusioned Mack receives an enigmatic note in his mailbox signed by "Papa" (his wife's name for God), inviting Mack to "get together" with him at the shack. Confused, and suspecting the killer's involvement, Mack travels to the shack but finds there only bleak reminders of his daughter's brutal murder. Turning to leave while fighting suicidal despair, Mack sees the shack and its environs transform into a paradisaical landscape. Inside the now-idyllic cottage, Mack finds God the Father in the form of a motherly African-American woman calling herself "Papa" or "Elousia"; the Holy Spirit as a beautiful, ethereal East Asian woman named "Sarayu"; and, of course, a wise, friendly Jewish carpenter named Jesus. Over the next three days, Mack eats, drinks, works, plays, laughs, cries, and converses with the Three-who-are-One, while also sharing experiences of a more divine nature: watching his dead daughter playing in the heavenly garden that is her true home, walking on water with Jesus, and seeing the spiritual essences of the world laid out before him in blazes of psychedelic colour in a moment when he is given the ability to see some of what God sees. Mack's experiences at the shack—culminating in Papa's taking him into the surrounding mountains to recover Missy's missing remains—help him overcome the trauma of losing his child as well as helping him forgive and be forgiven by his abusive dead father (who God allows him to meet). While returning home after waking up in the once-again disenchanted shack, Mack is badly injured in a car accident. On his recovery, however, he is able to retrace his hike with Papa and finds Missy's remains exactly where he had found them on his enchanted weekend. Finally at peace, Mack asks his friend Willie to write down his story. It is Willie who arranges the novel, and it is his commentary, in the preface and epilogue, that frames Mack's narrative.

The Shack is an homiletic novel. Its primary job is to inspire in its reader a transformation toward a more Christian way of life.² The forms of representation it employs serve that end. As its author explains in "The

² Gregory Jackson (2004, 2009, 2011) distinguishes homiletic novels from those with religious themes. The former appropriate a sermonic function and are

Story Behind *The Shack*,” the book emerged from a desire to pass on the theological insights gleaned from years of personal struggle in order to give a true understanding of God’s love “to a world that longs, in the deepest places of their [sic] hearts, for such a God.” Young realized that a simple catalogue of his theological meditations did not serve this function very well but that when he transcribed them into the form that they had occurred to him—as conversations between himself and God—he found that “something wonderful happened”: “All the systematic stuff fell away, and instead what [he] now had was alive.” He decided that a “story would be a perfect vehicle for these conversations,” and that narrative homiletic vehicle emerged, slowly, over several rewrites, as the story of Mack and the shack. The ultimate success of the novel is measured by its homiletic impact. “This little story,” Young notes, “was able to sneak past people’s defenses and right into their hearts,” proving that it is an instrument of grace. “As you read” he observes, “don’t be surprised if something happens inside that you weren’t expecting. That is so like Jesus.”³ In other words, although homiletic novels both were, in their nineteenth-century heyday, and are, in the case of *The Shack*, subject to theological assessment and often scathing theological critique, this critique often misses the point because although they may borrow from all of these discourses, such works are *not* written as theological dissertations, nor as works of apologetic, nor even as literary works that invoke open-ended meditation on theological themes.

Although, for example, Marilyn Robinson’s *Gilead* is narrated by an homilist meditating on theology and homiletic (and often quoting from his own and others’ sermons), it is not, because of its *literary* treatment of its theological and Christian pastoral themes, a homiletic novel. While the ideas provoked by homiletic works may be of central interest to the committed, what is arguably more interesting to the cultural or literary critic is the *impact* of these works: how they help organize the ways that these influential cultural communities and political constituencies interpret their world and how such interpretations help to structure both internal dialogue and external engagement. Ultimately, in other words, a work such as *The Shack* and evangelical genre fiction in general can be better

designed to inspire some concrete change or activity, while the latter primarily invite meditation or reflection.

3 In “The Story Behind The Shack” (addendum to the Oasis Media audiobook version).

understood if its function—popular homiletic—and form—popular fiction—are explored on their own terms, rather than others.⁴

In order to explore these terms, we need some familiarity with the traditions and communities *The Shack* engages. As both a homiletic vehicle and a mass cultural consumer product, the novel negotiates many of the tensions that animate American evangelicalism.⁵ The novel aims to help build faith but self-consciously distances its vision of true faith from the doctrines or practices of any ecclesial organization. It condemns attention to self, although it is itself essentially a spiritual self-help book. And, although it draws on rich traditions of Christian epistemology, hermeneutics, and homiletic, these traditions are displaced by the narrative's more obvious orientation to contemporary popular culture and fiction that allow the novel's theological themes to emerge in a way characteristic of evangelical homiletic: as dehistoricized, immediately self-evident, and fully individuated ideas—represented here as God Himself telling Mack the way things are—that obscure any sense that these ideas are the product of a historical process of *human* disputation over the correct interpretation of scripture and the nature of the God that is revealed in them and in the world.

American evangelicalism is characterized ecclesiastically by its tendency (emerging out of its giving priority to individual faith over corporate religious practice) to circulate primarily in non-denominational and para-church organizations and doctrinally by its adherents' emphasis on individual conversion, the authority of scripture, crucicentrism, the centrality of evangelical witness, and the recognition that “the real, historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture” informs each individual's attempt to live a “spiritually transformed life” (Marsden, ix–x). Drawing on both the Puritan and Pietistic traditions and embracing populist movements that have proliferated at the interstices of all of

4 There have been several studies of evangelical fiction, although most treat this fiction within the context of sociological, theological, or, as in the case of Paul Boyer's landmark study of American prophecy belief, historical discussions. Much of the more recent scholarship has addressed the apocalyptic Left Behind series, with Amy Johnson Frykholm's *Rapture Culture* being the work most sensitive to the cultural dimensions of the apocalyptic subgenre's rhetorics and literary contexts. Lynn Neal's *Romancing God* stands out as a sociologically acute and critically sophisticated treatment of the evangelical popular romance novel and its readers.

5 For discussions of the conventions that surround the scholarly use of the highly contested term “American evangelical culture” see Marsden (1984) and Watt (1984, appendix) for historical contextualization and Hunter (1983) for sociological definition.

the main denominations, evangelicalism is a term often used to identify the religiosity associated with what Martin Marty calls “the sectarian sprawl” of American Protestant revivalism. This revivalism, especially prominent in the mid-eighteenth-century First Great Awakening and the early-nineteenth-century Second Great Awakening, has often functioned as the main religious vehicle of the dissenting individualism that also undergirds American republicanism, frequently complementing and as often conflicting with more secular forms of the nation’s institutions, visions, and projects.⁶

The de facto civil religion of the United States by the mid-1800s, the evangelical movement was deeply riven by the slavery question and late in that century fractured in earnest, torn apart by disputes between theologically liberal “modernists” and theologically conservative “traditionalists.” “Modernists” were seen as open to accommodating doctrine to developments in culture, science, and historicist forms of biblical criticism, and, in their concern for social justice, they were suspected of putting public service ahead of saving souls. Evangelical conservatives aligned themselves with the defense of a strongly supernaturalist conception of the relation between the human and the divine, and, in the years after the First World War, with what came to be called the “fundamentals” of traditional doctrine, even if some of the beliefs that animated the movement (such as premillennial dispensationalism) were not particularly traditional at all.

After the fundamentalist controversies of the 1920s, liberal evangelicalism was largely appropriated by mainline Protestant denominations. The contemporary version of American evangelicalism—initially called “neo-evangelicalism”—emerges after the Second World War as the heir to the earlier evangelical traditionalism. It was embraced by extra-denominational Protestant groups that retained the conservatives’ emphasis on

6 Hatch best explores the interaction between American republicanism and evangelical sectarianism, Finke and Stark illustrate the evangelical success at applying “free market” principles to church development, and Casanova provides a succinct overview of how the various historical “disestablishments” of American Protestantism (from its role as state religion after the Revolutionary period, from its role governing public education in the late nineteenth century, and from its role framing the American *Lebenswelt* in the mid-twentieth) solidified its status as a vehicle of cultural alterity. Smith’s sociological research confirms the contemporary centrality of dissenting individualism in evangelical self-conception. Smith’s findings suggest that it is the tensions that emerge from the evangelical negotiation with non-evangelical culture—their need to assert spiritual and moral difference while articulating an understanding of that difference largely in appropriated (“redeemed”) forms of modern “worldly” culture—that provide evangelical movements with much of their continuing vitality.

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supernaturalism, soul-saving, crucicentrism, and the authority of scripture but that disavowed the militancy and isolationism of the earlier fundamentalism in favour of “engaged orthodoxy”: a willingness to engage contemporary cultural issues and discourses with the doctrines, discourses, epistemologies, and hermeneutics of traditional conservative evangelicalism. Primarily revivalist in the fifties and sixties, this movement has become increasingly influential in shaping the main discourses of American institutional Christianity over the past forty years.⁷ Although evangelical churches, especially those stressing charismatic forms of belief, have grown rapidly since the 1960s, even as attendance at mainline churches has largely stagnated, contemporary evangelicalism is primarily a faith of countersecular individualism manifest primarily in small-group worship mediated by large churches that are themselves focal points of evangelical subcultures connected by their shared participation in a diffuse and diverse evangelical mediasphere.⁸

As a modern phenomenon emerging in the Enlightenment and providing countersecular variants of its conceptions and cultural forms, evangelical movements have been vigorous participants in what historian of theology E. Brooks Holifield calls the modern struggle to articulate “the story of the American self.” This self, Holifield notes, has been as flexible and as culturally overdetermined in religious understanding as it has been in secular culture, proceeding in American Protestant thought “from an ideal of self-denial to one of self-love, from self-love to self-culture, from self-culture to self-mastery, from self-mastery to self-realization within a trustworthy culture, and finally to a form of self-realization counterposed against cultural mores and social institutions” (12). In the recent evangelical renaissance, as Holifield observes, the predominant way of representing “the self” has been in terms of the discourses of therapeutic individualism, and in both the secular and religious variants of these discourses “faith” is held out as a primary way for people damaged by the modern world to help and to heal themselves.

The Shack’s use of narrative shaped around the conventions of popular fiction as its primary homiletic vehicle follows a long tradition in evangelical preaching, mostly because these conventions most reliably helped deliver the goods (whether entertainment or edification) and secure a

7 See Marty for a historical overview of twentieth-century evangelicalism; Marsden (2006) for an account of the conservative/modernist schism and fundamentalism, and Carpenter on the emergence of the contemporary evangelical movement.

8 See Wuthnow.

return on investment (paid in cash or saved souls, or both) in an increasingly mass-mediated cultural environment.⁹ For at least a century and a half, popular fiction has been shaped by its market function as a mass-produced and mass-consumed entertainment commodity. Because pop fiction—especially “genre fiction,” its most standardized and market-rationalized forms—is primarily written to provide reproducible aesthetic experiences, it has three main tendencies. First, its narratives provide imaginative pleasure, often by invoking, resolving, and displacing the ambiguities, anxieties, and complexities of the readers’ social world and everyday life. Its stories tend to follow the generic conventions of romance and fulfill something of this genre’s function of mediating culturally conditioned forms of expectation and desire, frustration and anxiety. Second, in order to ensure a market-friendly reproducibility of product it tends to employ its conventions formulaically, which leads to its third tendency: popular fiction tends to mask the aesthetically distancing recognition of formulaic conventionality through the use of descriptively “realist” techniques that encourage identification with the characters and that facilitate an immersive experience of the narrative.¹⁰

Realism, in this sense, describes the rhetorical affirmation of an implicit simile between a verbal representation and some aspect of what its audience recognizes as reality. As implied similes, realist narrative worlds effectively ask to be seen as *extensions* of the reader’s that can be accepted, provisionally, as fictive synecdoches of the “real” world: as possible parts that illuminate aspects of the whole. But secular pop fictional realism compartmentalizes its realist claims; it does not extend its claims to the plausibility of the story as verisimilar to some existing state of human consciousness or experience of human society. Rather, it is understood as a *functional* verisimilitude that helps readers identify and “lose themselves” in the story enough to allow the elements of romance narrative to deliver predictable, genre-modulated aesthetic experiences such as the

9 See Finke and Starke for the religious “free market” that shaped nineteenth-century evangelicalism; Moore and Denning on the co-development of secular and evangelical popular fictional conventions in the nineteenth century; Jackson (2009) on the development of “homiletic realism” in evangelical discourse.

10 Cawelti provides the classic statement of the formula/novelty balance in twentieth-century popular fiction. Frye (1976) historicizes the use of romance convention in popular narrative. Gelder’s analysis provides greater attention to the way that popular fiction is positioned as a “field of production” against “literature,” allowing it to be “processed” (produced, marketed, distributed, sold, and consumed) within a certain oppositional logic, even if particular texts themselves may formally blur the lines of that field.

vicarious experience of love in romantic novels, of fear in horror novels, and of suspense and excitement in thrillers, for example.¹¹ The recognition of the secular pop fictional narrative's obvious *unreality*, in other words, either removes it entirely from the question of its relationship to actuality or places it, at best, in a metaphorical relation to the actual world, that, if sustained, can enable an allegorical kind of reading (as in much sci-fi writing).

But where secular popular fiction has tended to use realist techniques to intensify the aesthetic pleasure of an emotionally gripping story by making it more accessible, evangelical homiletic has used this power of popular narrative for homiletic ends: to edify and mobilize readers in their faith. This has not merely been a matter of exploiting the instrumental power of certain kinds of pop fictional storytelling to seize attention and enable quick, powerful identification. It has also been a matter of decompartmentalizing and extending the narrative's realist claims. The superficial realism remains as a plausible representation of our own mundane world, but what in secular pop fiction is recognized as the marvelous or extraordinary stuff of fantasy with no correlate in reality is understood in evangelical homiletic as indicative of either the *miraculous* (the agency of supernatural forces that really do intervene in the human world, at variance with natural laws) or as special providence: the sense that there is, as Young puts it, "a purpose in all things that we only occasionally glimpse" and that God arranges each event in every life in accordance with a pre-ordained plan.

Gregory Jackson argues that this kind "homiletic realism"—the coupling of a discursively realist narrative presentation to a spiritual reality that is presumed to be perceptible within human social experience in order to motivate spiritual transformation in the reader—is characteristic of American Protestant homiletic narrative. "Readers of homiletic narrative" Jackson observes,

understood religious stories of exemplary figures—biblical personages, the subjects of spiritual autobiographies, the characters in religious novels, or characterological roles in video games—to be not merely tales particular to a time and

¹¹ Umberto Eco, for example, notes the tendency in Fleming's James Bond novels for the narrative to dwell on the particularities of Bond's surroundings. Such "useless details" of the kind that Barthes associates with the creation of a "reality effect" help, Eco argues, to solicit our credulity as the plot moves through its less-than-credible plot and characters. This stylistic technique, as Lee Clark Mitchell notes, "is a standard convention for countless popular genres" (33).

place, but also representative stories of universal experiences, religious metanarratives, and biblical typologies, with realities and consequences both in historical and eschatological time—the temporal simultaneity that produces an aesthetics of immediacy. (31)

Jackson argues that the descriptively realist techniques used by evangelical homilists were designed to help readers relate so powerfully to the narrated characters and situations that their faith would be accessed at the affective level of personal identification and that, so moved, they would then be spurred on to spiritually transformative work in their lives and communities. “Identification with personal tragedy,” he observes, “became central to the homiletic strategy for reinvigorating Pauline scripture in Protestant life,” and “suffering became the primary mechanism for such identification, the epistemological bridge” (32). Just as Jackson argues that these patterns of reading persist in things like contemporary evangelical video games, so, too, do they characterize *The Shack*, which moves its determinedly ordinary main character through a succession of aesthetically immediate, emotionally wrenching, ultimately transformative confrontations that would not be out of place in a work of the nineteenth-century evangelical genre of sentimental fiction.

Like nineteenth-century homiletic narrative, which, as Jackson observes, “drew on readers’ sentimental perceptions to invoke a spiritual world, affording those who engaged the narratives a glimpse of their part in God’s design” (32), *The Shack* uses the conventions of contemporary popular sentimental storytelling to offer an explanation of how to understand the role of suffering in the human relationship to God. It provides, in other words, a theodicy—an explanation for suffering—that integrates the discourses of therapeutic individualism (with their emphasis on self-help and healing) into a vision in which human suffering is part of a larger, scripturally described plan which, while not capable of being fully understood or known, can be apprehended through the development of a personal relationship with God.

Its (quite orthodox) theodicy, therefore, is essentially temporal: suffering happens now because of what happened in the past. God is part of the way through an historical process of redemption, after which suffering will no longer exist. “The world is broken,” Jesus tells Mack, “because in Eden you abandoned relationship with us to assert your own independence” (146). Because of that choice, Sarayu explains,

“Nothing is as it should be, as Papa desires it to be, and as it will be one day. Right now your world is lost in darkness and chaos, and horrible things happen to those that he is especially fond of.”

“Then why doesn’t he do something about it?”

“He already has ...” [she replies]. (164)

Explaining that allusion, Papa tells Mack: “Adam chose to go it on his own, as we knew he would, and everything got messed up. But instead of scrapping the whole Creation we rolled up our sleeves and entered into the middle of the mess—that’s what we have done in Jesus” (99). “Everything is about him,” she insists. “Creation and history are all about Jesus. He is the very center of our purpose and in him we are now fully human, so our purpose and your destiny are forever linked” (192). This theodicy links the events of scriptural history (“in Eden”) to the time of mundane history and contemporary human experience through the figure of Jesus (“He already has”), who was both the divine (co)author of the providential chronology of redemption as well as a human actor in the human history through which that providential plan works itself out.

It is in this sense that theologian Roger Olsen can claim that *The Shack* is “brutally realistic” (62): because it is both “true to experience” and “biblical” (24). His use of the term “biblical” needs some unpacking for non-evangelicals. “Biblical” thinking differs from “theology,” theologian Joel Green observes, in that while theological discourse “tends effortlessly, naturally, toward propositional statements ... [and] toward a unified witness ... biblical thinking recognizes that ‘the revelation of God’s person is inextricably tied to the events in which God becomes different things, in a way that any person does; it is thus inextricably tied to narrative’” (13, quoting John Goldengay).¹² “The narrative content of Christian faith,” Green continues, “is essential to the logic of belief in Jesus Christ as the revelation of God in human history, and this ‘content’ is an unavoidable feature of the grammar of Christian faith” (14) because it is scripture’s

¹² “Biblical” thinking is central to “Christian worldview theory” (see, for example, Naugle or MacArthur), a body of thought emerging from nineteenth-century Reform theology that has been highly influential in the evangelical discourses of the past thirty years or so. It presumes that a faithful understanding of the Bible results in a “worldview”: “a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic construction of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being” (Sire, 15).

narrativity that allows it to facilitate the identification that is the precondition to spiritual transformation. Its narrativity allows scripture to invite Christians “to make our lodging the Genesis-to-Revelation narrative so that our modes of interpretation are conformed to the biblical narrative, so that this story decisively shapes our lives” (16). The “narrative grammar” of scripture, the way these stories relate to each other and work to structure the narrative self-understanding of the contemporary Christian’s life by imbricating mundane experience with its spiritual dimension, is conveyed in *The Shack* by God’s reference to Mack as the “you” who ate the apple and broke Creation; to Mack as Adam; to Adam as all men; and to all men as created in the image of God, who is also Jesus. *The Shack*’s “biblical” vision rests, in other words, on a substructure of what used to be called “figural” or typological interpretation.

Scriptural typology, Northrop Frye observes, is both an *organon*—a way of reasoning grounded in what Earl Miner calls “one of the fullest, most comprehensive and supple symbolic systems devised by the human mind in its encounter with experience in time” (392)—and a rhetoric, a way of organizing and expressing that reasoning in verbal form (Frye, 1982; 80). Although typology seems merely the identification of relationships between one scriptural event or character and another, these identifications rest on what theologian Hans Frei calls the fundamentally “narrative” understanding that undergirds late medieval and (with a more tenuous set of allegorical extensions) early Protestant interpretation: the understanding that, at its core the Bible tells a unified story of human events that succeed each other in time but which are connected to each other spiritually through Jesus.

Typology emerges as a dominant mode in Christian discourse in periods of turbulence and transition (that is, the second, third, twelfth, and sixteenth centuries) and, in times of church expansion, in populations new to Christianity. “Its integral, firmly teleological view of history and the providential order of the world,” Erich Auerbach argues, “gave it the power to capture the imagination and innermost feeling of the convert nations” (56). In medieval exegesis, typology was one among several interpretive techniques used to interpret and articulate the “spiritual” senses of scripture, the senses of what scripture *meant* beyond what was “literally” said. Typology was primarily used to reconcile the events, characters, and prophecies of the Old Testament with the life of Christ and the actions of the early church, providing, in Frye’s words, “a metahistorical form to scripture which allows it to be ‘seen together’ or comprehended as a unity which transcends its internal diversity” (1982, 62). People looking to

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scripture for insight into how best to live (its “tropological” sense) would find in it models (or “tropes”) of good or bad behaviour: scripture as a source of moral allegory. And people who were musing on ultimate, final questions could look to the “anagogical” sense of scripture to glean indications of the nature of God and the future of the created universe. Together, these layers of interpretation could provide all the answers people needed or could expect. They provided an image of a stable cosmos, intricately ordered through the harmonious analogies between the spheres of man, nature, and the divine, governed until Jesus’ return by the church, the manifestation of his millennial kingdom on Earth.¹³

Early Protestant reformers instead saw human history as very much in flux and, in their own time, breaking out into the prophesied final period before Christ’s return. The relatively stable spiritual truths found in discerning relations between the spheres was increasingly complemented and overshadowed by a more urgent awareness of correspondences between events in the continuously unfolding history of Christ’s redemption of Creation. And this is where typology comes in, because of all the ways of discerning the “spiritual” sense of scripture, only typology allows the historical conception of a relationship between historical events and characters (scripturally recorded and otherwise) and the eternal structure of the created universe as it works itself out in human time.

The Protestant reassertion of the primacy of typological interpretation against vilified forms of “allegory,” Frei argues, carried with it what he calls “an expanded sense of the real.” As a master hermeneutic, typological literal-historicism privileged the discursive “realism” of scriptural narrative: it recast scriptural stories not as examples or illustrations of theology or doctrine but primarily as records of things with spiritual significance that actually happened in history.¹⁴ By supplying the spiritual dimension of that historical reality, typology allowed scriptural events to be placed on the

13 Auerbach succinctly summarizes classical models of typological scriptural interpretation. Lewalski (1979) provides an analysis of Protestant typological thinking in sixteenth-century literature, and Bercovich illustrates the influence of typological thinking on American conceptions of nation and self from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Harrison (2006) shows how the Protestant embrace of typological literal-historicist interpretation provided an epistemological basis for the development of early modern science.

14 For Frei, scripture is “realistic” because its narrative “is of that peculiar sort in which characters or individual persons, in their internal depth or subjectivity as well as in their capacity as doers and sufferers of actions or events, are ... set in the context of the external environment, natural but more particularly social. Realistic narrative is that kind in which subject and social setting belong together, and characters and external circumstances fitly render each other” (13).

same plane as events in contemporary history, thus allowing contemporary events to be seen as having the same “spiritual” coherence as scriptural events. All historical events were equally real and all were joined together through Jesus, but Christians needed to develop a “spiritual” understanding in order to perceive the dimension of the divine and the eternal that filled out the reality of their historical world.¹⁵

While European Reformers restored to typology its primacy as a mode of scriptural interpretation, seventeenth-century American Protestants, to an even greater extent, modified typological interpretation to address everyday events in the life of both the nation and the individual. This “more liberal” kind of typological interpretation “found everywhere in early American writings,” Karl Keller observes, “extended the historical order of classic typologizing to the cosmos,” allowing typology’s “teleological order [to] become a moral order” (278). This “plebian” use of typology to interpret personal events—its assumption of the tropological function—signified a subtle but substantial expansion of its explanatory power. “Where classic reasoning moved from the antitype to the type,” Keller writes, “plebeian reasoning proceeded from type to antitype—an existential difference ... [that] refreshed the structure [of typological understanding] considerably” (280) and paved the way for the form’s later vitality in evangelical discourse.

And it *was* evangelicals, as George Landow points out, who were responsible for the large-scale “revival of interest in typological interpretations of the Bible” (343–44), even as eighteenth-century theology, philosophy, and philology were undermining typology’s claim to reconcile the literal sense of scripture with the overarching scriptural narrative and leading to its supersession in Protestant theology and its marginalization in discussions of doctrine. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, most English-speaking Protestant thinkers had long since abandoned it as a mode of serious exegesis, and it was used, if at all in polite letters, not as a discourse articulating sincere faith but as a way of organizing poetic imagery. In America, even as (or perhaps because) evangelicalism moved in from the frontier circuits and solidified its hold on small towns and the urban, especially female, middle classes, a sincere commitment to religious typology was increasingly regarded by the American *literati*

15 Frei’s historical overview of hermeneutic change accords with theologian David Tracy’s distinction between Catholicism’s primarily “analogical” imagination—in which God is understood as immanent in a pervasively sacramental cosmos—and Protestantism’s primarily “dialectical” imagination that apprehends God as transcendent over a fallen human world.

as indicative of a lack of intellectual sophistication. Religious typology, as Keller observes, had “moved from the mark of True Belief among the New England Puritans to the butt of iconoclastic joking by the time of Emily Dickinson and Mark Twain” (274).

But the evangelical embrace of typology was not indicative of their backwardness. On the contrary, by drawing upon the latent religious literacy instilled by the persistent circulation of Protestant heuristic, pedagogical, and homiletic works,¹⁶ they re-animated the abiding typological imagination of American popular Protestantism with the use of new homiletic techniques, distribution networks, and media forms. In their robust, accessible, stripped-down, and emotionally intensified versions of earlier forms of American Christianity—including their renovation of earlier traditions of typological interpretation—evangelical preachers formulated an intuitively persuasive counter-discourse that could not only rebut modern trends in theology and philosophy but that could provide, for adherents, a way of responding to the rapid social change going on around them.

The old forms of typology fit especially well with the evangelical shift away from exegesis and toward storytelling in preaching.¹⁷ Narrative sermonizing helped people to see common sense¹⁸ analogies between the material and historical situation of their own lives and the stories of people

16 As Jackson (2009) points out, it was their “training within the Protestant heuristic tradition [that laid the groundwork for [nineteenth-century evangelical writers’] typological understanding” (184). This heuristic tradition included the pedagogical reliance on Puritan primers and catechisms from the early colonial period until well into the nineteenth century, as well as the prominent position of Puritan classics in the homes of people who were not otherwise literary consumers. These, along with the Bible and religious tracts that often excerpted or imitated them, were staples in the inventory of the itinerant religious book-sellers (*colporteurs*) that plied their wares in the villages of post-revolutionary America (see Nord [2006], and Zboray [1993]).

17 See Reynolds.

18 Evangelicals tended to adopt the assumptions of Scottish Common Sense Realism, although, as Mark Noll observes, this tradition “has not so much provided American evangelicals with theological principles as it has given distinctive shape to the style, the apologetics, and the biblical shape of an already existing faith” (1985; 226). Trusting in spiritual discernment but using human rationality and autodidactic initiative, evangelicals found correspondences between special (scriptural) and general (natural) revelation that were understood as indicative of how Providence was operating within the natural world, human history, and individual life. Noll (1994) argues that evangelicalism’s foundational appeal to common sense has grounded a tendency toward an intuitivist kind of faith more geared toward practical results than toward self-reflexivity or historical self-consciousness. See also Noll (1985), Marsden (1991, 2006), Hatch (1984, 1990).

like themselves who had experienced spiritual transformation, repented of sin and reformed their lives, or backslid and paid the wages of sin. Most nineteenth-century evangelical homiletic focused on moral exhortation, but it was moral exhortation set in an illustrative narrative and often grounded in a typological framework that was telegraphed through what Landow calls a “typological commonplace,” in which common scriptural situations or characters are aligned with each other or with a present situation, without mediation or explanation. Typological commonplaces, such as God’s conflation in *The Shack* of Mack with Adam, are shorthand markers that mobilize what Landow calls “the intrinsic imaginative power of typological thought.” “Since each type is a synecdoche for the entire Gospel scheme,” he observes, “it possesses the property of being able to generate the entire vision of time, causality, and salvation contained in that scheme. A typological image always has the potential to thrust the reader into another context, demonstrating in the process how everything and every man exist simultaneously in two realms of meaning” (327).

But typological images or commonplaces were always set in larger stories. Those stories, in order to allow the relation a particular situation to scripture, needed to represent that situation in a way that people could relate to quickly and easily. American Protestant preachers and writers generated several narrative models (of spiritual conversion, of captivity and release, of sin and its wages, of pious martyrdom, of Christian governance and the effects of its absence in both the home and the world, etc.) which could reliably articulate the relationship between contemporary mundane experience and its spiritual dimension.¹⁹ While the typological reference supplied “truth” and acted as the vehicle for the homiletic message in these stories, and while the general plot and character types remained relatively stable, the narrative particulars used to *mediate* the relationship of worldly to divine reality was almost infinitely flexible, often drawing on traditionally Christian genres (such as spiritual autobiography) but able to accommodate the narrative forms that had the most cultural currency at any given time and place. As evangelical culture moved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from revivalism to hegemony to schism, through fundamentalism and into neo-evangelicalism, it developed cultural forms (always borrowing from contemporary popular forms but integrating earlier, traditional narratives) that were “realist” in the sense of invoking a relation of verisimilitude to experienced reality. But the

19 Jackson discusses some of these in their homiletic role as “spiritual masterplots” (2009, chapter 2).

reality these forms invoked was not the literary realist world of material phenomena, social causality, and historical contingency infused, vaguely and ambiguously, with intimations of transcendent intelligence. Instead, these forms invoked the double-layered Christian reality of the strongly supernatural evangelical faiths.

“Typology,” as Susan Friend Harding observes, “remains the reigning mode of reading the relationships between past and future events in many born-again Christian communities” (229). And, she notes, because typological interpretation rests on “the idea that the original story is history (not just a narratorial representation of it) and that its antitype is part of that original historical event, revealed over human time but present to the type in its human incarnation” (110), typological interpretation—with its “expanded sense of the real”—brings with it a strong bias toward looking at things as events and a strong bias away from looking at things as imaginative representations of abstractions (allegory). This bias accords with Young’s observation that despite the marvellous quality of the events narrated in his story, many of its first readers assumed that *The Shack* was literally true and asked him for information on how to meet Mack.²⁰ So Young clarified. Even though, he notes, much of the story was rooted in his own experience and emotional responses, “the story is fiction, I made it up.” But, Young observes, “then there is God ... and certainly, He is true.” The related events of the story, in other words, are to be understood as realistic (although not journalistic) rather than allegorical: they are understood to plausibly occur in a fictive extension of the world of the reader’s own experience. Its fictionality, however, does not invalidate its homiletic function, because not only is it realistic and therefore plausible as an extension of the mundane world, it is also plausibly rooted in the *spiritual* reality of God in His creation, a transcendent reality that, in Christian tradition, must be *spiritually* discerned.

In the novel, Willie illustrates this interpretive movement, enacting a version of the nineteenth-century evangelical’s squaring of a common-sense realist perspective with a supernaturalist understanding of divine agency and special providence. Initially, he recounts, he was “skeptical” (7): the story was “a little, well ... no, ... a *lot* on the fantastic side” (12). “But,” Willie immediately continues,

whether some parts of it are actually true or not, I won’t be the judge. Suffice it to say that while some things may not be scientifically provable, they can still be true nonetheless.... I

20 In “The Story Behind The Shack.”

desperately want everything Mack has told me to be true. Most days I am right there with him, but on others—when the visible world of concrete and computers seem to be the *real* world—I lose touch and have my doubts. (12–13)

Later in the narrative he elaborates: “Perhaps there is suprarationality: reason beyond the normal definitions of fact or data-based logic; something that only makes sense if you can see a bigger picture of reality. Maybe that is where faith fits in” (67).

Establishing Willie and Mack within a register of reality readers can recognize as a fictive extension of their own, then, is a key aspect of *The Shack*’s rhetorical realism. Willie’s voice is American small town vernacular. Friendly, unpretentious, colourful, quirky, and blunt, marked by a prominent use of folksy colloquialism, this voice marks Willie as a metonym for the community he and Mack share. This community is semi-agrarian and neighbourly, populated by people who know each other by first names, diminutives, and nicknames; people who attend the local “pew and pulpit Bible church,” who run into each other at the local coffee shop, and who pitch in to help with each other’s projects (Willie and Mack meet when “both showed up at a neighbor’s house to help him bale a field of hay to put up for his couple of cows” [7]). This kind of community certainly exists, but, better than that, it is “real.” It is the “real America” that provides the setting for warmly-hued television movies, that grounds the country music verities, and that helps political candidates and pickup trucks get sold.

If Willie is “real,” Mack is “normal.” Although given a very specific life history and placed in the same community as Willie, Mack’s perspective is presented as that of a contemporary everyman: he is a “rather unremarkable, slightly overweight, balding, middle-aged white guy” (“which,” as Willie observes, “describes a lot of men in these parts” [10–11]). As Mack becomes the focal character of the story, the colloquialisms fall away and the narrative voice becomes more eloquent and self-reflective. Mack’s responses are consistently intelligent, well-informed, and skeptical. His actions are plausibly informed by love for his family within the framework of the depression that follows the loss of his child. He displays intense (but, in the context, proportionate) emotional responses to the situations he encounters. In terms of the predominant discourses of evangelical manhood that prize emotional openness, dedication to family, and the role of “servant leadership” within the family, these responses serve to reinforce, for evangelical readers, Willie’s description of him as a “good man.” Together Willie and Mack provide a broad and accessible structure

Mack's back-
story, for
example—son
of an abusive,
hard-drinking,
Bible-thumping
dirt farmer
who runs away
after helping
his daddy drink
himself to death
by poisoning
all the booze in
the house—is
pure American
Gothic.

of identification: Willie's voice provides familiarity, and Mack provides the authority of an unmarked but valorized perspective.

But although Mack is a “realistic” character, he moves through a narrative that draws on a dozen recognizable popular genres from both secular and evangelical traditions. The story draws on the plot that informs everything from *Pilgrim's Progress* and most Protestant spiritual autobiography to almost every evangelical “personal witness” narrative: the protagonist faces a crisis that undermines his or her illusion of self-sufficiency, there is a period of despair, and then, overwhelmed and often at the point of suicide, he or she cries out to God and finds a measure of peace through faith and grace. Things such as the introduction of an innocent child character for the single purpose of being the victim of a murder sufficiently horrific to generate an appropriately profound spiritual crisis in the protagonist may seem a bit coldly calculated to a reader unfamiliar with evangelical conventions, but it falls well within the venerable evangelical tradition of moral sensationalism, in which graphic depictions of human sin, depravity, and suffering—true pictures of fallen human nature—are seen as legitimate means if the end is helping people convert or recommit to faith.²¹ The plot's relentless succession of wrenching emotional encounters might seem overwhelming, but this focus on moments of intense affect is a staple of evangelical homiletic. Precisely such narrative motifs—especially the death of innocent girl-children—were staples of sentimental fiction and, due perhaps to what Jackson calls the “high tolerance for anachronism” (2011; 175) that characterizes readers of Protestant popular fiction, they continue to be central to contemporary evangelical representation.

There are more secular narrative mediators as well that stretch the story's realist claims even further. Mack's backstory, for example—son of an abusive, hard-drinking, Bible-thumping dirt farmer who runs away after helping his daddy drink himself to death by poisoning all the booze in the house (7–8, 38)—is pure American Gothic. His family camping trip is pretty standard domestic light drama, until it turns bad, at which point the narrative tone shifts abruptly. The description of the events following Missy's disappearance are some of the most powerful in the novel: the language is spare, facilitating immediate identification with Mack's rising terror and anxiety as he searches for his daughter. But after the police arrive

21 As proto-evangelical Jonathan Edwards explains: “Some people talk of it as an unreasonable thing to think to fright persons to heaven: but I think it is a reasonable thing to endeavor to fright persons away from Hell...: 'tis a reasonable thing to fright a person out of a house on fire” (in Jackson, 37). See Tompkins (1984) and Moore (chapter 1) regarding “moral sensationalism” in nineteenth-century evangelical homiletic narrative and sentimental fiction.

to investigate, the tone changes again, adopting the clipped banter, terse looks, and acronym-laced copspeak of the police procedural. The killer is almost cartoonish in the flatness of his representation: he is a “perverted monster” (49–50) who is able to move like a “ghost” without leaving any evidence (64); he had been stalking Mack’s family, had snatched Mack’s innocent daughter, and left only a tell-tale “signature” (a lady-bug pin), leaving Mack with nightmares of “monsters and demons of the deepest dark with barbwire fingers and razor touches; of Missy screaming for her daddy and no one answering” (53).

Missy’s abduction demonstrates particularly clearly the way that elements of highly conventional popular narrative participate in “expanded sense of the real” characteristic of typological realism. “The story of Missy’s disappearance is unfortunately not unlike others told too often” (26), we are told, in a sentence that (like many others in the novel) invokes a nod of readerly assent that reinforces a sense of common perspective. Just as the “we” invoked by the novel recognize Willie’s community as part of the real America even in the absence of unmediated experience with such places, so too do “we” recognize the reality of the predatory pedophilic serial killing stranger, even in the absence of direct experience with such a figure.²² But it is not that *The Shack* simply exploits images and *mythoi* that are part of the staple repertoire of American sentimental pop culture and tabloid media, respectively. On the contrary, part of the success of both sentimental and tabloid media lies in the ability to draw on the way that sentimental and sensational narration is built into evangelical culture, which, in turn, has been informing American popular culture for the past two centuries. These contemporary media forms merely reinforce, by populating with particular images and by furnishing new narrative conventions, the vision of the world that undergirds American evangelicalism: a world utterly degraded and pervaded by Sin, but shot through with Grace. The highly conventionalized treatment of the killer does not undermine but reinforces the novel’s realist claim for its readers because it does not dwell on the particularities of the killer’s situation (which are essentially accidental, belonging as they do to his merely phenomenal existence in the physical world) but allows him to be perceived as a figure of sin and human fallenness, attributes of the world’s enveloping spiritual reality

22 As criminologist Nicole Rafter points out, the very discrepancy between the actual occurrence of these figures and their pop cultural representations makes them more relevant to study as cultural indices than as criminological case studies.

that are obscured by too much narrative attention to the accidental and the particular.

The stripping away of “realistic” details, in other words, allows the outlines of the narrative’s typological reality to emerge more clearly. As Erich Auerbach puts it, “Whereas in the modern view the event is always self-sufficient and secure while the interpretation is fundamentally incomplete, in the figural interpretation the fact is subordinated to an interpretation which is fully secured to begin with” (58). Since New Testament times, as Frye observes, Christian writers have made a distinction between *mythoi*, or stories (or, worse, *bebelous mythos*: profane stories), and *logoi*, or *true* stories (2006, 18). It is this fidelity to the already-secured typological interpretation that separates stories that may press journalistic or literary-realistic claims to verisimilitude with sociological phenomena from stories that are both descriptively realistic *enough* to be plausible but that are *also true*, with that sense of truth furnished by a perception of the narrative’s verisimilitude to the typological organization of spiritual reality. Although on the plane of mundane realism Missy’s killer was plausible (in an American cultural context, if statistically improbable), as a figure of crime and psychopathology, the *truth* of this figure that supplements its realist plausibility, for *The Shack*’s spiritually discerning readers, is found in the way it participates in a story of sin, suffering, and the problem of human evil in a universe ruled by a loving God.

The Shack helps the reader negotiate, to some extent, the claims of its typological realism against those who would read it tropologically as a fairy tale suffused with moral allegorical meaning. At the beginning of their camping trip, Mack and his family stop at Multnomah Falls, and Mack tells his children its legend. Once there was a plague that befell the Multnomah people, and it was prophesied that only the sacrifice of a princess could save them. Hearing this, and seeing the death of her people, the chief’s beloved daughter threw herself off a cliff, to her death. The plague stopped, and, in response to her heartbroken father’s prayer to the Great Spirit, water has ever since fallen from the place where she plunged, to commemorate her sacrifice (27–28). Later, Mack’s daughter Kate asks:

“Did the Indian princess really die? Is the story true?”

Mack thought before he spoke. “I don’t know, Kate. It’s a legend and sometimes legends are stories that teach a lesson.”

“So, it didn’t really happen?” asked Missy.

“It might have sweetie. Sometimes legends are built from real stories, things that really happen.”

Again silence, then, “So is Jesus dying a legend?” Mack could hear the wheels turning in Kate’s mind.

“No honey, that’s a true story.” (30–31).

Although the princess story may have, as Mack observes, “all the elements of a true redemption story, not unlike the story of Jesus” (29) if its reference to the actual world is in question and if it is clearly an imaginative construct designed to “teach lessons,” then, although it *illustrates* typological relationships, it is to be read as a moral allegory. But if the rhetorical techniques of a narrative can plausibly locate that story in an extension of the reality the reader accepts as verisimilar to his or her experienced world—such as the story of Mack and the shack—then even if it tells of an extraordinary or supernatural event the story can be read in terms of typological realism, in that it can be seen as both realistic in its fidelity to sociological reality and that the typological relationships it reveals can be seen as realistic in their fidelity to cosmological truth.

This kind of typological understanding, then, assumes that humans do not merely use stories to describe an essentially unknowable universe but that the ontological structure of the created universe is itself narratively organized, with those existential narrative forms reflected by, and potentially discerned in, the products of human culture. This insight is developed in an influential strain of modern Christian thought that holds that the most popular story forms are not necessarily just vehicles of escape into infantile fantasy worlds but that, instead, trace (however distantly) original congruencies between creature and creation and that thereby provide modes of access to spiritual reality. Like so many other tendencies of contemporary evangelicalism, this body of Christian narrative theory emerges most prominently in the context of conservative reactions to the theological liberalism and modernism of the late nineteenth century. In their rejection of secular realist models of representation, these conservative Christians were part of a more widespread cultural movement to reject what Frederic Jameson calls the realist vision of a world “incapable of symbolic unification,” a world “of Cartesian extension, of the quantification of the market system” (111).

Like others at the time, conservative Christians found the possibility of deeper truth in the narrative forms of romance. With the “gradual reification of realism in late capitalism,” Jameson argues, “romance once again comes to be felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and of freedom from that reality principle to which a now oppressive realistic representation is the hostage. Romance now again seems to offer the possibility of sensing other historical rhythms, and of demonic or Utopian transfor-

mations of a real now unshakably set in place” (104). G.K. Chesterton, a late-nineteenth-century convert to conservative Christianity beloved of contemporary evangelical commentators, expresses similar sentiments. Popular novels were read more widely than books of science or metaphysics, Chesterton writes, because “the novel is more true than they are ... Romance is the deepest thing in life; romance is deeper even than reality” (1905, 192). Fredrich Beuchner elaborates: both the Christian Gospel and fairy tales tell stories in which “terrible things happen and wonderful things too ... goodness is pitted against evil, love against hate, order against chaos, in a great struggle ... which goes ultimately to the good, who live happily ever after” (81). But although they share a fairy-tale logic, the “crucial difference” is that “the claim made for [the Gospel] is that it is true, that it not only happened once upon a time but has kept on happening ever since and is happening still” (90). Like the super- and sub-human agencies that interact with people in fairy tales, Beuchner observes, the spiritual world acknowledged by Christians “impinges on the ordinary world the way the dimension of depth impinges on the two-dimensional surface of a plane” (78). Romantic conventions displace the assumption that what Beuchner calls the “horizontal” sense of mundane normalcy is complete and in so doing enables the vertical perspective that can bestow a sense of narrative coherence—of plot, theme, character types, and ultimate setting—on worldly experience. Romance conventions can contribute to an evangelical rhetoric of “realism” because they can provide a simulation of the spiritual aspect of experience that complements the more conventionally realist techniques that simulate the Christian’s experience of the secular world.²³

The Shack’s obvious divergence from the conventions of literary realism and its use of non-ironized romantic and conventionally pop fictional elements does not, therefore, undermine its claim to accurately and profoundly address reality. Instead, these pop fiction conventions contribute to a self-consciously countersecular form of realist rhetoric, one that invokes a world and events that are plausible *despite*—and, to some extent, *because of*—their romantic structure. Its plausibility and its capacity to enable realist identification is secured not by some judgement of the probability of the events it describes (which, as Willie says, there is no way to

23 See also, for example, Conrad for an analysis of how romance structured the rhetoric of Falwell’s Moral Majority movement and Harding for a discussion of how romance conventions informed multiple forms of evangelical storytelling (witnessing, testifying, preaching, teaching) and was narratively integrated with typological models.

prove or disprove) but by its structure of feeling, by the way its narrative's appeal to a typological reality accessed through radical empathy resonates with what one (as Willie puts it) *wants* to be true. The reality of *The Shack*, in other words, is ultimately confirmed affectively, in its readers' suffering with Mack in his pain and his experience of evil, and that experience of radical empathy reinforces the novel's typological vision. In their compassion for Mack, readers vicariously experience not only a representation of the reality of evil but also the reality of how Jesus is known: as the divine man whose suffering (passion) offers redemption to us all.

The ability to identify with the story on this emotional level is made precisely analogous in the novel to understanding its theodicy. "There are a lot of smart people who are able to say a lot of right things from their brain because they have been told what the right answers are," Sarayu tells Mack, "but they don't know me at all" (198). The Bible, she tells Mack, should not be approached as a book of rules, but as something that facilitates a "relationship—a way of coming to be with us" (198). In its essence, she says, it is "a picture of Jesus" (197), the one who, in relationship, is "the living answer" (198) to the deep question of why Missy had to die. *The Shack* tells us that in knowing Jesus as the creative Word, as the redeeming Lamb, and as the coming Judge that is revealed in scripture, it becomes possible to reconcile the story of one's life in the everyday real world ("more likely ... the un-real world," Mack muses [238]) with the deeper reality of Christian cosmology. Because Missy's abduction allows us to have compassion with Mack in his pain and despair, and because both we and Mack are types of Jesus, so too can Mack's path from despair back to faith be ours. Mack's journey is not a moral allegory, like the story of the Multnomah princess. Instead, his experience, even if fictive, is grounded in the same register of reality as our own, which means that we share a common typological relationship to Jesus and to the divine metanarrative. This allows Mack's story to function as a "real" model of Jesus' healing work in human life and can allow even the conventionally romantic aspects of its narrative to function, rhetorically, as "realisms."

Although in the twentieth century key aspects of *The Shack*'s narrative—the discursively realist presentation that facilitates immediate emotional involvement, the use of romance narrative in this realist frame to articulate human engagement with forces above (and below) normal human control, and the development of highly "formulaic" narrative models—were almost completely appropriated by commercial genre fiction because of their ability to reliably evoke commodifiable aesthetic pleasure, they *also* are rooted in an evangelical tradition of homiletic storytelling

The ability to identify with the story on this emotional level is made precisely analogous in the novel to understanding its theodicy.

that allows them to naturalize a homiletic “message” by functioning as analogues of an ontological order in which all things are possible for God and in which everything happens according to His ultimately benevolent will. With its ability to integrate highly romantic genre conventions with discursively realist appeals to mundane verisimilitude, what typological realism provides that secular realisms cannot give is a sense of pervasive cosmological coherence and teleological closure: what evangelicals often call “purpose.” Works of contemporary evangelical genre or popular fiction, such as *The Shack*, show how this sense of purpose—so central to the appeal of evangelical faith—is rhetorically effected and popularly mobilized through an appeal to ways of understanding particular to American evangelical culture, an appeal made possible by the way that contemporary evangelicalism has retained, renovated, and continued to draw cultural vitality from American popular Protestantism’s homiletic and hermeneutic traditions.

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