6. Cloud-Reading with John Durham Peters's *The Marvelous Clouds* (2015)

Sarah Wasserman

As a child, I prayed to two gods. The first one, known to me through my mother's Catholicism, looked in my imagination like, well, God. I pictured a burly father figure with clouds of white hair and an ample beard: a new-age Ernest Hemingway, Zeus from D'Aulaires's *Book of Greek Myths*, Karl Marx. The god I learned about at temple with my father, though, always appeared in my imagination like a fastidious scientist: he wore wire-rimmed glasses and a white lab coat, like a young Louis Pasteur or perhaps like (the excellently named) August von Wassermann, whose moustache is nearly as remarkable as his research that led to the development of a diagnostic test for syphilis (Fig. 1).

I cringe now to recall how stereotype and convention conditioned my imagination, but I'm also struck by the fact that my "Jewish god" seemed to draw his authority from the scientific knowledge symbolized by his lab coat. There's nothing *right* about these two images of God, the paternal and the professorial (and perhaps nothing wrong), but while dwelling in the pages of John Durham Peters's dazzling 2015 book, *The Marvelous Clouds*, I found my old Jewish chemist-god waltzing across my mind's eye. Why had he returned? And what does any of this have to do with Peters's erudite study that takes readers, as the subtitle promises, "toward a philosophy of elemental media?"

Fig. 1: Portrait of August von Wasserman.

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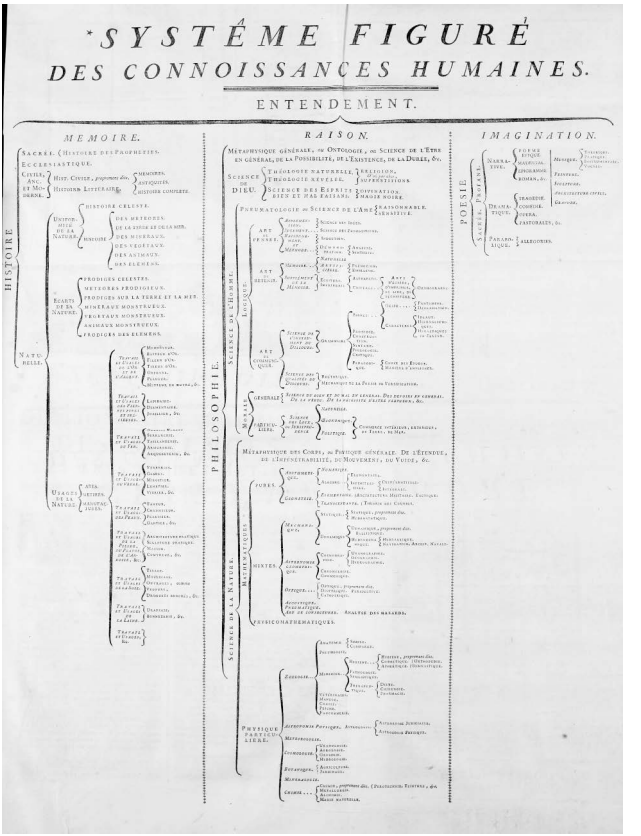
In the concluding chapter of *Marvelous Clouds*, "The Sabbath of Meaning," Peters confesses that his "efforts at crossing disciplinary borders" have caused him "plenty of fear and trembling" (378).[1] After deftly guiding readers through seas full of dolphins, skies full of stars, landscapes dotted by fire, and a panoply of objects including stone tablets, paper scrolls, clocks, calendars, and mobile phones, Peters admits that the project's central goal—to "invite media studies to be friendlier to the natural sciences as well as to theology and philosophy"—still causes him some discomfort (378). The challenges and potential pitfalls of crossing so many disciplinary boundaries are real, not least because within a European context, the humanities and the natural sciences have been separated from one another, and both from religious studies, since the fifteenth century. Diderot's famous *Système Figuré des Connaissances Humaines* ("Map of the System of Human Knowledge," see Fig. 2) from the 1750s—frequently cited as foundational to the division and organization of academic disciplines—in fact resonates with the tentacular reach of Peters's mind. For Diderot, the category "Science of Man" (*science de l'homme*) includes the fields we today call media studies: the "Art of Remembering" (*art de retenir*) and the "Art of Communicating" (*art de communiquer*). All of this falls under the same general heading of "Reason" (*raison*) with, surprisingly enough, "The Science of God" (*science de dieu*). By thinking expansively about media as civilization-ordering devices, Peters reminds us that human experience and meaning don't respect disciplinary divides or historical periodization; the species seeks and creates meaning in stars as well as Snapchats. I guess that's why my lab-coated YHWH has reappeared: he is my personal cipher for the confluence of religion, science, and the humanities, a childhood mascot for the methodological aims Peters's book brings back together.

1 All parenthetical citations in the text refer to John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Towards a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Fig. 2: Diderot's Map of the System of Human Knowledge.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ENC_SYSTEME_FIGURE.jpeg

It's also perhaps because I can't help but recall one of the Hebrew equivalents for cloud, *Anan*, which is marvelous indeed. The term is explained in Rabbinical literature as naming a phenomenon that renders people "pleasant toward one another through prosperity," presumably because clouds bring

rain to nourish crops.[2] This is an apt metaphor for Peters's book, given his efforts to make disparate methods and thinkers "pleasant toward one another." The scholars who inhabit the landscape of cultural criticism should welcome such *Anan*. Broadly intellectual, Peters's approach is technology-literate but also environmentally-attuned and literary in its sensibilities. By bringing a hermeneutic spirit as well as historical depth into the sometimes-arid terrain of communications or technology-driven media studies, *The Marvelous Clouds* … makes it rain. This is what Peters would call "a real howler." In the current moment, when literary studies and media studies continue to overlap, Peters's book draws upon both without collapsing the core of each discipline. He cites familiar, foundational media scholars and, like Marshall McLuhan and Friedrich Kittler, explores the way that every medium extends and changes the human sensorium. But in *The Marvelous Clouds*, Peters is not narrowly bound to media as technological devices or systems; in this way he takes a running leap from the springboard of McLuhan and Kittler, vaulting into our present internet age carrying all the tools of the past along with him. Peters draws particular inspiration from an unlikely historical source, one that is usually seen as antithetical to media studies: American transcendentalism. Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson serve as models who knew "the splendor and strangeness of being a humanoid in this particular cosmos" (43). Like them, Peters seeks to be a student of "anthropozoic comminglings" (43).

Given the book's environmental concerns, the transcendentalists are logical muses. *The Marvelous Clouds* tracks the convergence of nature and culture: it argues that our environment (the sea, the sky) has always been made of media and that technological media saturate the atmosphere so that they become environmental—an argument more urgent than ever given the current reality of climate change. Media, for Peters, are ontological as well as semiotic. They are not only *about* the world, they *are* the world. The sea, for instance, is not a natural entity that ebbs and flows outside all human influence; for Peters, "the ocean is the medium of all media, the fountain from which all life on earth emerged" (54). The sea's cetaceans teach us how environment shapes mind and body. While whales and dolphins and vampire squids flourish at sea, humans can survive at sea only by ship, what Peters describes as "the archetype of artifice become nature, craft become environment" (102). In addition to a

2 *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "cloud," accessed June 29, 2020, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4424-cloud.

chapter on the sea and seafaring, the book covers fire and technologies of domestication; the sky and astronomical and meteorological practices of timekeeping and forecasting; the earth and techniques of writing and storage; as well as operations of memory, searching, and navigating information overload. If, as these chapters suggest, media comprise the entire infrastructure underwriting human existence, then media studies must encompass theology along with science and technology, the science of God and the science of man.

Beyond its disciplinary-smashing ambitions, it's easy to imagine why *The Marvelous Clouds* might interest literary scholars. The emphasis Peters puts on writing (the noun, not the verb) offers compelling fodder for book historians and anyone interested in what is happening to books as they become increasingly digital things. Spoiler alert: "Defining a book is as difficult as defining a language, and Google revives a way to think about both: they are networks" (323). More than just broadening the typical things that literary critics want to do with network analysis—trace relays between publishers and readers, or visualize contacts between characters in plays—Peters's book has important implications for how professional readers of literature read. Here, the mists of *Anan* helpfully roll in. Peters attends to each medium, be it sundial or no-smoking sign, with historical and material specificity. But the metaphysical nature of his claim that "expression and existence merge" (15) means that alongside such precise analysis lies the overarching sense that similarity and contiguity are as powerful as difference. If we see media as elemental, we can better recognize productive relays and slippages between device and environment, object and subject, past and present. Peters's goal is not so much a "flat ontology" à la Latour than, well, as Bob Ross might put it: a happy little cloud (Fig. 3). Through this silly metaphor I mean to capture something of what I find so compelling about Peters's model of the world. Peters isn't just espousing a friendly hippie sense that the planet would fare better if humans better understood their interdependence with plants, animals, and the elements, but is acting as a generous guru of technique, inviting us to tune in and see how it's done. Peters's protocols for reading are broad and close and deep: on container technologies, for instance, he ranges from the Ancient Greeks to twentieth-century urban studies, from the *Genizot* where unused Hebrew religious texts are stored to agricultural monocultures that have changed human food habits. With precision and immense breadth and openness to the histories and traditions of media studies, Peters foregoes a

shallow digital field and instead tills a landscape as plentiful as the ones Bob Ross paints.

Fig. 3: Bob Ross at his easel

Source: "Bob Ross Mystic Mountain (High Quality) Season 20 Episode," Dailymotion Video, https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3d66l2

What's more, Peters's insistence on co-existence—of creatures, histories, and disciplines—works against the note of discord that has been sounding in recent conversations about literary method. In the first two decades of this century, a dizzying array of supposedly new methods have come to define literary studies. Big data, surface reading, postcritique, new materialisms, new formalism, and the digital humanities name just a few of the methodological imperatives that scholars have developed to innovate literary studies and push disciplinary boundaries. Recent debates about what interpretation can and should look like in the twenty-first century have led some scholars to suggest that literary and cultural critics are embroiled in "method wars." Rita Felski has argued that method debates have taken center stage following the era of high theory and the subsequent entrenchment of historicism.[3] This concept of a method war depends in large part upon a sense that these methods are new—that the attention to "non-literary" objects, the curation

3 Rita Felski, "Interpretation and Its Rivals: Introduction," *New Literary History* 45, no. 2 (Spring 2014): v–xi.

of digital archives, and the expansion of algorithmic analysis represents a meaningful shift from earlier modes of study. My own sense (and here I'll be presumptuous enough to say that I think Peters would agree) is that this adversarial angle obscures many continuities, both between recent and older methods and across seemingly different methodologies. You say surface; I say symptom. You say big data; I say new formalism. Or as Peters might put it: all of it can be accommodated within the current ecumenical state of cultural studies.

The polemical crackle and pop of recent methodological conversations in literary studies has, as Julie Orlemanski notes, been largely in excess of any substantial difference in practice.[4] Even as scholars trumpet correction, revision, novelty, and plucky push-back against methodological hegemons, they in fact offer very modest changes in how literary studies actually gets done. In an article about the many lessons queer theory has to teach us about "method melodramas," David Kurnick deftly argues that method manifestos "offer not new ways to interpret texts but new ways to feel about ourselves when we do."[5] This seems right to me insofar as the "new" offerings of literary method often focus on critics' attitudes rather than whether or not they should continue to read closely, historicize, and contextualize: be generous, not suspicious; be modest, not heroic; be attentive, not adversarial. The growing infatuation on the part of literary critics with media studies may be motivated, at least in part, by fatigue with all of these injunctions. Certainly the burgeoning attention to materiality and the ubiquity of digitality have compelled scholars of literature to look to media studies. But seen from the shores of literary studies, media studies offers a relatively peaceful reprieve from methodological infighting. This is not to say that there are no disagreements in media studies—about which objects to study or how to study them—but less ink has been spilled of late pitting one method against another. *The Marvelous Clouds* says to readers, "more, not less." Peters's approach is expansive and inclusive, but his commitment to precision even in trans-temporal, trans-cultural study means that he does more than simply glop about in the "honey of the media concept [that] is being smeared all over the place" (10). Rather he tells us that we'd best think bee, beekeeper, and honey all together.

4 Julie Orlemanski, "What Our Notions are Made Of" (Lecture, Annual MLA Conference, Chicago, IL, January 13, 2019).

5 David Kurnick, "A Few Lies: Queer Theory and Our Method Melodramas," *ELH* 87, no. 2 (Summer 2020): 349–374, here 351.

What does this actually look like in practice? And what could it look like in practice for scholars examining poems or novels? Let me consider one example that suggests what Peters's method has to do with the Jewish god I ushered on stage above. In a chapter entitled "Lights in the Firmament: Sky Media (*Chronos*)," Peters surveys the various media that have filled the sky and examines "our current celestial predicament" by "sketch[ing] its long prelude in cyclical and linear sky media such as clocks, calendars, and their celestial sources, and punctual or fractal sky media such as towers, bells, weather, and clouds" (167). Calendars, Peters notes, play a central role in religious ritual for Christians as well as Muslims, Buddhists as well as Jews. In a single paragraph, Peters moves from the Qumram sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls (who resisted the Greek lunisolar calendar) to the prophets of Y2K doom, drawing a long line through this history in which "every calendar invites resistance" (193). Peters is most interested in this section in the Jewish calendar that uses both the sun and the phases of the moon and also has a curious history of being governed by central authority. (The diaspora calendar used to be coordinated by flares and messengers from the Sanhedrin in Jabneh.) The sky sets our calendars, which determine our rituals and our religions. Or is it the other way around, the sky determining rituals and religions, which then shape the calendar? In Peters's account and in true dialectic fashion, it is both: media are elemental precisely because they are the moon and the month, the stars and the Sabbath. The convergence of theological and hermeneutic traditions in such analysis makes Peters's approach to media helpful for literary scholars; it also makes theology and science helpful to one another. Planetary rotation and belief in the gods matter equally in this story of time-keeping; a meaningful understanding of calendars requires engagement with both.

This example illustrates how *The Marvelous Clouds* reminds readers of the exciting and historically provocative ways in which literary and cultural texts are always embedded in media systems—what we read, be it calendar or novel, always comes to us through and as media. The example also points to a kind of reading that might today feel somewhat alien to literary scholars for the way that it moves across many levels and traditions of thought. When Peters reads the Jewish calendar, we are left to wonder: is this surface reading, since he is just telling us what the calendar looks like and what it does? Is it depth, since he uncovers hidden meanings that an average reader wouldn't perceive? Is it comparative, insofar as he places the Jewish calendar in context among many other calendars? Or is it theological, as he teases out the mythic significance that the calendar holds for the human species? Of course we can

pose the grumpier version of the question: who told John he's allowed to read in all these ways at once? Surely he has to choose one, plant a methodological flag, delineate a single approach for the rest of us mere mortals to use in our own research! Such questions not only reveal the limits of the method wars, they also bring to mind a much older tradition of reading that I can't help but see at work in *The Marvelous Clouds*.

In the late thirteenth century, the term *Pardes* first appeared in the writings of Spanish rabbi and Kabbalist Moses de León (known in Hebrew as Moshe ben Shem-Tov).[6] Pardes, frequently written as PaRDeS, refers to a set of layered approaches to biblical exegesis in rabbinic Judaism. The term is an acronym formed from the initials of four ways to interpret the text in Torah study (Fig. 4). As readers proceed through each of the four methods in the order indicated by the acronym, they perform a more intense level of interpretation, revealing the meaning of the text at hand as if they are peeling back the layers of an onion.[7] First up, *P'shat* is the plain, simple meaning of the text. Much like surface reading, *P'shat* looks at the literal meaning of scripture, seeking the customary meanings of the words used in their original historical and cultural setting.[8] Next, *Remez*, which means "hint," is something like reading for depth and uncovering the implied meaning of a text. For example, while *P'shat* would read Proverbs 20:10, "Different weights, and different measures, both of them are alike an abomination to the Lord," as a statement about merchants using the same scale to weigh goods for all of his customers, *Remez* understands this line to be about the importance of fairness and honesty in life more generally.[9] *D'rash*, the next level of reading, means

6 *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Leon, Moses (Ben Shem-Tob) De," accessed June 29, 2020, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9767-leon-moses-ben-shem-tob-de.

7 In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson discusses the medieval system of biblical exegesis that proceeds along four levels similar to those of Pardes. The four levels include literal reading, allegorical reading, moral reading, and anagogical reading (uncovering the political message or "collective meaning of history" from the text). Jameson notes that this medieval system served a practical function in late antiquity, "its ideological mission as a strategy for assimilating the Old Testament to the New, for rewriting the Jewish textual and cultural heritage in a form usable for Gentiles." Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (New York: Routledge, 1983), 14–16.

8 *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Peshat," accessed June 29, 2020, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12060-peshat.

9 See "The Rules of *Pardes*" at http://www.yashanet.com/studies/revstudy/Pardes.htm, accessed June 29, 2020.

"concept," but points toward something like a comparative reading. It usually entails the exposition of the *P'shat* and the *Remez*, and often involves combining unrelated verses in allegorical ways.[10] Finally, *Sod* (also written as *Sud*), "secret" or "hidden," is the divine meaning that is given through revelation.[11] *Sod* holds that the Torah contains divine secrets that can only be laid bare by patient readers open and attuned to the mystical sense given by the Kabbalah. In some traditions, *Sod* involves "returning" the letters of a word to a material state and giving them new form—such as numeric values—in order to reveal a hidden meaning.[12]

Fig. 4: Guide to Pardes

PARDES: Orchard, Garden

Hebrew	Letter	Meaning
פְּשָׁט	(p)	*P'shat*: simple, literal
רֶמֶז	(r)	*Remez:* hint, suggestion
דְּרַשׁ	(d)	*D'rash*: insight
סוֹד	(s)	*Sod:* mystery

Chart by author. For more, see https://www.hebrew4christians.com/Articles/Seventy_Faces/seventy_faces.html

10 *Jewish Encyclopedia*, *s.v.* "Biblical Exegesis," accessed June 29, 2020, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3263-bible-exegesis#anchor29.

11 Given Peters's interest in American transcendentalism, it's a happy coincidence that Emily Dickinson's poem "I never lost as much but twice," in which the poet arrives at God's door to ask for the return of her two deceased friends, includes a reference to (secular) sod: "I never lost as much but twice / And that was in the sod. / Twice have I stood a beggar / Before the door of God." Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1924), 201.

12 Chaim Potok's 1967 novel *The Chosen* features vivid scenes of a Rabbi's son, Reuven Malter, and his friend Daniel Saunders, learning *Sod* from Reuven's father.

Admittedly, Pardes makes of texts some pretty weird onions. But this fourfold way of reading has always informed the secular hermeneutics of new historicism, new formalism, new materialism or the new whateverism that is popular by the time this essay is published. Kabbalah and related traditions of biblical hermeneutics have long given literary theory and interpretation its root structure; why not media studies too? Walter Benjamin, a favorite and foundational thinker for media scholars, was deeply interested in the Kabbalah. Benjamin's correspondence with Gershom Sholem, the German-born Israeli philosopher who is widely regarded as the founder of the modern, academic study of the Kabbalah, attests to this interest. As Susan Buck-Morss details in *The Dialectics of Seeing*, Kabbalist thought provided for Benjamin "an alternative to the philosophical antinomies of not only Baroque Christian theology, but also subjective idealism, its secular, Enlightenment form. Specifically, Kabbalism avoided the split between spirit and matter … and it rejected the notion that redemption was an antimaterial, otherworldly concern."[13] It's not difficult to think of Benjamin's readings—of German tragic drama and Baudelaire, but also of train stations, World's Fairs and Mickey Mouse—as Kabbalistic. Benjamin's attempt to locate the past flashing up in the wish images of the present feels often like a mystical mode of cognition, one that reveals the previously concealed truths within nature and shows how they are meaningful in a Messianic Age (for Benjamin, and in Marxist terms, a just, classless society).[14] The Kabbalah, as Buck-Morss argues, offered Benjamin a "metaphysical base for revolutionary pedagogy vital to Marxian politics, but it is expressed in the fully secular, historically specific discourse of women's fashions and street traffic."[15]

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13 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 230.

14 On this point, Scholem writes: "A totally different concept of redemption determines the attitude to Messianism in Judaism and Christianity … Judaism, in all its forms and manifestations, has always maintained a concept of redemption as an event which takes place publicly, on the stage of history and within the community …. In contrast, Christianity conceives of redemption as an event in the spiritual and unseen realm, an event which is reflected in the soul, in the private world of each individual, and which effects and inner transformation which need not correspond to anything outside." Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 1.

15 Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing*, 232.

Before I fall too far from the clouds into the rabbit hole of Benjamin's Messianism, I want to simply stress that, strange as Pardes may sound, there is often (if not always) a bit of mysticism in a reading that compels or moves us. When a scholar shows us the deep well of meaning that inheres in a poem or a map or a mirror or a search engine, we thrill at the knowledge they share but also, perhaps, at the sense that such knowledge might be the key to another way of being. This is precisely what Stephen Best, Heather Love, and Sharon Marcus have critiqued in their work on surface reading and thick description. To them, such mysticism can seem to be the preserve of an empowered (white, male) elder rather than a democratically available, albeit disenchanted reading process.[16] But I think it's possible to see Pardes not as a way to claim such power or assert the self-aggrandizing mastery Rita Felski describes as a hallmark of literary critics doing close reading; it can instead entail humility in the face of a text that contains multitudes. Pardes serves as a model for reading in more ways than one, for remembering that until we contextualize, compare, *and* read closely, we have yet to really understand a text. And even when we've done all that, the text will exceed our analysis, evading capture like a cloud that changes shape just as soon as we've seen in it a dragon or a knight. Peters's approach evokes Pardes insofar as it historicizes widely and interprets deeply while still creating room for a little bit of magic to float to the top. That's yet another reason why *The Marvelous Clouds* is a book for our current critical moment. As media and literary scholars alike work to understand networks of media and meaning in new, often seemingly empirical ways, they (re)-discover a kind of magical object: a novel, an image, even a device that continues to move us even after it has been run through an algorithm or pressed into a spreadsheet. The *D'rash* of Peters's readings, cutting across large swaths of culture and time, puts our newest devices in a long arc of media that dismantles whatever Silicon Valley hegemony might be lingering in media studies; his *Sod* reminds us that media (and readings of media) still have the power to enchant us, even when they have been rigorously analyzed.[17]

16 See Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1–21; Sharon Marcus, Heather Love, and Stephen Best, "Building a Better Description," *Representations* 135, no. 1 (2016): 1–21; and Heather Love, "Close but not Deep: Literary Ethics and the Descriptive Turn," *New Literary History* 41, no. 2 (2010): 371–391.

17 An unlikely but memorable example of such "enchanted" media comes at the beginning of Thomas Pynchon's 1965 novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*. A can of hairspray menaces

It may sound as though I'm enamored of Peters's work because its magical mystery tour of media allows for a benevolent humanism, one blind to the urgent political concerns of the day. Peters is explicit that his argument has implications for the environment, but thinking about Pardes reminds me that criticism can be additive, harmonizing, a humble but meaningful exercise in imagining a better world. This is what Edward Said says is the task of literary scholarship in his essay, "Secular Criticism" (an *ur*-text of debates on method worth revisiting). There, Said writes that "criticism must think of itself as life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination, and abuse; its social goals are noncoercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom."[18] The generous alchemy of *The Marvelous Clouds*, its desire to take different forms of knowing seriously and to explain how they congeal in our oldest media and our newest, *feels* "life-enhancing." Instead of method wars, Peters ushers in method peace. This is not an unprincipled stand, a wishy-washy everything goes approach; instead it's a way of asking whether everything possible—all the contexts and cultures, including those outside our own purview—has been taken into account. It's no coincidence that Pardes means orchard in Hebrew. The English word PaRaDiSe comes from the same Persian root *Pardis*, an ancient word for an enclosed garden.[19] This root reminds us that enclosure isn't only unfreedom—it is also structure that facilitates flourishing, an apt metaphor for the productive delimitation of fields and expertise. Combined with the drift and lift of clouds—*Anan*—we have the potential to produce meaningful knowledge while also seeing our enclosures with more perspective, and more wonder. Peters's clouds are marvelous because they show us media studies as plenitude, not poverty. Literary scholars should take note.

This is just one more way in which Peters's book is timely for scholars in the humanities. As neoliberal rationalization and austerity measures are

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the protagonist, Oedipa Maas, when she knocks it over in a hotel bathroom: "The can hit the floor, something broke, and with a great outsurge of pressure the stuff commenced atomizing, propelling the can swiftly around the bathroom. … The can knew where it was going, she sensed, or something fast enough, *God or a digital machine*, might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel." Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000), 24 (emphasis added).

18 Edward Said, "Introduction: Secular Criticism," in *The World, The Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 29.

19 *OED* Online, s.v. "paradise, n.," accessed June 26, 2020.

forced upon universities by a global pandemic, the humanities are compressed into smaller and more enclosed spaces. While actively resisting such downsizing, we can also consider the conceptual effects of contraction and disciplinary proximity. It gives us an opportunity to learn from each other's ways of reading the world, demanding that we become less parochial and also giving us common ground from which to fight cuts and reductions. Peters's work suggests it might be time to look for inspiration toward theology, the form of study foundational to the modern university that has been most banished from the sciences and the humanities alike. Theology and its methods help Peters describe integrative aesthetics and encounter the integrated world as finite and vulnerable in ways that inspire secular critics. And truth be told, when it comes to religion, Peters knows Judaism better than I do. Though it's a part of my identity and my experience in the world, it turns out that having two different gods often results in having none at all. Whatever beliefs I once held have long faded, along with both my bearded god and the mustachioed one. But when Peters discusses the Jewish calendar, Jewish scrolls, the *Shofar*, or Hebrew scripture, he validates my sneaking suspicion that one reason I study literature has to do with my religious background. Funny how in Peters's hands, the Jewish hermeneutics I dismissed as too odd and too religious when I was a teenager have renewed appeal. You don't need to believe in god or in Pardes or even in media studies to believe the lesson of *The Marvelous Clouds*: that "the world does not need to be re-enchanted; it is already wondrous" (381).