CHAPTER NINETEEN

FROM THE CLENCHED FIST TO THE OPEN HAND:
A POSTMODERN READING
OF THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM

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The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me. (Psalm 23:1-2, 4, NRSV)

You've been leading me
Beside strange waters
Streams of beautiful lights in the night
But where is my pastureland in these dark valleys?
If I loose my grip, will I take flight?
(Bruce Cockburn, "Strange Waters," from the album The Charity of Night)

Can Psalm 23 bear an encounter with the underside of reality?

For a long time I have had a problem with Psalm 23. I have found this most popular of all biblical poems difficult to stomach. I could, of course, say that I have found the psalm difficult to believe, but that would obscure the visceral nature of my reaction to the psalm. For years, my sense of the psalm has been that its affirmations might be adequate for a naive, "Sunday School" faith. And perhaps it does provide comfort in times of bereavement or near life's end—that is certainly how the psalm has functioned in western society. But after a while
its sweet simplicity and unabashed confidence seem cloying, if now downright false to my experience of the real world.

Who is the speaker in this psalm anyway? Who is it that can confess in such absolute terms that because the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not “want”—I lack nothing? Most of us have all kinds of lacks. Confessing God as shepherd doesn’t protect anyone from marriage breakdowns, from financial crisis, from spousal abuse, from the pain of children who take everything out of you and bring you to the brink of abuse yourself. Confessing God as shepherd doesn’t protect many people in the world from hunger, poverty or disease, from racial or gender discrimination, from civil war, ethnic atrocities, or death.

It is quite easy to talk about God giving us rest in verdant pastures or about God leading us by quiet, placid waters. But for many of us, our paths have led anywhere but beside quiet waters or through peaceful pasturcands. On the contrary, the waters have been passing “strange” and we have wandered through a wilderness of danger and threat, a landscape of fissures and shifting sands.

And “fear no evil”? We’re running scared of evils real and imagined. We’re scared of inner-city violence, scared of terrorism, scared of our jobs being cut, scared of never getting a full-time faculty position, scared of that book that will never get written. We’re scared of how our kids will turn out, scared of loneliness, scared of intimacy, scared of fundamentalism, scared of postmodernism. We’re scared of living life honestly, to its fullest, a landscape of fissures and shifting sands.

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engage a text, in the quest for the text’s meaning(s).

3. Affirming subjectivity: the fullness of human experience, including faith

But perhaps even more important than intertextuality per se (which looks for connections between texts), a postmodern reading does not pretend to objectivity or neutrality, but looks for connections between texts and life. Most fundamentally, then, a postmodern reading means affirming the ineradicable subjectivity of all interpretation. This is, indeed, the basis for an intertextual reading. A postmodern reading means engaging the text in terms of human experience, bringing one's full-bodied subjectivity—which includes one's gender, ethnicity, social location, theological assumptions, cultural and religious experience (and that includes musical experience, hence the intertextuality with Cockburn)—bringing the full range of one’s life experience to the interpretive task, that the text might be truly and fully engaged. Thus I bring myself to the reading of this psalm.

But this engagement does not mean subjectivism, as if whatever I bring to the text and whatever meaning I read into it is inherently valid. The sort of postmodern engagement I am interested in neither absolutizes the subject nor justifies sloppy scholarship. But it does take experience seriously.

4. Hosting suspicion: critical questioning, rooted in honesty: a theological matter

Even more particularly, a postmodern reading takes seriously the experience of suspicion. It takes seriously, then, the necessity of raising critical questions about the text and its claims and assumptions. Whereas a hermeneutics of suspicion is typically applied to texts that either legitimate explicit violence or that surreptitiously encode hegemony, patriarchy or some other form of oppression, here I am suspicious of what seems like the naïve idealism of the psalm, which does not square with my experience of life's more ragged edges. vii

But questioning, for me, is not the first gesture. Prior to suspicion, and more foundational, is trust. I started my faith journey with a transcendent idealism whose blessing you must accept, says Cockburn (there is blessing in the unlikeliest places).

Reading Psalm 23 with Cockburn’s “Strange Waters”

But questioning, for me, is not the first gesture. Prior to suspicion, and more foundational, is trust. I started my faith journey with a transcendent idealism that resonates remarkably well with Cockburn’s language in the first stanza of “Strange Waters.” viii Those images of a “high cairn kissed by holy wind” and a “mirror pool cut by golden fins” recall lyrics of Cockburn’s early songwriting, some twenty-five years before. Even the musical style at the beginning of the song (before the drums and distortion guitar) is reminiscent of his albums in the early nineteen-seventies. ix Like Cockburn, I sought the transcendent purity of a spiritual vision and journey, only to discover “the alleys where they hide the truth of cities” (and the truth of academia, and of families, and of churches)—the backside of reality, the unfettered craziness, hidden from polite view—whose blessing you must accept, says Cockburn (there is blessing in the unlikeliest places).

And I do not believe, in the end, that faith—or scholarship—can be insulated from the dark, disturbing experiences of reality’s backside. The very attempt hermatically to seal off (and thus protect) our treasured faith, or our academic work, from exposure to the extremities of the human condition—the postmodern
condition—which is our own condition, leaves us with clenched fists, our knuckles white with fear, hanging on (to our naïveté, or our sophistication) for dear life.

But faith, or scholarship, that can't stand exposure to reality isn't worth much in the long run. So, the invitation comes to us—it certainly came to me—to open those clenched fists, to take the risk of reading the twenty-third psalm through the lens of “airport’s guarded glass and chrome,” of “rifled roads” and “landmined loam”—and also the passion of burning love.

The trouble is, of course (and here I speak of my own experience), that when we allow reality to impact our faith—or better, when reality intrudes upon us, without our permission—our faith changes, sometimes for the worse. We may find ourselves transformed from an initial robust confidence in God’s goodness, protection and guidance to a minimalist sort of faith. It may not be quite the “indolent sullenness” that Albert Borgmann describes in Crossing the Postmodern Divide (Borgman 10), but, as Christopher Lasch puts it in his book The Minimal Self, we contract into our own narrow protective agendas (Lasch 15). We withdraw from genuine openness to our neighbor, to a defensive posture. We need to protect our turf—our academic turf, our ideological turf, our theological turf, our personal turf.

And God? Well, what can you really expect from God anyway? And we find our faith shrivelling—the very faith that we began with, the faith that generated the journey which has led us to this place in our lives. So we constrict to a minimalist, defensive core, fists clenched tight, knuckles white, hanging on to what we’ve got, to what we’ve achieved, for dear life—fearful of losing even that.

The alternative to a minimalist, fearful stance, however, is not an undisciplined embrace of heterogeneity, but clarity about what really matters. Such clarity doesn’t need to mince words. Bruce Cockburn expresses this clarity in “Strange Waters.” The apostle Paul in Philippians 3 articulates a similar clarity. And here I plunge deeper into that postmodern territory known as intertextuality. Having already set up Psalm 23 and Cockburn’s “Strange Waters” as intertexts, appealing to Paul’s letter to the Philippians might seem tame by comparison. Yet whereas Cockburn was intentionally alluding to Psalm 23, this Pauline intertext resonates not directly with the psalm, but with the Cockburn song, and then only in our own consciousness. So, taking the risk of wild intertextuality, we turn to Philippians 3, where Paul, surveying in verses 4-7 his badges of honor and his many accomplishments (his “gains”) and going beyond those accomplishments to everything in his life, says in verse 8, “I consider all things to be loss, ... indeed I consider [them] to be skūbala,” in contrast to what Christ has to offer.

Now, skūbala (singular skūbalon) means either (more mildly) “rubbish, garbage, trash” or (in a more vulgar idiom) “excrement, dung, (utter) crap.” Paul, in this text, is thus under no illusions. Although he articulates the Christian hope of redemption, the fact that he takes Christ as his model inoculates him against naïveté. His journey towards resurrection, he therefore acknowledges, passes through suffering. This is a suffering with Christ, a “sharing” or “fellowship” in Christ’s sufferings (verse 10). To attain to his ultimate goal of redemption, Paul has to let go of what is unimportant, especially when it becomes an impediment to that goal. And so, it turns out, Cockburn isn't saying anything radically different from Paul when he surveys his own life, from the simple naïveté of initial faith to the honest recognition of the backside of reality—the “strange waters” by which God is leading him—and then makes the judgment that “everything is bullshit but the open hand.”

That’s a profound theological statement. “Bullshit” is a tolerably good translation for skūbala. But it certainly stirs up pious sensibilities. As it ought to. Both Paul and Cockburn want to make the radical choice before us crystal clear. Either excrement or Christ, says Paul. As Cockburn puts it: either bullshit or an opening of the clenched fist, a letting go of what we’re so protectively and desperately hanging on to, that we might live in open, deep trust in the One—beyond ourselves—who is the rock-solid source and goal of all life.

Journeying beyond suspicion: toward a second naïveté

But let's be realistic. How is it possible after suspicion to regain a healthy, robust trust in God again? How, after experiencing the “concrete fields of man” (especially for women who have experienced the entrenched patriarchal concrete blockages to success and advancement in academia, in society, in the church)—how is it possible to trust Psalm 23, with any integrity, this psalm with its serene claims of God’s guidance and provision? How can anyone, after experiencing the “concrete fields of man” trust in the One-beyond ourselves-who is the rock-solid source and goal of all life?

And the answer, of course, is that we can never regain in any purity the same pre-critical, naïve trust that we once had. We can, however, come to what Paul Ricoeur calls a “second naïveté,” a trust that is tempered by the crucible of doubt and of honesty, and which is deeper and more whole, precisely due to the experience of tempering (Ricoeur 351-52, 356).

And if allowing our experience, including our critical questions, to permeate our encounter with a biblical text is a theological matter, as David Jobling noted, concerning the freedom of the reader or the believer, then it is equally a theological matter when Jobling comments one page later that “[t]he Bible (and
of course I would say the same of any other text) must also have the freedom to question our readings of it” (Jobling 309; his parentheses).

There is a reciprocal relation between text and reader. I cannot, therefore, remain hermetically sealed in my stance of suspicion. I am called to journey beyond suspicion, which is also (although more atypically) a postmodern gesture.

Journeying beyond suspicion: five hermeneutical moves

But how is this journey beyond suspicion possible? Let me suggest a number of hermeneutical moves by which this text, Psalm 23, responds to the sort of critical questioning with which I began this paper and challenges me—or any reader—to move beyond an initially suspicious reading. These five moves have helped me in my own journey towards a second naïveté, toward allowing the text to speak a message of (chastened) hope to this interpreter. The first three moves arise from attending to the psalm itself, while the last two are suggested by the song “Strange Waters.”

1. The psalm’s own testimony to the underside of reality

First of all, careful attention to Psalm 23 shows that it already contains within it an acknowledgment of the harsh realities of life. Verse 3 does, after all, refer to God restoring (not simply maintaining) the psalmist’s nephesh or life (traditionally, “soul”). In this connection, the Hebrew verb ravats, used in verse 2 for God making or causing the psalmist to “lie down” or “rest,” often has the connotation—especially when applied to humans—of rest after an ordeal or relief from affliction. Verses 2 and 3 thus have healing or restoration in their purview.

Furthermore, the psalm clearly refers to passing through dark valleys (verse 4), and to enemies in whose presence the Lord sustains the psalmist (verse 5). The psalmist does not say that he is led around or past the dark valleys, but that even in the valleys—in the presence of enemies—he is comforted, even feasted within it an acknowledgment of the harsh realities of life. Verse 3 does, after all, refer to God restoring (not simply maintaining) the psalmist’s nephesh or life (traditionally, “soul”).

So, while acknowledging that my suspicious reading of the psalm’s naïveté was necessary for entering into a serious engagement with the text, my first move beyond suspicion is to listen for the text’s own articulation of life’s difficulty. The text has its own voice and must not be uncritically subsumed under my prior assumptions.

2. The psalm’s use of exodus-wilderness traditions

My second hermeneutical move requires engagement with careful biblical scholarship on Psalm 23. Here I attend to the traditioning process discernable in the psalm, whereby the psalmist draws on prior texts, applying them in transformed ways to a new situation. The pioneering work of biblical scholars Pamela Milne (1974-75) and David Noel Freedman (1976), further articulated by Peter Craigie (1983: 203-09) and by Michael Barré and John Kselman (1983), has shown just how embedded this psalm is in the exodus and especially the wilderness traditions of Israel. Although numerous biblical texts could be cited as possible precedents for various ideas utilized in Psalm 23, there are certain texts—typically describing God’s guidance and provision in the wilderness—that contain not just similar ideas, but identical language, to Psalm 23. Here I have to be selective, as there are many more relevant texts than I could mention. I shall cite six biblical texts that are particularly striking (see Appendix III for a graphic representation of these references in their relationship to Psalm 23).

For example, “I shall not want (or lack)” (the negation lo= with the verb chasar), from verse 1, is found in Deuteronomy 2:7, in the second person. There, Moses reminds the people that for the forty years that God has accompanied them in the wilderness, “you lacked nothing” (lo= chasar with davar—literally, you didn’t lack a thing).

Then, verse 2 of the psalm contains the somewhat rare verb nahal for God’s leading or guiding, which turns up also in Exodus 15:13 (the Song of the Sea) and in Psalm 78:52-53. While both these texts describe Israel’s journey from Egypt to the land of promise, the latter text explicitly utilizes the shepherd metaphor for the wilderness journey, and mentions that when God led them “they were not afraid” (this theme of not being afraid is found also in verse 4 of Psalm 23).

“For his name’s sake” (l’ma’an shemo) at the end of verse 3 is an exact match with Psalm 106:8, where it refers to the motivation for God’s deliverance of Israel in Egypt and at the Red Sea.

Then, that strange (and rare) word tsalmavet in verse 4 (or possibly tsalmum as some have revocalized it), translated “deep darkness” or (more traditionally) “shadow of death,” is also found in Jeremiah 2:6 where it describes the dangerous wilderness through which the Lord led the people from Egypt.

And the notion in verse 5 of God preparing a table (arak shulchan) occurs in Psalm 78:19, where the people question whether God was able to provide for them in the wilderness.

What is significant about all these texts (and I have just scratched the surface) is that they are all summary retellings of Israel’s history with God, and these retellings focus specifically on the exodus-wilderness journey. The
recognition of the exodus-wilderness theme as the framework for Psalm 23 solves what used to be a scholarly conundrum in many older commentaries, namely the switch in metaphors that occurs in the middle of the psalm from God as shepherd (in verses 1-4) to God as host (in verses 5-6).xvi When framed by the exodus-wilderness theme, it is clear these metaphors are not radically discontinuous, since the wilderness experience was remembered precisely as a time of God’s guidance (the shepherd metaphor) and God’s provision (the hospitality metaphor).

There is, however, a second cluster of biblical texts that Psalm 23 draws on, namely prophetic texts arising from the context of the sixth-century exile of Israel in Babylon.xvii Here we find not only that the shepherd metaphor is used to describe God’s care for the exiled people (Jeremiah 31:10, Isaiah 40:11, and Ezekiel 34), but that the return from exile is framed as a new exodus, with a wilderness journey back home, characterized precisely by God’s guidance, provision, comfort, and protection from enemies, with no need to fear.xviii Besides the shared imagery between these texts and Psalm 23, much of the language is identical.

The fact that Psalm 23 recycles themes and even language from the exodus and the exile suggests that the psalmist is not making some pious individualistic claim of absolute faith in God no matter what. Rather, Psalm 23 is a confession and the exile suggests that the psalmist is not making some pious individualistic confession of faith rooted ultimately in the communal traditions and experience of the faith community, traditions which are imbued with the experience of suffering and threat. The psalmist thus joins Israel’s exilic writers who utilized the ancient traditions of the exodus and wilderness to speak of a later, analogous experience. So, whatever the present realities (which are not to be denied), this psalm encourages us to give the ancient traditions a hearing—to listen to them, to indwell them—that Israel’s founding story of God’s guidance and provision in a time of crisis might come to shape our consciousness, and inform our faith. The way forward, in other words, is back—to the founding stories, to the roots of the tradition. This traditioning process (a variety of intertextuality) that is typical of a postmodern reader-to enter into the biblical text, to indwell these old stories, even Psalm 23, in a manner which moves us forward, as we make this text our own, in our own idiom. Contemporary readers of this text are thus invited to participate in a tradition that is larger than ourselves—yet a tradition that does not suppress our individuality or subjectivity. In a radically liberating move, Psalm 23 offers us an inner-biblical warrant for faithful improvisation of a living, unfolding tradition.xix

4. Cockburn’s transformation of genres

Of course, this movement beyond suspicion is not an easy move. It requires taking a risk, opening our hands. And Bruce Cockburn, at the end of “Strange Waters,” doesn’t quite open his hand, yet. He doesn’t actually reach a place of positively affirming Psalm 23.

Nevertheless, Cockburn’s approach to the text—his own personalizing of Psalm 23—can be understood as a fourth hermeneutical move that can help us in our rapprochement with this text. For just as the psalmist transformed earlier communal texts by personalizing them, so Cockburn transforms the psalm’s confident affirmation of trust into a question. Obviously alluding to Psalm 23 (verses 2 and 4), he asks, “where is my pastureland in these dark valleys?” With this question, Cockburn has shifted from the genre of Psalm 23—a psalm of trust or confidence—to another psalmic genre, that of lament or complaint. The genre of lament or complaint (it is variously named by biblical scholars) characterizes over one-third of all the biblical psalms, and typically includes honest questioning as a mode of faithfulness.xi The questioning inherent in lament is not a turning away from God. Rather, it functions as a mode of prayerful—if abrasive—engagement. It is questioning for the purpose of maintaining a relationship with God, as an alternative to severing the relationship.

It is thus not without significance that on the liner notes to The Charity of Night album, on which “Strange Waters” appears, Cockburn thanks (among others) “the book of Psalms” and “God for always keeping the ladder in place,” an allusion (via the story of Jacob’s ladder in Genesis 28) to prayer. And the song “Strange Waters” is clearly a prayer, addressed to God.

This transformation of genres, from a song of confidence to lament, suggests
that critical questioning, even of God, might well serve as an important hermeneutical move for coming to terms with the claims of the biblical text. Indeed, I began this paper with my own lament over Psalm 23. And it is precisely the Cockburn song “Strange Waters” that first nudged me to seek a critical rapprochement with the twenty-third psalm.

5. An intertextuality of the open hand

But there is a fifth hermeneutical move we can make vis-à-vis Psalm 23, which is suggested by the last lines of “Strange Waters.” At the close of the song Cockburn asks a final question: “If I loose my grip will I take flight?” It is this line that suggested the central metaphor for this paper. From the start I found the metaphor of the “open hand” resonating and echoing intertextually with a biblical text in Deuteronomy 15. We are, obviously, not dealing here with intentional intertextuality, but rather with wild or open intertextuality. Indeed, we could call this open-handed intertextuality. In Deuteronomy 15:7-11 (which follows verses 1-6 on the Sabbatical year legislation), we find an exhortation to the Israelites that even if it isn’t the Sabbath year, whenever there is anyone in need (vv. 7 & 8), “do not be tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand.” And verse 11: “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”

Here the metaphor of opening the hand signifies sharing with another, meeting interpersonal needs—or, to use the terminology of Emmanuel Levinas which has so often been invoked in this collection of papers, it refers to seeing the face of the Other and being obligated to compassion. For some readers, that interpersonal opening of the hand can be a path leading back to opening our hand in renewed trust in God. Awareness of the need and pain of another person can resonate deeply with our own sense of need, and pain. It can mediate an awareness of our own need to unclench our fists, to give up the false securities that we have been hanging on to for dear life—whether that is the naïveté of faith, the illusion of neutral scholarship, or postmodern suspicion: our constriction can take many forms. A communal connection with other people and their needs can thus generate in us an “eros” for re-connection with God. The open hand of justice and compassion can then be a way back to the open hand of faith.

Conclusion

In the end, however, nothing is guaranteed. And Cockburn’s final question, which generated for me the metaphor of the clenched fist and open hand, is perhaps the most ambiguous line in the entire song: “If I lose my grip will I take flight?” Cockburn doesn’t ask, Will I fall? His worry isn’t about a downward descent. Indeed, if we read intertextually, he has already fallen. In another song on The Charity of Night, called “The Whole Night Sky,” we find the lines, “hanging from this high wire / by the tatters of my faith.” Falling isn’t the issue at the end of “Strange Waters.” Having already fallen, and so hanging on for dear life, Cockburn asks, “will I take flight?” I find this an immensely hopeful question. Just a few lines earlier in “Strange Waters” Cockburn mentioned “streams of beautiful lights in the night.” Now, “streams” connects with strange “waters” and “streams of beautiful” even sounds like a Hebrew construct phrase (and Cockburn does know his King James Bible which preserves some of that syntax). But the entire phrase “streams of beautiful lights in the night” moves beyond the pastoral image to something more urban and technological. It suggests a landing strip in the dark. Or maybe the strip is for taking off? Having confessed that “You’ve been leading me beside strange waters” (which is the only clear theological affirmation in the song), perhaps Cockburn is asking in his final question whether he can trust that when he lets go, and opens his hand in faith, God will take his hand and the journey will continue.

I can’t answer for Cockburn, but I myself have heard, precisely through Cockburn’s reading of Psalm 23, an invitation to a childlike openness, that knows the darkness—that certainly doesn’t avoid the hard questions—yet can confess beyond (though not without) suspicion that the Lord is my shepherd, and indeed provides just enough light to take off again and continue the journey, open-handed.

Notes

1 This paper has its origins in a short meditation on Psalm 23 given at a conference entitled “Trust and Suspicion—Hermeneutics in a Broken World,” held at the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, ON, May 1997. More developed versions of the paper have been presented to the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies, Université Laval, Québec City, QC, May 2001; and to the Biblical Criticism and Literary Criticism section of the Society of Biblical Literature, Toronto, ON, November 2002.

2 For the full text of Psalm 23 and the lyrics to Cockburn’s “Strange Waters,” see Appendices I and II, respectively. In the oral versions of this paper, I began by playing the song “Strange Waters” and I read Psalm 23 (in the King James Version) over the lead guitar solo following the first chorus. The effect of this juxtaposition cannot, of course, be reproduced in a written paper.

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sin as inscribed on the (individual) human heart (Jeremiah 13:23 and 17:1, 9) and both Jeremiah and Ezekiel portray redemption as the transformation of the heart, the inner (individual) person (Jeremiah 31:33, 32:40; Ezekiel 11:19-20, 18:31, 36:26-27).

For a fuller exploration of the notion of Christian discipleship as faithful improvisation (conceiving Scripture as an unfinished drama in which we must participate), see chap. 8: “The Hope of Our Times” in Middleton and Walsh 1995.


The Sabbath year legislation (found in Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25) instructs Israelites to forgive debts and set free those who became slaves through indebtedness every seventh year. This was meant to embody in Israel’s ethical practice God’s prior generosity to them shown at the exodus, when they were set free from Egyptian bondage. Deuteronomy 15 goes on to apply this principle of generosity beyond the seventh year, making generosity a universal mandate for Israel.

Works Cited

Appendix I

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
3 he restores my soul.
4 He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.
5 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;
6 for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.
7 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
8 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

(NRSV)
CHAPTER NINETEEN

Appendix II

Strange Waters

I've seen a high cairn kissed by holy wind
Seen a mirror pool cut by golden fins
Seen alleys where they hide the truth of cities
The mad whose blessing you must accept without pity

I've stood in airports guarded glass and chrome
Walked rifled roads and landmined loam
Seen a forest in flames right down to the road
Burned in love till I've seen my heart explode

You've been leading me
Beside strange waters

Across the concrete fields of man
Sun ray like a camera pans
Some will run and some will stand
Everything is bullshit but the open hand

You've been leading me
Beside strange waters
Streams of beautiful lights in the night
But where is my pastureland in these dark valleys?
If I loose my grip, will I take flight?

[lead guitar solo]

You've been leading me
Beside strange waters
Streams of beautiful lights in the night
But where is my pastureland in these dark valleys?
If I loose my grip, will I take flight?

Bruce Cockburn, "Strange Waters"
From the album The Charity of Night (1997)

APPENDIX III

PSALM 23 AND THE EXODUS-WILDERNESS TRADITIONS

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing. (Deut. 2:7)

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode. (Exod. 15:13)

3 he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Then he led out his people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. He led them in safety, so that they were not afraid; but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. (Ps. 78:52-53)

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. Our ancestors, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wonderful works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, so that he might make known his mighty power. (Ps. 106:7-8)

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. They did not say, "Where is the LORD, who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?" (Jer. 2:6)

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long. They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" (Ps. 78:19)