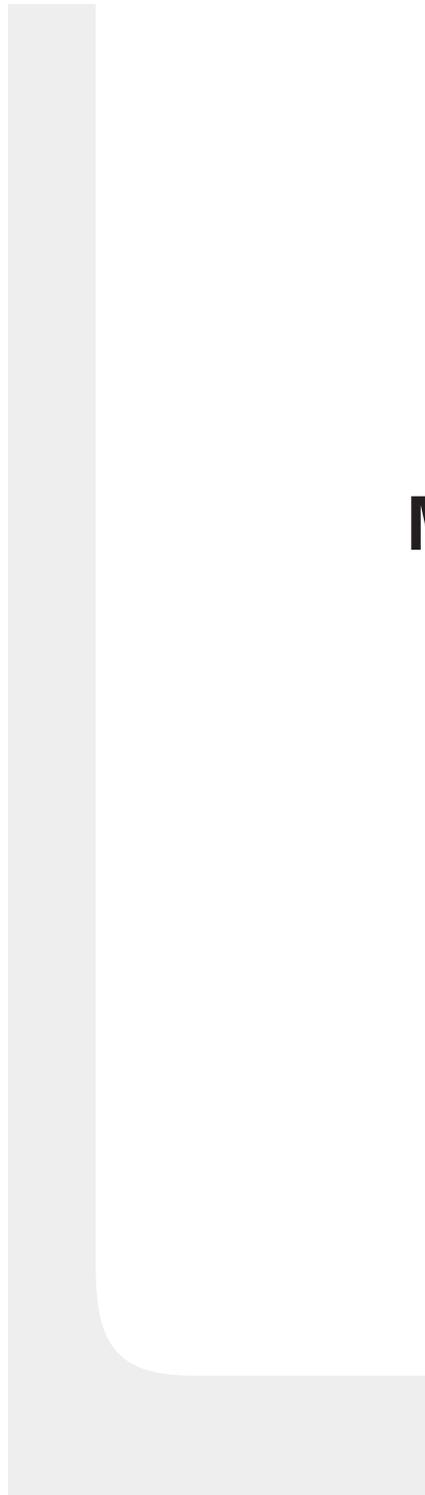


We asked the candidate what her dream course would be, and she said she would like to teach a course in “theory and—and, um—” (there was a long silence) “theory and *nontheory*.” Our chair asked, “*nontheory*, what’s that?” And she said, “well, *nontheory*—like, *you* know, poems, stories, plays.” And he said, “Oh yes, what we used to call literature.”¹

Literary “theory” was pronounced dead today by the Association of Literary Scholars and Critics’ Ad Hoc Committee on the Status of Interpretation.²

Theory itself is only too happy to witness the passing of Theory. Nothing stimulates the production of Theory like the proclamation of its own death.³



**THEORY
AND
METHODOLOGY**

Theory's Obituaries

By the mid-1980s, poststructuralism had become the dominant discourse in U.S. literary studies⁴—a rather sad and curious fate for a congeries of critical positions that, collectively, made so much of the marginal and the peripheral and relentlessly subjected dominant discourses to principled interrogation.⁵ Eugene Goodheart, long a critic of poststructuralism, nuances its ascent in the 1970s and 1980s:

What I am describing did not occur everywhere in the academy. I suspect that many institutions of higher learning in the country have not experienced an academic transformation, and that there are still places where the older traditions of teaching prevail. . . . But the transformation did take place in the leading institutions which have a disproportionate influence not only on the academic, but also on the cultural life generally.⁶

1. Sandra Gilbert, "New Uses for Old Boys: An Interview with Sandra Gilbert," in *Professions: Conversations on the Future of Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Donald E. Hall (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 252.

2. Michael Bérubé, "Literary Theory Is Dead and I Feel Fine," January 28, 2004: http://www.michaelberube.com/index.php/weblog/literary_theory_is_dead_and_i_feel_fine/ (accessed May 14, 2010).

3. Martin McQuillan, Graeme MacDonald, Robin Purves, and Stephen Thomson, "The Joy of Theory," in *Post-Theory: New Directions in Criticism*, ed. Martin McQuillan et al. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), ix.

4. "Literary studies" is a term of convenience. "Departments of literary studies" are few or non-existent, at any rate in the Anglophone world. The term "literary studies," as ordinarily used, denotes the bread-and-butter activity of modern language departments (English, French, Spanish, etc.) and departments of comparative literature.

5. Deconstruction was the most visible variant of poststructuralism, and entailed the dismantling of "metaphysical" concepts (origin, essence, identity, etc.) and hierarchical oppositions (presence/absence, central/marginal, masculine/feminine, etc.); exposure of the exclusions, omissions, and blind spots that enable texts, and entire societies, to function; and analysis of the ways in which literary, critical, and philosophical arguments are destabilized by the figural language (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, etc.) on which they rely. The next most prominent variant of poststructuralism in the mid-1980s was the Foucauldian; in the succeeding decade, however, it would come to overshadow the deconstructive variants. It specialized in unearthing the constructedness of some of the most-solid seeming features of the Western cultural landscape, not least sexuality. Accessible introductions to poststructuralism include Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and James Williams, *Understanding Poststructuralism* (Chesham, U.K.: Acumen, 2005).

6. Eugene Goodheart, *Does Literary Studies Have a Future?* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 20–21.

The institutionalization of poststructuralism within the Modern Language Association⁷ received vivid symbolic expression in 1986 with the election of arch-deconstructionist J. Hillis Miller to its presidency. For quite some time, in short, poststructuralism has occupied a role in U.S. literary studies not unlike that of historical criticism in biblical studies as the *sine qua non* for initiation into the discipline.

Poststructuralism has also long epitomized “high theory” in literary studies—or “Theory” as we shall term it for convenience. Poststructuralism’s relationship to Theory has generally been synecdochic, the part standing in for the whole.⁸ It is no accident that Theory’s most visible early outing as a term was in Jonathan Culler’s *On Deconstruction*, a book that arguably did more than any other to popularize deconstruction, a frequent synecdoche in turn for poststructuralism, in Anglo-American literary studies. As the book opens we find Culler ruminating on how “works of literary theory are [now] closely and vitally related to other writings within a domain as yet unnamed but often called ‘theory’ for short. This domain is not ‘literary theory,’” continues Culler, “since many of its most interesting works do not explicitly address literature. . . . [T]he most convenient designation is simply the name ‘theory.’”⁹ More recently, Culler has defined Theory as an umbrella term for “discourses that come to exercise influence outside their apparent disciplinary realm because they offer new and persuasive characterizations of problems or phenomena of general interest: language, consciousness, meaning, nature and culture, the functioning of the psyche, the relations of individual experience to larger structures, and so on.”¹⁰

Since the 1980s, the term “Theory,” at once vague and specific, has stood in for a paradoxically expansive yet selective body of work: Russian formalism, French structuralism, semiotics, poststructuralism, deconstruction, Lacanian and post-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory,

7. The principal professional association within the field(s) of literary studies, its annual convention regularly attracting more than ten thousand attendees.

8. In hindsight it is being asked why Theory was “collapsed into the synecdoche of poststructuralism” and whether it even makes sense to postulate poststructuralism as a “unitary phenomenon.” See Judith Butler, John Guillory, and Kendall Thomas, “Preface,” in *What’s Left of Theory? New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory*, ed. Judith Butler et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), viii.

9. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 8.

10. Jonathan Culler, *The Literary in Theory* (Cultural Memory in the Present; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007), 4.

assorted Marxisms and neo-Marxisms, reader-response criticism and *Rezeptionsästhetik*, “French feminist theory” (more precisely, *écriture féminine*), “third-wave” feminist theory, gender studies, queer theory, New Historicism, cultural materialism, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and (academic) postmodernism *tout court*, along with carefully selected slices of what is known (often polemically) as “continental philosophy.” Theory’s national origins are thus seen to lie quite specifically in a transatlantic alliance between France and the United States with walk-on parts for a few Russians, Germans, and Italians, and a brief detour through Birmingham (England, not Alabama) for cultural studies. Theory’s A-list has included such assorted luminaries as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, Paul de Man, Edward Said, Fredric Jameson, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Judith Butler, Homi Bhabha, Slavoj Žižek, and Donna Haraway, to name but a few representative figures. Theory does not include figures like Jung or Weber; it may not even include figures like Adorno or Habermas.¹¹ And though its corpus is corpulent and expansive, Theory is hardly a single body. In its relatively short life it has seen as many sectarian schisms as post-Reformation Christianity. Proponents of cultural materialism, say, are as prone to parody New Historicists, or neo-Marxists to parody postcolonial theorists, as evangelical Christians are to parody Roman Catholics—or other evangelical Christians. Not surprisingly, therefore, attacks on Theory have been equally conflicted, with Theory serving as a repository for mutually exclusive accusations. Charged with being at once too high (arcane, scholastic, esoteric) and too low (vulgar, materialist, pop-cultural), Theory has become a target for both “right” and “left,” at once too “politically correct” and too apolitical, remote, and disengaged.

Thus far we have been writing as though Theory still ruled the roost in literary studies, but its hold has slackened, seemingly, in recent years. “High theory,” epitomized by poststructuralist theory, is currently in a state of perceived decline. In the field of literary studies, book titles such as *Post-Theory*, *After Theory*, *Reading after Theory*, and *What’s Left*

11. For the filleted version of Theory and what it excludes, see Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now: A Study in the Cultures of Theory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 1.

of *Theory*?¹² suggest that Theory is currently croaking its last gasp—though closer inspection suggests that certain of those trumpeting Theory’s demise most loudly may also be standing over Theory with a pillow, intent on bringing about the very death they are describing. Even for the authors of these would-be obituaries, however,¹³ what has taken or will take Theory’s place is still veiled from view, awaiting apocalypse. Introducing *After Theory*, eponymous exemplar of the “after Theory” phenomenon and arguably its most influential product, Terry Eagleton cautions:

Those to whom the title of this book suggests that “theory” is now over, and that we can all relievedly return to an age of pre-theoretical innocence, are in for a disappointment. There can be no going back to an age when it was enough to pronounce Keats delectable or Milton a doughty spirit. It is not as though the whole project was a ghastly mistake on which some merciful soul has now blown the whistle, so that we can all return to whatever it was we were doing before Ferdinand de Saussure heaved over the horizon.¹⁴

12. McQuillan et al., *Post-Theory*; Thomas Docherty, *After Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic, 2003); Valentine Cunningham, *Reading after Theory* (Blackwell Manifestos; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002); Butler, Guillory, and Thomas, *What’s Left of Theory?* See also Jacques Derrida, Frank Kermode, Toril Moi, and Christopher Norris, *Life.after.theory* (New York: Continuum, 2004), a book whose engagement with the “after Theory” debate is more oblique. For the proceedings of a particularly public would-be postmortem on Theory conducted in Chicago in April 2003 by a particularly distinguished group of Theorists, see “The Future of Criticism: A Critical Inquiry Symposium,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 324–483. As the editors of *Post-Theory* astutely remark, the death of Theory seems to have become “a persistent theme in Theory” (McQuillan et al., “The Joy of Theory,” ix, their emphasis). With the announced demise of Theory in general, moreover, questions are now being asked as to whether specific types of Theory, some until recently deemed hale and hearty, are also at death’s door; see, for example, “The End of Postcolonial Theory? A Roundtable with Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamadou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu, and Jennifer Wenzel,” *PMLA* 122 (2007): 633–51.

13. Speaking of obituaries, see in addition Paul Bové, *In the Wake of Theory* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), and Barbara Johnson, *The Wake of Deconstruction* (The Bucknell Lectures in Literary Theory, 11; Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

14. Eagleton, *After Theory*, 1–2. Further still on Theory’s rise and alleged decline, see Dwight Eddins, ed., *The Emperor Redressed: Critiquing Critical Theory* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995); Wendell V. Harris, *Beyond Poststructuralism: The*

The very debate engendered by Eagleton and others, however, serves to create a sense of Theory as, at the very least, an “obtrusive ghost” in literary studies.¹⁵

Or is it literature instead that is the ghost in literary studies? “A specter is haunting the academy, the specter of literature,” Marjorie Perloff announced in her 2006 MLA presidential address.¹⁶ She was lamenting the dramatic demise of literary knowledge among students of literature. “I have heard graduate students discussing the vagaries of Romantic self-consciousness in Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind,’” she complains, “who cannot tell you what an ode is, what apostrophe is, or why (much less how) this one is written in terza rima.”¹⁷ She continues: “But whose fault is this? Not that of theory, for consider . . . the excellent theorists, from Roman Jakobson and William Empson to Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva, who have written superb critical commentary on particular poems.”¹⁸ The problem with these unlettered students of literature, it would seem, is that they swallow the Theory but spit out the criticism, and with it the literariness of the literary work. Precisely two decades, then, after J. Hillis Miller’s deconstructive MLA presidential address, which, as we noted earlier, marked the official arrival of Theory, flushed with triumph, in the literary studies academy,¹⁹ Perloff’s MLA

Speculations of Theory and the Experience of Reading (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996); and especially Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral, eds., *Theory’s Empire: An Anthology of Dissent* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), about which we have much to say below.

15. Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Future of Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 10.

16. Marjorie Perloff, “Presidential Address 2006: It Must Change,” *PMLA* 122 (2007): 658.

17. *Ibid.* Biblical-scholarly versions of this lament would not be hard to imagine: “I have heard graduate students discussing the vagaries of rhetorical purpose in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians who cannot tell you what forensic rhetoric is, how it differs from epideictic or deliberative rhetoric, or why (much less how) Paul adapts all or any of these oratorical techniques in his letter. . . .”

18. *Ibid.* Here Perloff is echoing Terry Eagleton’s *How to Read a Poem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 2. She begins this section of her address by quoting one of Eagleton’s opening quips: “I first thought of writing this book when I realized that hardly any of the students of literature I encountered these days practiced what I myself had been trained to regard as literary criticism. Like thatching or clog dancing, literary criticism seems to be something of a dying art” (*ibid.*, 1).

19. Delivered in 1986, the address was published the following year as J. Hillis Miller, “The Triumph of Theory, the Resistance to Reading, and the Question of the Material Base,” *PMLA* 102 (1987): 281–91.

presidential address is attempting, politely but firmly, to help Theory into its coat and usher it out the door as a guest that has overstayed its welcome.²⁰ Indeed, Perloff, like Eagleton, is convinced that Theory is, in any case, already on its way out. She notes how not so long ago,

“everyone” had to know Marx and Freud, Benjamin and Adorno, Foucault and Derrida, Lacan and Kristeva. But increasingly this Eurocentric theory has come to seem less than adequate for dealing with the growing body of minority, transnational, and postcolonial literature, and so poststructuralist theory is being replaced by critical race studies and related models, but so eclectic have the categories become that in most colleges and universities there is now no theory requirement at all.²¹

Perloff may, however, be indulging in wishful thinking here; for prominent among these “related models” are sundry politicized forms of poststructuralism, however eclectic and generic that poststructuralism may have become in the process of its dissemination and politicization. The problem for Theory-weary discontents like Perloff is that Theory has seeped so deeply into the soil of literary studies that it is now all but impossible to dig around or under it. Michael Bérubé argues the case with regard to deconstruction, once Theory’s most alluring product, now hopelessly outdated, even dead, yet still eerily alive:

[Y]ou don’t really need to know this or that text by Derrida in order to make your way through graduate school or the profession at large. However, and this is a seriously italic “however,” you should be aware that deconstruction has seeped into the groundwater of the discipline, even as the term itself lost any distinct referent long ago. It has been “disseminated,” in fact, in just the way that deconstruction itself suggests: the word is now floating around

20. Theory’s first conspicuous sighting in America is commonly dated to 1966 (see p. 16 below), two decades before Miller’s presidential address. The tale of Theory in America, then, is one whose plot unfolds in twenty-year cycles so regular as to cause the pulse of a premillennial dispensationalist to race.

21. Perloff, “Presidential Address 2006,” 656.

out there, and cannot be recalled to its point of origin. . . . You don't need to be able to cite Derrida's *Dissemination* chapter and verse. But you do need to know what a deconstructive argument looks and sounds like, and you need to know what implicit and explicit claims are at stake in such an argument, because you will encounter these arguments in essays and books where they will not declare their names. . . . [O]ver the past thirty years, these arguments have been as common as rain, and they've seeped into the disciplinary groundwater.²²

Even if deconstruction and other forms of Theory can in some sense be said to be "dead," then, in no sense can they be said to be gone.

Reports of Theory's recent or imminent demise, in any case, even assuming they are not exaggerated,²³ are not good news, it seems to us, for biblical critics with pronounced interests in literary studies. For Theory has long functioned as a kind of lingua franca in our particular sector of the humanities. The absorption of "Theory" back into "reading" and the corresponding decentering of Theory and Theoreticians in favour of a renewed foregrounding of literature and literary authors may be cheering news indeed for Theory-weary literary critics, but hardly for biblical literary critics restlessly searching for ever-new angles on the same old set of texts. For the lightning bolt of inspiration is, on the whole, far more likely to strike the biblical critic browsing works with such titles as *Deconstructions: A User's Guide*, or *Queer Studies: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, or *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism* than browsing works with such titles as *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, or *Jane Austen's Letters*, or *T. S. Eliot: His Mind and Personality*.²⁴

22. Michael Bérubé, "Conventional Wisdom," *Profession* (2009): 17–18, n. 1.

23. Colin Davis, for one, in *After Poststructuralism: Reading, Stories and Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), argues that such reports are exaggerated and that Theory will continue to play a crucial role in the humanities. So too Peter Barry, whose *Continuing Theory* (3rd ed.; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) also engages the "after Theory" debate. As the book's title suggests, Barry is himself not ready to pull the plug on Theory. Neither are the contributors to Derek Attridge and Jane Elliott, eds., *Theory after "Theory"* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), a recent major collection that projects a rich (after)life for Theory beyond the older poststructuralisms.

24. Nicholas Royle, ed., *Deconstructions: A User's Guide* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); Robert J. Corber and Stephen Valocchi, eds., *Queer Studies: An Inter-*

In biblical studies, in any case, Theory hardly faces the same mortal threat as in literary studies. Theory can hardly be said to have risen to sufficiently Luciferian heights in biblical studies to undergo any meaningful fall. Rather than being cast from the celestial heights, it would have to be thrown from a basement window. Theory-weary book titles are hardly a fixture of contemporary biblical studies. We do not find biblical scholars reflexively reaching for the particular eschatological trope of Theory's Decline and Fall to limn an as yet dimly glimpsed future designed, as all such futures are, to reorient the present polemically. The first reason for this is the obvious one: any call for an apocalypse of Theory from within biblical studies would sound absurd. Apocalypses are not minor fires started by pyromaniacs, but last-ditch emergency measures, reserved for overbearing worlds that need imagining otherwise. To get a decent apocalyptic fire going you need something momentous and massive (the Roman Empire, say, would do nicely; the American Empire would do just as well) to send up in flames.

Academics are as adept as any other constituency at imagining themselves as members of a beleaguered minority. Books or articles written from an acknowledged perspective of privilege and majority are ever in short supply. That being said, visions of victimhood can only go so far. The image of traditionally minded biblical scholars marooned in a small rowing boat or huddling on a small island on a globe that has been thoroughly colonized by Theory would sound paranoid and absurd. "Theory's Empire" in biblical studies is approximately the size of Tobago or the Falkland Islands. This is the underwhelming reality that John J. Collins is up against in his *The Bible after Babel*, a rare biblical studies contribution to the "After Theory" subgenre. But even Collins is compelled to admit a few pages into his book: "It is not the case that the postmodernists have captured the field. Far from it."²⁵

disciplinary Reader (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003); Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair, eds., *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Helen Vendler, *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999); Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); S. S. Hoskote, *T. S. Eliot: His Mind and Personality* (Philadelphia: Richard West, 1979).

25. John J. Collins, *The Bible after Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2005), 3. Similar in tone is James Barr, *History and Ideology in the Old Testament: Biblical Studies at the End of a Millenium* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). The faint apocalypticism of the book's subtitle

Far from it, indeed, especially when the field is set in international perspective. Biblical scholars from the global South have tended to have an uneasy relationship with academic postmodernism, epitomized by Theory. European biblical scholars have tended to have a more straightforward relationship with it: most of them have dismissed it outright. The leading European professional associations for biblical studies offer far fewer forums for the non-traditionalist than the (American-based) Society of Biblical Literature. The *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*, for instance, has never even had a program unit devoted to garden-variety feminist biblical hermeneutics, much less its third-wave, Theory-infused mutations.²⁶ European biblical scholarship in general groans under the burden of a long and glorious history. Bent over so far is it under the weight of this history that it habitually looks backwards between its bowed legs. Even in the United States, however, biblical scholars with serious interests in literary theory, critical theory, cultural theory, or other related domains tend to be isolated voices—when not absent altogether—from the principal Ph.D.-granting institutions, graduate programs at such institutions still being shaped primarily by traditional historical-critical agendas.²⁷ The situation of Theory in biblical studies is thus diametrically opposed to its situation in literary studies. In the latter field, as noted above, Theory early took up its abode in the most prestigious U.S. departments and programs, and trickled out from there to saturate the field, the stream gradually swelling into a flood.

And yet there has been progress of a sort in biblical studies. Few if any of the first generation of biblical literary critics emerged from their respective doctoral programs with any real degree of fluency in the second language of Theory. For certain of them, indeed, the discovery of Theory—for the most part, literary theory—was a Damascus

is amplified in certain of its chapters, particularly the one entitled “Postmodernism” (141–62).

26. What SNTS has had most years, since around 1980, is one “. . . And Everything Else” program unit (or “seminar,” as the units are called)—but only one at a time, to balance the fifteen or so other seminars devoted to traditional historical criticism, untainted by any touch of Theory. This “. . . And Everything Else” seminar has assumed various titles. Two of the longer-lived have been “The Role of the Reader in the Interpretation of the New Testament” (1985–1993) and “Hermeneutics and the Biblical Text” (1994–1999). At the time of writing, its title is “New Challenges for New Testament Hermeneutics in the 21st Century.”

27. Cf. Dale Martin, *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 15.

road encounter experienced after they had exited graduate school altogether and begun to publish as historical critics. In more recent years, in marked contrast, a significant number of graduate students seem already to be fluently bilingual, shuttling between the discourses of biblical and literary studies with an ease not always shared by their doctoral mentors. Related to this development, no doubt, is the fact that the time-warp factor, long so pronounced in biblical literary criticism, has noticeably decreased. By this we mean that deconstruction and other forms of poststructuralism, such as New Historicism, were not taken up in biblical studies until long after their first flowering, and even their eventual decline, in literary studies, whereas most of the major developments of the 1990s in literary studies, in contrast—cultural studies, postcolonial studies, queer theory, masculinity studies, autobiographical criticism—had all been taken up in biblical studies even before that decade had come to an end.²⁸ Contemporary biblical literary critics tend, on the whole, to be more attuned to real-time literary studies than their time-traveling predecessors.

Theory in the Cafeteria

Through our (admittedly jaundiced) eyes, however, Theory, while certainly alive and sometimes even kicking in biblical studies, seems all too often to be used as garnish, a soupçon of Zeitgeist spice, on modes of critical practice that remain fundamentally unaffected by it; or it tends to circulate among a few overworked usual suspects and fervent new recruits who preach to the converted in the Theory-ghettos of the Society of Biblical Literature annual meeting. Definitely not a Tower of Babel, then; with so few builders it has long since set its sights considerably lower than the heavens.

But even this modest building project has recently been curtailed. In 2002, the Research and Publications Committee of the SBL shut down *Semeia: An Experimental Journal for Biblical Criticism* against the protests of its editorial board. *Semeia* and the *Journal of Biblical Literature* had, for some years previously, constituted the society's two official journals.²⁹ (The reverse scenario, a pulling of the plug on *JBL* leaving *Semeia*

28. We discuss these appropriations below.

29. At the time of writing, two other journals have replaced *Semeia* on the journals page of the SBL website (<https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/browsejournals.aspx>).

to represent the entire society, would, of course, be unimaginable.) *Semeia*'s founding in 1974 under the auspices of the SBL represented Theory's first conspicuous success in biblical studies, making it hard for some to read the *Semeia* shutdown as anything less than an attempt to engineer the "end" of Theory in biblical studies (an end marked not by a bang but by a whimper: still no apocalypse, then). The rationale for the shutdown included the claim that the particularity of *Semeia* could now be adequately represented in the alleged disciplinary universalism of the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. But note our earlier caveat about Theory being used as garnish or spice to camouflage critical ingredients that may be bland or even stale.

Literary critic Valentine Cunningham misreads the menu, claiming that Theory has "spread . . . slickly" and "glibly" like a "gumbo" into such unlikely fields as geography, law, music, and even theology—by which he apparently means biblical studies, as the sole item of evidence trotted out for the Theorization of theology is the existence of *The Postmodern Bible*.³⁰ Cunningham has mistaken the gumbo for the main course when it is merely a side dish at most.

Litcrit asylum seekers from "Theory's Empire" like Cunningham do, however, enable us better to gauge the jaw-dropping gulf that has gradually opened up between their field and ours around the issue of Theory. We look on agog while Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral, industrious compilers of the 725-page "Anthology of Dissent" from "Theory's

They are *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* and *Online Critical Pseudepigrapha*, titles that probably tell the tale more effectively than anything we might say. The *Semeia* Studies monograph series, established originally as a companion to the journal, continues to be published by SBL.

30. Valentine Cunningham, "Theory, What Theory?" in Patai and Corral, *Theory's Empire*, 32: "And that's why Theory has spread so slickly, glibly even, into so many domains of the humanities—into geography (the surface of the earth is a text, and so are cities and weather systems and so on); and history (historiography is writing, ergo it's to be theorized as narrative and story and rhetoric, all tropologically, and its practitioners slotted into the gender, race, and class boxes); and music (more textual product, subject to the squeeze, of course, of race and class and gender; gender especially; can a flattened third be gay? why yes it can); and theology (the Judeo-Christian God and His Book, all easily deconstructable and narrativizable; and as for patriarchy and logocentrism, why here are their foundations); and, of course, art history (all texts); and architectural theory and practice (all texts again, and Daniel Libeskind deconstructs buildings!); and law (more text, and all deconstructable interpretative acts); and medicine (the body is a text, after all)." Cunningham's supporting endnote (40 n. 12) includes The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995).

Empire,” lament that job applicants nowadays, “ostensibly in literature,” seem unable to do anything but trot out increasingly tired truisms about the “construction of national identity,” “globalization,” “epistemic violence,” “border crossings,” “transgressive sexuality,” and the like.³¹ We are bemused by Jonathan Culler’s optimistic take on the seeming disappearance of Theory in which it becomes a “discursive space within which literary and cultural studies now occur, even if we manage to forget it, as we forget the air we breathe.”³² We marvel as Terry Eagleton bemoans the “quietly spoken middle-class students” who “huddle diligently in libraries” and work on vampirism and eye-gouging, cyberfeminism and incest, pubic hair, the literature of latex, and (most disturbing of all, no doubt) the TV sitcom *Friends*.³³

Needless to say, such sardonic caricatures may bear as little relation to reality as the caricatures of depravity in the Prophets or the more indignant of the Catholic Epistles. Poetic or parodic license notwithstanding, however, the institutionalization of Theory within the Modern Language Association is routinely assumed even—or especially—by those most hostile to Theory. So institutionalized, indeed, has Theory become, according to Patai and Corral, that it is no longer *haute cuisine* but cafeteria fare: “more and more students these days approach theory as a tedious obligation, no longer as an exciting subject they wish to explore. In other words, theory in the classroom is, today, often little more than a routine practice, as predictable and dull as cafeteria food.”³⁴ “Oh, no, not the gouged eyeballs again!” the hapless English Lit student might well exclaim. Once upon a time, the best and brightest of the Ivy League’s literature students, among them Theorists-to-be of the stature of Gayatri Spivak and Barbara Johnson, sat at the feet of Paul de Man, Cornell and Yale professor and doyen-to-be of American deconstruction, absorbing his darkly luminous classroom pronouncements and puzzling over their meaning afterwards in the corridors. These days, Ivy League students are far more prone to ironize the fashionability and revolutionary cachet of Theory, if the testimony of a Yale undergraduate writing recently in the *New York Times Magazine* is to be credited:

31. Patai and Corral, “Introduction,” in Patai and Corral, *Theory’s Empire*, 11.

32. Culler, *The Literary in Theory*, 3.

33. Eagleton, *After Theory*, 2–6.

34. Patai and Corral, “Introduction,” 13.

Lit theory is supposed to be the class where you sit at the back of the room with every other jaded sophomore wearing skinny jeans, thick-framed glasses, an ironic T-shirt and oversize retro headphones, just waiting for the lecture to be over so you can light up a Turkish Gold and walk to lunch while listening to Wilco. That's pretty much the way I spent the course, too, through structuralism, formalism, gender theory, and postcolonialism.³⁵

He further confesses that he was too busy shuffling through his iPod in class to wonder what the "patriarchal world order of capitalist oppression" had to do with *Ethan Frome*. Panning the political fervour of what he calls "dead letter theories," he goes on to describe his discovery of postmodernism (which he evidently believes can be disengaged from the lifeless clutch of such theories) as a personal epiphany. The brand of postmodernism that celebrates the ephemeral, the epiphenomenal, and the simulacrum enabled him to understand why, for his generation, the revolutionary aura of Theory is precisely what makes it appear so passé. Bound up as it is with the ancient revolution of the 1960s, Theory can now only be an ironic gesture at best, the equivalent of retro headphones: "We are a generation for whom even revolution seems trite, and therefore as fair a target for bland imitation as anything else. We are the generation of the Ché Guevara T-shirt."³⁶ Theory thereby becomes little more than an intellectual fashion accessory that seems quaintly, if earnestly, out-of-date. Geriatric names like Jacques Lacan might be replaced by slightly younger names like Slavoj Žižek, but the product line is looking increasingly tired nonetheless.

Contrast biblical studies, in which Theory is at less risk, at least for now, of going the way of the tie-dyed tee-shirt, love beads, and the lava lamp. Our aim in this study, however, is not to launch yet another ad campaign to sell Theory to biblical scholars or sell them on it. The time for that, at least, might well be past. Our intent, rather, is diagnostic and analytic. We want to look at what has happened, what has failed to happen, and what might yet happen in biblical studies under the heading of "Theory," and reflect on what these various "whats" reveal about

35. Nicholas Handler, "The Posteverything Generation," *New York Times Magazine*, September 30, 2007, 36.

36. *Ibid.*, 43.

the very different disciplinary spaces occupied by biblical studies and literary studies, and the very different disciplinary histories that have brought each of these spaces into being. Contending that Theory's most important contribution is the self-reflexive and metacritical moves it makes possible, our reflection on Theory's reception in biblical studies is intended to defamiliarize the histories and peculiarities of our own disciplinary space.

Theory before Theory

Let's twist things around, as those (over?)-ingenious Theorists are rumored to do, and suggest an alternative and more interesting reason why biblical studies lacks protests against Theory, beyond the rather pedestrian one that it is hardly languishing at present under a surfeit of Theory. Both the demarcation of a zone called "Theory" and attempts to resist "it" or write "its" epitaph have done important work in literary studies as rallying points for disciplinary debate (not least because Theory can be so variously defined that almost any hobbyhorse can be trotted out in the case "for" or "against"). But biblical studies is such a radically different discipline that neither Theory, nor what critics are against when they declare themselves against Theory, quite translate. So different are these two disciplinary domains, in fact, that were we biblical scholars to take up the campaign against Theory in the terms in which it has been fought in literary studies, we would, as will gradually become apparent, be arguing against ourselves.

When Theory "officially" arrived on the scene in literary studies, it met itself at the door to the extent that it entered a discipline that had already taken a theoretical turn. The New Criticism that had been the dominant mode of Anglo-American literary criticism from the late 1930s onwards shuttled between "practical" criticism and metacritical reflection—Theory *avant la lettre*—the latter activity steadily assuming ever-greater autonomy. By the early 1940s, Theory had begun to step out of the shadows. The word is boldly emblazoned in the title of René Wellek and Austin Warren's 1942 landmark, *Theory of Literature*.³⁷ William K. Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon* from 1954, another New Critical classic, is no

37. René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1942).

less theoretical in orientation.³⁸ By turning New Criticism into New Theory, Yale literature professors like Wellek, Wimsatt, and Cleanth Brooks (whose *Well Wrought Urn* from 1947 also veers into Theory)³⁹ were unwittingly setting the stage for their usurpers, the Francophile theorists of the next generation, “some of whom were their own students.”⁴⁰

When Theory “officially” arrived on the scene in literary studies, then—and it did so most flashily at the conference that Johns Hopkins University hosted in 1966 to welcome French structuralism to America⁴¹—it entered a discipline that was already well-accustomed to working between literature and philosophy (in the broad, non-analytic sense), or, if you prefer, to thinking quasi-philosophically and proto-Theoretically in the ample space afforded by literature. The discipline was already replete with “abstract” reflection—enough, for example, to fill 683 pages of David Lodge’s 1972 anthology, *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, with only a handful of those pages issuing from the French *maîtres à penser* in the person of Roland Barthes.⁴² “Traditional” literary critics such as William Empson, Lionel Trilling, and Frank Kermode had been busy for decades writing on such abstract topics as ambiguity, sincerity, authenticity, time, mortality, and endings. The reading of Literature for many such critics was intimately intertwined with the task of reflecting on the human condition, albeit in an often elitist Malcolm Arnold sort of way (that was crying out for “Theoretical” demystification). It was also bound to an at once spiritualized and secularized, large and modest sense of “soul.” As Theology retracted from a putative universal to a specialized preserve of the tribe called Christians and Anglo-American philosophy became more doggedly “analytic,” Literature, largely a nine-

38. William K. Wimsatt Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954).

39. Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1947).

40. Morris Dickstein, “The Rise and Fall of ‘Practical’ Criticism: From I. A. Richards to Barthes and Derrida,” in Patai and Corral, *Theory’s Empire*, 62.

41. In the persons of Barthes, Lacan, and Derrida (then a much lesser luminary than the other two), among others. The conference proceedings were published as Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds., *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970). 1966 also witnessed a thematic double issue of *Yale French Studies* (36/37) entitled “Structuralism,” with articles by Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, and other early inventors of Theory.

42. David Lodge, ed., *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1972).

teenth century invention, came to serve as a vital refuge for “vagrant values” such as the deviant, the erotic, the visionary, the sublime, the ineffable, and the transcendent⁴³—albeit a mode of transcendence that often had a very uncomfortable, even antithetical, relationship to God(s).

What passed for normal critical practice in literary studies was, therefore, fundamentally different from its counterpart in biblical studies. The investigation of the chronological relationship between manuscripts and quartos, the quest for the identity of the “dark lady” and Shakespeare’s relationship to her, the refining of textual editions, and other para-historical-critical preoccupations were but a part of critical practice. Lectures and papers about literature were frequently self-consciously performative and evangelistic. The task was to produce a piece of writing that would seduce the reader or hearer into reading or rereading Wallace Stevens or *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The labor of criticism often entailed conspicuous wordsmithery and frequently took the form of stitching different works together by means of a seemingly marginal metaphorical or thematic thread. “Strong” and idiosyncratic readings were applauded, as was overt authorship. The critic stood forth as bold critic-writer rather than self-effacing commentator hiding bashfully behind the literary text. A lecture or paper might take as its task a reflection on the paradoxical representation of truth and lying in fiction, but dealing as it did in fiction, it would have been peculiar to think of its function as a definitive exposition of the work’s “truth.” For literary specialists such a view would have been ripe for mockery—as it was in David Lodge’s now aging but still apposite caricature of literary academia in his novel *Changing Places*. Lodge’s literary-critic character Morris Zapp dreams of completing a series of commentaries on the novels of Jane Austen, “one novel at a time, saying absolutely everything that could possibly be said about them . . . so that when each commentary was written there would be simply *nothing further to say* about the novel in question”—the object, however, not being that of “enhanc[ing] others’ enjoyment and understanding of Jane Austen” but of “put[ting] a definitive stop to the production of any further garbage on the subject.”⁴⁴

43. Cf. Eagleton, *After Theory*, 99.

44. David Lodge, *Changing Places: A Tale of Two Campuses* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975), 34, emphasis original. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century biblical scholars who evoked the notion of a final commentary on a particular biblical book tended to do so without irony, as in Alfred Plummer’s modest opening to his now classic Lukan commentary: “This volume has no such ambitious aim as that of being a final

It is hardly surprising that Theory found a natural habitat in such an environment. Nor is it surprising that the particular species of Theory that took root was not structuralism, with its compulsion to explain and exhaust, but deconstruction. In its early American manifestation, deconstruction was characterized by an untiring insistence on literature's sublime capacity always to exceed anything that the critic might think to say about it,⁴⁵ and as such was more of a New New Critical phenomenon than was generally realized at the time.⁴⁶ This has become ever clearer in hindsight. Typical is Rita Felski's recent observation:

Participants in the so-called theory revolution of the last few decades often extolled the iconoclasm of their intellectual interventions, yet in practice these theories rarely if ever spawned entirely new ways of reading, but modified and fine-tuned techniques of interpretation that had been developed over decades, in some cases over centuries.

We may be reminded, at this point, of the frequently made observation that deconstruction's success in the United States derived from its ability to latch on to, while burnishing with new glamour and prestige, techniques of close reading popularized during the heyday of New Criticism.⁴⁷

commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke. The day is probably still far distant when any such commentary can be written" (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke* [The International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896], iii). A far distant day, however, is different from a day whose advent is impossible in principle; and most contemporary biblical scholars understand instinctively that their discipline conspires on every level to keep the day of the final biblical commentary from ever dawning.

45. A theme first given expression by Paul de Man: "The text . . . tells the story, the allegory of its misunderstanding" (*Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971], 136).

46. For recent adaptations of Derrida beyond earlier clichés of deconstructive practice, see, for example, the essays in Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart, eds., *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

47. Rita Felski, "From Literary Theory to Critical Method," *Profession* (2008): 110–11. Recognition of the New New Critical character of "Yale deconstruction," in particular, is as old as Yale deconstruction itself; see especially Frank Lentricchia's scathing chapter on Paul de Man in his *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 282–317.

Theory glided in as, in some ways at least, a smooth extension of normal critical practice in literary studies insofar as it coupled consideration of audaciously large questions with intricate engagement with the minutiae of the words on the page.

Theory's progress, however, was uneven. It moved in with lava-like swiftness in some contexts but with glacial slowness in others. The incursions of Theory into literature departments were often gradual and belated. Outside of the charmed circle of elite departments in which the leading Theorists themselves tended to cluster, many departments were only beginning tentatively to dip their toes in Theory by the late 1980s, students being exposed to it in small (inoculating?) doses in the form of what Julian Wolfreys has termed the "Theory tourism" of the lone and detached Theory course.⁴⁸ Paul de Man's insistence that Theory has always been accompanied by a resistance to Theory is entirely apposite.⁴⁹ To that resistance we now turn.

The Inhumanity of Theory

With the arrival of Theory in literary studies as a source of regeneration and redefinition came the equally vital stimulus of Theory as that over against which to define oneself. As both welcome guest and unwelcome intruder, Theory provoked myriad performances of disciplinary redefinition or reconsolidation. But here again, just where we might expect close conjunction with biblical studies and the raising of voices essentially interchangeable with those of Barr, say, in *History and Ideology in the Old Testament* or Collins in *The Bible after Babel*, the differences are striking and instructive. The campaign against Theory in literary studies has been spearheaded by figures such as Harold Bloom, whose own early work extolled such unhistorical-critical-sounding activities as "strong misreading" and "poetic misprision"; Christopher Ricks, who writes on Bob Dylan as well as Victorian poetry and so slums it in "low" or popular culture (albeit to redeem Dylan for poetry); and Valentine Cunningham, whose *In the Reading Gaol* is a virtuoso

48. Julian Wolfreys, "Introduction: Border Crossings, or Close Encounters of the Textual Kind," in *Literary Theories: A Reader's Guide*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 1-11 passim.

49. Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Theory and History of Literature, 33; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3-20. Admittedly, this is a simplified take on de Man's complex argument.

performance of criticism-as-literature, with headings such as “Textual Stuff,” “Handkerchief Othello,” “Give me an Aposiopestic Break,” and “The Wor(l)d of Mrs Woolf.”⁵⁰

Insofar as they have made common cause, campaigns against Theory have tended to unite around a soteriological, protectionist impulse: a desire to save the Author (a long-endangered species) and, by extension, the human as that which, in an ambiguously secularized world, is the source of the spiritual and the repository of meaning, all the more precious for being smaller than a god. Terry Eagleton’s *After Theory*, the most visible of the anti-Theory excursions, relies heavily for its rhetorical armature on this trope of the reassertion and protection of the human. Working with a suspiciously pruned version of Theory,⁵¹ Eagleton sets Theory up (in both senses) as that which excludes, by definition, all the truly important human stuff, like love, suffering, birth, death, ethics, and religion.

Revealingly, a large proportion of the metaphors Eagleton employs come down to differences between the human and the animal, giving his book a curiously Aesopian flavor. We are urged to retrieve the human from the clutches of Theory, red in tooth and claw, by working our way through a menagerie of fables about good and bad toads, the parochial stoat, the tiger in the bathroom, and the unusually literate zebra. Toads, it turns out, are altogether unlike human beings in that they “know by instinct how to do what it is best for toads to do. They simply follow their toad-like nature, and for them to do this is to prosper. It is to be a good toad rather than a bad one, living a fulfilling toad-like existence.”⁵² Like Aesop, Eagleton cannot resist hammering home the moral, in this case the distinctively human patent on morality: “Good toads are very toad-like. This is not the kind of goodness you can congratulate them on, however, since being toad-like is something they can’t help being. It is not an achievement. Toads do not win medals for being toads. You can have a good toad, but not a virtuous one.”⁵³ The truth that “we are universal animals” and “moral animals” because of “the kind of bodies

50. Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); Christopher Ricks, *Dylan’s Visions of Sin* (New York: Ecco, 2004); Valentine Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts and History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

51. Cf. Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now*, 1.

52. Eagleton, *After Theory*, 110.

53. *Ibid.*

we are born with” is reinforced by contrast with “stoats,” who, it seems, are a “good deal more parochial. Because their bodies are not geared to complex production and communication, they are more restricted by their sensory experience than we are. Like village idiots and neighbourhood police officers, they are essentially local beings.”⁵⁴ The moral of this fable concerns Theory, which, Eagleton asserts, is likewise local or parochial. Due to its aversion to universality, Theory is mired in the mud of locality, together with the stoat or toad.

Eagleton’s moral menagerie, however, has not yet finished performing. We have yet to marvel at the “unusually literate zebra.” Theory and postmodernism, for Eagleton, are characterized by a myopic moral relativism. They hold that “[t]he fact that we value Pushkin or free speech is purely contingent. We just happened to be born into the sort of set-up which admires those kinds of thing. It could easily have been otherwise.”⁵⁵ The madness of this position is dramatically exposed by the “unusually literate zebra” that now trots into the ring.⁵⁶ This unthinkable thinking/writing animal could afford us a zebra-eye view of a life that was other-than-human. But seeing as there is no such thing as an unusually literate zebra, then this other-than-human view does not exist either, at least for humans.⁵⁷ Such a chimera could also undermine our belief in inalienable humanity, presumably, by demonstrating that it too can read Pushkin and espouse principles of democratic freedom. Again, however, this is impossible. Thus the unusually literate zebra consolidates, not zebanness, but humanity in all its normalcy and uniqueness.

Immensely sensitive elsewhere to the cultural constructedness of the seemingly self-evident, Eagleton ironically trots out old Aristotelian distinctions here between the human and the nonhuman. The incredulity provoked by the very notion of a thinking animal, or an animal that creates, is used to shore up our (increasingly fragile?) belief in the essential core of the “human”—and to keep us entertained in the process. For the animal with anthropomorphic pretensions is, of course, a staple of the circus. We delight to see dogs cavorting in tutus

54. *Ibid.*, 157.

55. *Ibid.*, 56.

56. As elsewhere it is exposed by the tiger in the bathroom: “All truths are established from specific viewpoints; but it does not make sense to say that there is a tiger in the bathroom from my point of view but not from yours” (*ibid.*, 106).

57. *Ibid.*, 55–56.

and zebras pretending to consult dictionaries. Through its metaphorical association with toads and stoats, zebras and tigers, and its seeming inability to distinguish between the human and the inhuman(e), Theory in Eagleton's *After Theory* is made the barbarian (or "village idiot") at the gates. It is placed firmly outside Literature which, like Aristotle's *polis*, becomes the primary locus for uniquely human creation and construction, and also the place where the human/humane resides and is protected. Eagleton's animal fables fall prey to one of the most recent critiques mounted by Theory and continental philosophy: the exposure of indefatigable but untenable humanisms in the modern history of philosophy and theology, including meticulous historical analyses of the construction of the human through the exclusion of the animal. Such work seeks to unravel the densely knotted connections between our anthropologies, zoologies, and theologies, and to expose the ends, edges, and limits of "man."⁵⁸ Happily oblivious to these recent evolutions in Theory, Eagleton resorts to tired dichotomies to turn Theory into the furry, slimy, low-life other of the human and the humane.

To acquire a clearer sense, however, of why Theory is currently demonized in certain circles of literary studies one needs to turn from Eagleton to other, more traditionally minded representatives of the profession. And who better to speak for the traditionalist position than the late René Wellek, principal author of the aforementioned New Critical classic *Theory of Literature*, and one of the most respected literary critics

58. For recent work on the human in its relations to the animal (and occasionally to the divine), see Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (trans. David Wills; Perspectives in Continental Philosophy; New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); idem, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, vol. 1 (trans. Geoffrey Bennington; Seminars of Jacques Derrida, 1; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (trans. Kevin Attell; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003); Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm, 2003); and idem, *When Species Meet* (Posthumanities; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). For the larger picture, see Matthew Calarco and Peter Atterton, eds., *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought* (New York: Continuum, 2004); and Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). For a probing theological investigation of what she calls "the fourfold of man"—that is, his raced, sexed, divine, and animal others—see Ellen T. Armour, "Touching Transcendence: Sexual Difference and Sacrality in Derrida's *Le Toucher*," in Sherwood and Hart, *Derrida and Religion*, 351–62. Also relevant is David Wood, "Specters of Derrida: On the Way to Econstruction," in *Ecospirit: Religion, Philosophy, and the Earth*, ed. Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia; New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 264–89.

of his generation. “Destroying Literary Studies” is at once the title of a 1983 article by Wellek and his answer to the question of what the more recent brand of Theory is up to:

The day-to-day task of criticism is the sifting of the enormous production of books, and even the ranking and grading of writers. That we teach Shakespeare, Dante, or Goethe rather than the newest best-seller or any of the romances, Westerns, crime, and detective novels, science fiction, and pornography on the racks of the nearest drug store is an act of evaluation. We exercise choice the minute we take up a classical text whose value is certified by generations of readers, in deciding what features we shall pay attention to, what we shall emphasize, appreciate, and admire, or ignore and deprecate. It is now unfashionable to speak of a love of literature, of enjoyment of and admiration for a poem, a play, or a novel. But such feelings surely must have been the original stimulus to anyone engaged in the study of literature. Otherwise he might as well have studied accounting or engineering. Love, admiration, is, I agree, only the first step. Then we ask why we love and admire or detest. We reflect, analyse, and interpret; and out of this understanding grow evaluation and judgment, which need not be articulated expressly. Evaluation leads to the definition of the canon, of the classics, of the tradition. In the realm of literature the question of quality is inescapable. If this is “elitism,” so be it.⁵⁹

Wellek’s jeremiad ends, somewhat poignantly, with the hope that “this new ‘absurdist’ wave . . . has already crashed on the shore.”⁶⁰ He would live another twenty-two years, long enough to see droves of graduate students turn their back on the literature stacks of the university libraries altogether to head instead for “the racks of the nearest drug store” for material on which to write their doctoral dissertations.

59. René Wellek, “Destroying Literary Studies,” in Patai and Corral, *Theory’s Empire*, 47–48. The essay originally appeared in *The New Criterion* 2 (1983): 1–8.

60. *Ibid.*, 51.

Lost love is a leitmotif wending its way through Daphne Patai and Will Corral's voluminous anti-Theory anthology, *Theory's Empire*. "This is what drew many of us to literature and criticism in college," one of the contributors, Morris Dickstein, reminisces. "The study of literature demanded a sheer love of language and storytelling for their own sake, yes, but the great writers also had something to say; the cognitive mysteries and affective intensities of the work of art lay before the young would-be critic like a land of dreams."⁶¹ That the Great Authors have been displaced by the Great Theorists is what many of the contributors find hardest to swallow. "[T]he critics seem less interested in considering what literary works have to say to us than in applying a particular theory to them," John Ellis complains.⁶² "And so these new professionals spiral away from anything resembling what one stubbornly continues to describe as the study of literature," adds Frank Kermode.⁶³ Harold Fromm goes further:

[T]he use of literature as a weapon to fight this war against capitalism and patriarchy is all too often a violation of the creative skills and large consciousness behind the novels and poems that gives us so much psychological nourishment. . . . Works of literary genius emerge from the same human soil as everything else, and nothing is finally sacred, but reductive readings produce crabbed and crippled forms of aesthetic response, constricting rather than expanding consciousness.⁶⁴

This elegaic lament for the tradition that extolled Great Books, Literary Masterpieces, and Authorial Genius running like a refrain through *Theory's Empire* would be unimaginable in Eagleton's *After Theory*. It dovetails neatly, nonetheless, with Eagleton's charge that Theory threatens the human. Patai and Corral summarize the sentiments of their contributors: "critics are called upon to transmit the abiding worth of literature to the coming generations. If this does not happen, our essay-

61. Dickstein, "The Rise and Fall of 'Practical Criticism,'" 61.

62. John Ellis, "Is Theory to Blame?" in Patai and Corral, *Theory's Empire*, 92.

63. Frank Kermode, "Changing Epochs," in Patai and Corral, *Theory's Empire*, 614.

64. Harold Fromm, "Oppositional Opposition," in Patai and Corral, *Theory's Empire*, 455.

ists fear, the humane and life-enhancing properties of literary works will be lost to us as literary studies, and literature itself, are disfigured in the distorting mirrors of the fun house of theoretical posturing.”⁶⁵ Two of these essayists inquire how the avowed goal of so much Theory, which they take to be that of human emancipation, can actually be achieved by Theory, since so much of it is so unabashedly anti-humanist.⁶⁶

The critique of Theory as anti-human(e)/anti-humanist, which is intimately bound up with the “demise of Literature” critique, is also closely tied to the third main plank of the anti-Theory platform, the identity-politics critique. “Summoning philosophical allies from Paris,” Todd Gitlin protests, “the partisans of difference as a supreme principle tack together a ramshackle unity based not so much on a universalist premise or ideal as on a common enemy—the Straight White Male who, trying to obscure his power and interests, disguises himself as the human in ‘humanism.’ With the identity groupings, humanism is dead, a dirty word. . . .”⁶⁷ All of which (to give editors Patai and Corral the last word) brings us back once again to Literature:

[I]dentity politics has for decades been on a collision course with the serious study of literature. Perhaps the most expressive, and most familiar, emblem of this clash is the label “Dead White Males” with which the entire Western canon (always excluding, of course, the still fashionable French *maîtres à penser*) is now routinely dismissed. The obverse of this blanket rejection is the “standpoint epistemology” that privileges, say, the writings of “women of color.” The greater the claim for past oppression and marginalization, the greater the presumed validity of a group’s contributions today.⁶⁸

By defending the human(e) against Theory, Eagleton contributes to the general thrust of anti-Theory protests—at least insofar as he can:

65. Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral, “Introduction” (to Part VIII), in *idem*, *Theory’s Empire*, 587.

66. Richard Freadman and Seumas Miller, “The Power and Limits of Literary Theory,” in Patai and Corral, *Theory’s Empire*, 78–79.

67. Todd Gitlin, “The Cant of Identity,” in Patai and Corral, *Theory’s Empire*, 404.

68. Daphne Patai and Will H. Corral, “Introduction” (to Part V), in *idem*, *Theory’s Empire*, 397.

rhapsodic elegies at the graveside of the Western literary canon or bitter denunciations of minoritarian discourse are hardly within bounds for any self-respecting literary Marxist.

Theory is regularly caricatured in anti-Theory polemic as a depersonalizing force that would dissolve the human into mere textuality, or reduce literary criticism to the lowest common denominators of race-gender-class sloganeering. It is often accused of missing the meaning of literary works: not in the sense of the “one true meaning,” a concept that has seldom mattered in literary criticism anyway, but the kind of meaning that Theory tends to dissolve in unsavory ideological subtexts. *Jane Eyre*, for example, must be defended against the kind of reading that would reduce it to an epiphenomenal effect of nineteenth-century imperialism, racism, and classism, or dissipate its transcendental human value in the sordid economics of the slave trade.⁶⁹

Large sectors of the anti-Theory camp are devoted to the protection of the Author, but not in the same way that biblical scholars have sought to protect the Author. What is to be defended is not the Author as ultimate author-ity (sovereign creator of originally intended meanings, which have been unknowingly scattered and lost by pre-critical readers, and must now, as in some Gnostic myth of return, be recovered and reconstructed by critical scholars), but the Author’s humanity, individuality, idiosyncrasy, creativity, and genius—all now threatened with consignment to the prison-house of language and the impersonality of semiotic systems. The self-appointed bodyguards of the Author in *Theory’s Empire* like to conscript paragons of authorship such as Virginia Woolf or Margaret Atwood to the cause, seizing on authorly ripostes such as “To read on a system . . . is very apt to kill what it suits us to consider the more humane passion for pure and disinterested reading” (Woolf) and “I think I am a writer, not a sort of *tabula rasa* for the Zeitgeist or a non-existent generator of ‘texts’” (Atwood).⁷⁰ The living, beat-

69. The sort of thing that Gayatri Spivak is alleged to do in her highly influential reading of *Jane Eyre*. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 243–61. The article (which has been reprinted in at least a dozen anthologies) begins: “It should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism, understood as Britain’s social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English” (243).

70. Woolf’s comment (from her *Hours in a Library*) appears as an epigram to Cunningham’s “Theory, What Theory?” (24), while Atwood’s remark (from “If You Can’t Say

ing heart of authorial sensibility and creativity needs defending from poststructuralist Theories of language that would dissolve all formerly autonomous agents, not least Authors, in an acid-bath of textuality, intertextuality, semioticity, and undecidability.

Since the Author was still reflexively clutching her literary creation as she sank into the acid-bath, it too needed rescuing. One of the most common rallying-cries against Theory has been its alleged propensity to reduce literature to a “text”—a term that smacked for many of the uglification of academic prose, quasi-scientism, and the reduction of something that had once felt like a site of communion between author and reader to an object for dissection. Literature needed to be protected from Theoretical über-systems that were “cold-blooded” (to employ Eagleton’s term), mechanical, reductive, and doctrinaire.⁷¹ Often these objections emanated not just from the professorial rearguard but from students who wanted to be left alone to read without Theory intruding between them and the novel, play, or poem like a lumpish, unwelcome visitor. Nothing could be less attractive to such students than, say, the geometrical rigidity of the semiotic square. The scene of intimate, unmediated reading that they imagined was Romantic, but also reminiscent of the Reformation Protestant communing with the Word direct.⁷²

Yet the campaign against Theory in literary studies, acrimonious as it has been, has produced almost no campaign buttons or stump speeches in biblical studies. Why is this? Because it doesn’t translate, because there is no need for it, and because polemic against the “cold-blooded” and system- and minutiae-obsessed would have us thrusting accusing fingers in our own faces. It is hard to imagine biblical scholars uniting around a critique of the cold-blooded, since warm-bloodedness is not a criterion for membership in our discipline. The cold-blooded aberrations the anti-Theorists ascribe to Theory would merely describe business as usual in biblical studies.

For example, whereas the objectification and deconstruction of “the text” felt to many like a transgression in literary studies, it somehow

Something Nice Don’t Say Anything At All,” *Saturday Night Magazine*, 6 January 2001) is cited in Patai and Corral’s “Introduction” (9). The editors deem Atwood’s protest to be “emblematic of the reaction to theory of most creative writers, whose status many theorists have been eager to usurp” (ibid.).

71. Cf. Eagleton, *After Theory*, 79

72. We are, of course, talking about the Reformation ideal. In practice, unmediated communion proved deeply problematic.

seems less jarring in biblical studies.⁷³ The biblical text has, in effect, long been seen as an “always already” deconstructed object. This is most evident in “textual criticism” (appropriately named): its operative assumption is the ineluctable *difference* between the imperfect object present to our senses (the current edition of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or the *Novum Testamentum Graece*) and the text in the putatively perfect state that the critic painstakingly seeks to reconstruct (the biblical autographs).⁷⁴ For textual criticism, that driest and dustiest of biblical disciplines and, one might imagine, farthest removed from the exotic

73. Assorted deconstructive forays in biblical studies can be found in the following works, among others: Robert Detweiler, ed., *Derrida and Biblical Studies* (Semeia, 23; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1982); Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989); Gary A. Phillips, ed., *Poststructural Criticism and the Bible: Text/History/Discourse* (Semeia, 51; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990); David Jobling and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Poststructuralism as Exegesis* (Semeia, 54; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992); Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); idem, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); David Seeley, *Deconstructing the New Testament* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 5; Leiden: Brill, 1994); George Aichele, *Jesus Framed* (Biblical Limits; London and New York: Routledge, 1996); David Rutledge, *Reading Marginally: Feminism, Deconstruction and the Bible* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 21; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Yvonne M. Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 212; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996; reprinted as *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Reading Hosea in the Late Twentieth Century* [London: T. & T. Clark, 2004]); Patrick Chatelion Counet, *John, a Postmodern Gospel: Introduction to Deconstructive Exegesis Applied to the Fourth Gospel* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 44; Leiden: Brill, 2000); Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus, 2000); Yvonne Sherwood, ed., *Derrida's Bible: Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *Reading Derrida/Thinking Paul: On Justice* (Cultural Memory in the Present; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005); James A. Smith, *Marks of an Apostle: Deconstruction, Philippians, and Problematizing Pauline Theology* (Semeia Studies, 53; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005); and Andrew P. Wilson, *Transfigured: A Derridean Rereading of the Markan Transfiguration* (Library of New Testament Studies; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2007).

74. This is the traditional goal of textual criticism in any case, one that certain New Testament practitioners have recently been trying to shift by problematizing the quest for the autographs. See, for example, Eldon Jay Epp, *Perspectives on New Testament Textual Criticism: Collected Essays, 1962–2004* (Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 116; Leiden: Brill, 2005); Bart D. Ehrman, *Studies in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (New Testament Tools, Studies and Documents; Leiden: Brill, 2006); and D. C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

excesses of Theory, the text is a para-poststructuralist object. Incurably infected with self-division, it is “at least dual.”⁷⁵ It is, in fact, myriad. The original, ideal, immaterial text always floats serenely free and beyond the reach of the object-text—the text-in-fragments, that is, violently marked and marred by the history of its material transmission. Though certain of the premises of textual criticism, as traditionally conceived, are on a head-on collision course with Theory (not least around the dream of accessing origin and intention), “textuality,” that Theoretical concept par excellence,⁷⁶ has certain uncanny affinities with textual criticism. Sizeable swaths of Barthes’s “From Work to Text,” for instance, that once celebrated manifesto for textuality, might well have been written with the bottomless waste paper basket of the biblical manuscript tradition in mind, as might his “The Death of the Author”: “We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God), but of a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations. . . .”⁷⁷ Or consider this equally well-known assertion by Derrida: “a text . . . is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. . . .”⁷⁸ Small wonder, then, if the concept of textuality should feel faintly familiar, at least, to biblical critics.⁷⁹ One of the first lessons that every initiate into our guild learns, after all, is that the biblical text is never simply given: it is, yet it also is not, and can never fully be.

75. To adapt a phrase from Jonathan Culler; see “Text: Its Vicissitudes,” in his *The Literary in Theory*, 100.

76. “Textuality” connotes the capacity of texts to mean incessantly and uncontrollably beyond the intentions of their original authors, thereby exceeding and eclipsing their original circumstances of production.

77. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in idem, *Image—Music—Text* (trans. Stephen Heath; New York: Hill & Wang, 1987), 146. Cf. Barthes, “From Work to Text,” in *Image—Music—Text*, 155–64. The essays date from 1968 and 1971 respectively.

78. Jacques Derrida, “Living On: Border Lines,” in Harold Bloom et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 84. For a more somber take on textuality (much of which also fits our topic, however), see Fredric Jameson, “The Ideology of the Text,” in idem, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays, 1971–1986*; Vol. 1: *Situations of Theory* (Theory and History of Literature, 49; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 17–71. Paul de Man’s “The Return to Philology,” in his *The Resistance to Theory*, 21–26, is also relevant.

79. Even if they feel simultaneously compelled to disavow it. See our discussion of the fate of intertextuality in biblical studies below.

Then there is our obsession with textual minutiae. We have long made our home in the kind of textual details that a traditionally minded literary critic would likely deem incidental or secondary, peripheral or tangential: the etymologies of the personal names in the Mari tablets; the probable geographical location of the land of Nod; the botanical identity of Jonah's *qiqayon* plant; fragmentary funerary texts from Ugarit; shopping lists from Oxyrhynchus; Western non-interpolations in the New Testament manuscript tradition; *hapax legomena* in the Pastoral Epistles;⁸⁰ the significance of locusts in the diet followed at Qumran—the list is infinitely long and ever more bizarre. In literary studies, meanwhile, preoccupation with the ostensibly incidental or tangential has, ironically enough, been associated not with the traditionalists in the discipline but rather with some of its least traditional—and hyper-Theoretical—practitioners, such as deconstructionists and New Historicists. The tangential obsession comes to classic expression in another oft-quoted statement by Derrida: “I do not ‘concentrate,’ in my reading . . . , either exclusively or primarily on those points that appear to be the most ‘important,’ ‘central,’ ‘crucial.’ Rather, I deconcentrate, and it is the secondary, eccentric, lateral, marginal, parasitic, borderline cases which are ‘important’ to me and are a source of many things, such as pleasure, but also insight into the general functioning of a textual system.”⁸¹ As biblical scholars, however, we do not need Derrida’s blessing in order to dig happily with our buckets and spades in the margins of the biblical text. As Tim Beal has observed, biblical commentary and Theory share a certain “pointlessness,” since both are diffused across a dizzying range of details and tangents and deconcentrate on the particular.⁸² Digging in the margins has been our business and our pleasure for centuries.

In a final twist of irony, the turn to Theory for at least some of us in biblical studies actually had much to do with an attempted “humani-

80. Did you know that of the 848 words (excluding proper names) found in the Pastoral Epistles, 175 do not occur elsewhere in the New Testament, while an additional 306 are not in the remaining Pauline letters (even including the disputed ones), and a further 211 are part of the general vocabulary of extracanonical Christian authors of the second century?

81. Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc* (ed. Gerald Graff; trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 44.

82. Timothy K. Beal, “Esther,” in Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, *Ruth and Esther* (Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry; Colledgeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1999), xi.

zation” of our discipline. Our first attraction to Theory arose in part from a desire to talk about “larger human themes” in our work (even if we never used that language, even to ourselves)—themes such as bodies and embodiment, pain and pleasure, sex and death—but also more alien themes such as ecstasy and mysticism. We were drawn to overtly arational, parareligious, poststructuralist meditations and to deconstructive flirtations with negative theology—which is to say, to the tantalizingly impossible quest for transcendence in the determinedly low-ceilinged space of Theory.⁸³ In an interesting twist, it felt like blasphemy in biblical studies—a field that for all its theological veneer tends to aspire to “rational” and scientific modes of argumentation—to venture into the poetic and mystical regions of these religious texts.

Method Is Our Madness

It is not mysticism, however, so much as methodology that accounts for Theory’s modest attractions for biblical scholars. Literary critics have been predisposed to resist the straitjacket of system and method, as we shall see, but biblical scholars have been predisposed to embrace it. Theory, insofar as it has been assimilated at all in biblical studies, has been assimilated mainly as system and method. Theory has fueled the biblical-scholarly susceptibility to methodolatry and methodone addiction. Method is our madness. Out of the ample range of options that Theory offered biblical scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, nothing was more warmly received than structuralism, semiotics, semiotic squares, actantial models, and other sharp-cornered narratological devices. The first three biblical studies journals founded as forums for methodologies other than the historical critical—*Linguistica Biblica* in Germany in 1970, *Semeia* in the United States in 1974, and *Sémiotique et Bible* in France in 1975—were founded either principally or exclusively

83. Deconstruction famously subjects the theological, or more properly the “metaphysical” in all its philosophical and theological guises, to stringent interrogation. Yet this blanket statement requires immediate qualification, for apophatic or negative theology, at least, has proved alluring to many deconstructors, not least Derrida himself: see especially Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, eds., *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992). Classically associated with such figures as Pseudo-Dionysius and Meister Eckhart, negative theology is a self-subverting discourse that strategically enacts its own inadequacy to the task of encapsulating the divine in human thought or language.

as forums for biblical structuralism and its closest kin: semiotics, narratology, generative poetics, sociolinguistics, and the like.

All in all, structuralism's impact on biblical studies has far exceeded its impact on literary studies, just as poststructuralism's impact on literary studies has far exceeded its impact on biblical studies. Structuralism had no sooner arrived from France than American literary critics began to tinker with it, loosen its screws, file its sharp edges, and transform it into something they soon began to call "poststructuralism"—a term that, as Derrida would wryly remark, was unknown in France until its "return" from the United States.⁸⁴ The attraction of poststructuralism, epitomized by deconstruction, was precisely that it was not structuralism, which is to say that it eschewed the structuralist project of turning literary criticism into a science by constructing ultimate explanatory models or methods that would lift the lid off literature once and for all and expose the hidden mechanisms that made it tick. Deconstruction, in contrast, was content to become "the straight-man or foil of a literary language that everywhere outwit[ted] its powers of conceptual command."⁸⁵ One of the most insistent tropes of deconstruction was the notion that the critic, while appearing to comprehend the literary text from a position securely outside or above it, is in fact being encompassed and contained by the text, enveloped within its folds, unwittingly acting out an interpretative role that the text has scripted, even dramatized, in advance.⁸⁶ In retrospect it is hardly surprising that it was poststructuralism, not structuralism, that took root and flourished in ground that had been prepared in advance by the New Critics, who themselves knew well how to genuflect before Literature. And nowhere was the unstructuralist character of poststructuralism more evident than in the assertion that early on became a mantra of American deconstruction: "Deconstruction is not a method."⁸⁷

84. Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," trans. David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, in *Derrida and Différance*, ed. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 2.

85. Richard Machin and Christopher Norris, "Introduction," in *Post-Structuralist Readings in English Poetry*, ed. Richard Machin and Christopher Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 18.

86. This trope of the prescient text featured prominently in the work of Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Barbara Johnson, and Shoshana Felman, and occasionally in the work of Derrida himself. For bibliography and further discussion, see Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, 29ff.

87. Due in no small part to Derrida's own insistence: "Deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one" ("Letter to a Japanese Friend," 3).

But deconstruction could not *not* be a method in biblical studies. Rita Felski has commented incisively on the compulsive tendency of academic disciplines to recreate elements incorporated from other disciplines in their own image and likeness:

While literary critics, for example, are often expected to position themselves in terms of gender, race, or sexuality, scant attention is paid to disciplinary location, surely the most salient influence on how we write and read. Only when we venture abroad are we forced into a realization of the sheer contingency and strangeness of our mother tongue. Literature scholars recruited to serve on interdisciplinary hiring committees soon discover how puzzling their working assumptions can seem to scholars in other fields. These methodological differences are modified but far from dissipated by the spread of interdisciplinary work. Victorianists may pride themselves on stretching the boundaries of their field by writing on drains or Darwin, yet to outsiders their arguments, interpretations, and use of evidence unequivocally proclaim their English department training. Disciplines, in other words, are defined less by subject matter than by method.⁸⁸

We would want to add, however, that some disciplines are more deeply defined by method than others. Specifically, we would contend that method has not meant as much for literary critics as for biblical critics. What defines the biblical studies discipline is less that it *possesses* method than that it is *obsessed with* method and as such *possessed by* method.

Biblical scholarship seems to turn everything it touches into method, even concepts as methodologically unpromising as “intertextuality.” That term was coined by Julia Kristeva, as is well-known, at the heady height of Parisian (post)structuralism,⁸⁹ and exuberantly glossed by Roland Barthes, for whom the text, as intertext, was

88. Felski, “From Literary Theory to Critical Method,” 112.

89. Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel” (French original 1969), in idem, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 64–91.

woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages . . . antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the “sources,” the “influences” of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas.⁹⁰

What happens when such a radically iconoclastic term enters the biblical-scholarly lexicon, as it began to do in the 1980s? The unraveling of biblical scholarship as we know it, fixated as it is on sources, influences, and “the myth of filiation”? Not in the least. What happens for the most part is business as usual, the ongoing preoccupation with Pentateuchal source-paternity, inter-Isaianic textual intercourse, Synoptic *ménages à trois*, and all the other intensely intersubjective authorial exchanges⁹¹ that elicit quiet excitement in the average biblical scholar—so much so that the editor of *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel* is emboldened to begin his introduction with the announcement, “To the Bible scholar, intertextuality is nothing new,”⁹² while the author of an intertextual analysis of Matthew and Paul can remark, “It has been argued that *the method of intertextuality*, which has been used so profitably in New Testament scholarship, can be employed with equal benefit in a study

90. Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text” (French original 1971), in idem, *Image—Music—Text*, 160.

91. Contrast Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” 69: “the notion of intertextuality replaces the notion of intersubjectivity. . . .” Certain of the essays collected in Danna Nolan Fewell, ed., *Reading between Texts: The Bible and Intertextuality* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992) represented a different trajectory for biblical intertextuality, one less concerned with authorial intentionality than with what exceeds and subverts it; but that has not been the version that has caught on in biblical studies.

92. Johannes Cornelis de Moor, “Introduction,” in *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel: Papers Read at the Tenth Joint Meeting of The Society for Old Testament Study and Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland & België, Held at Oxford, 1997*, ed. Johannes Cornelis de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 1998), ix. He continues: “The way in which Jewish works of the Second Temple period and the New Testament used the Old Testament forced exegetes to address the issue of intertextuality long before this postmodern shibboleth was coined” (ibid.).

of Matthew's Gospel and the Pauline epistles."⁹³ Richard B. Hays, one of the earliest consolidators of the method,⁹⁴ introducing the collection *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, admits: "Biblical critics are sometimes a little slow on the uptake with regard to . . . cultural fashions, but once we get wind of a new 'method,' we are sure to pursue it relentlessly for all it is worth—and maybe then some. . . . The journals are now full of essays on the intertextual analysis of everything from Genesis to Revelation, from 'Q' to the *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* of Pseudo-Philo."⁹⁵ This proliferation, however, gives rise to a problem, namely, "that the term intertextuality is used in such diverse and imprecise ways that it becomes difficult to know what is meant by it and whether it points to anything like a method that can be applied reliably to the analysis of texts to facilitate coherent critical conversation."⁹⁶

Faced with the domesticating capacity of such a discipline, what chance did poststructuralism in general, and deconstruction in particular, ever have of making a difference in it, much less a *différance*? The reception—or not—of deconstruction in biblical studies reveals much about the nature of the discipline. Ill-equipped to preconceive of it as anything but another method, biblical scholars immediately turned deconstruction into "deconstructionism," according it a place in the already long assembly line of critical "-isms" that lie at the center of the biblical studies enterprise: textual criticism, source criticism, tradition criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, composition criticism, genre criticism, rhetorical criticism, feminist criticism, canonical criticism, social-scientific criticism, structuralism, narrative criticism, reader-response criticism, deconstructionism. . . . This particular "-ism" was assigned a series of spectacularly reductive definitions, along the lines of "Deconstructionism denies that texts have any single correct

93. David C. Sim, "Matthew and the Pauline Corpus: A Preliminary Intertextual Study," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (2009): 418, emphasis added.

94. See Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989).

95. Richard B. Hays, "Foreword to the English Edition," in *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, ed. Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier and Leroy A. Huizenga (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2009), xi.

96. *Ibid.* The poststructuralist take on intertextuality finds token expression in the collection in George Aichele, "Canon as Intertext: Restraint or Liberation?" (*Reading the Bible Intertextually*, 139–56).

meaning or can have any single correct interpretation,”⁹⁷ which made it sound less like another useful addition to the biblical scholar’s methodological toolkit than a reason for early retirement. At the same time the word “deconstruction(ism),” evoking esoteric procedures and complex methodological machinery, began to pop up regularly in our academic prose. The notion of advanced critical machinery for highly trained operators appealed to our biblical scholarly sensibilities. Curiosity was seldom sufficiently piqued, however, to impel one to plunge directly into the machine’s manuals—Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, say, or de Man’s *Allegories of Reading*—and attempt to extract the methods presumably at their core.

There was less and less method to extract from literary studies, in any case, as the 1980s gave way to the 1990s. A remarkably under-remarked feature of the four developments in literary studies that dominated the 1990s and continue to be influential down to the present—postcolonial studies, cultural studies, queer studies, and masculinity studies⁹⁸—is that none of them offered anything much in the way of a “methodology,” at least as we have been conditioned to understand that term, and cathect to it, in biblical studies.

97. To distil the essence of such definitions. For recent examples, see the section “Postmodernism and Deconstructionism” in Corrine L. Carvalho, *Encountering Ancient Voices: A Guide to Reading the Old Testament* (Winona, Minn.: Saint Mary’s Press, 2006), 422, or the section “Postmodern Criticism” in Mark Allan Powell, “Literary Approaches and the Gospel of Matthew,” in *Methods for Matthew*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (Methods in Biblical Interpretation; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 58–59. Colin Davis remarks of similar definitions of deconstruction in literary studies: “Why bother to read Derrida when you could rely on grotesque caricatures of his thought to rebut him?” (*After Poststructuralism*, 2–3).

98. Arguably, the only comparably high-profile development that the 2000s have yielded is ecocriticism, which, not surprisingly, is still very much in ascent. For representative work in this mode, see Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, eds., *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Steven Rosendale, ed., *The Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory, and the Environment* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002); Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (New Critical Idiom; London and New York: Routledge, 2004); Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Blackwell Manifestos; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005); Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer, eds., *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic Conversations on Ecocriticism* (Nature, Culture and Literature, 3; Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006); and Helen Tiffin and Graham Huggan, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010). Much of this work is deeply inflected by Theory, which sets it apart from the corresponding corpus of work in biblical studies, typified by the five-volume Earth Bible series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic;

British cultural studies did develop certain distinctive methodological procedures during the 1970s and early 1980s.⁹⁹ By the time cultural studies began to take the U.S. academy by storm in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, it had all but uncoupled itself from method as such. What was distinctive (and controversial) about U.S. cultural studies was its preferred objects of analysis, as we shall see, not its analytical procedures.¹⁰⁰ What of postcolonial studies? Despite the colossal critical literature that the field has spawned, it has yielded remarkably little in the way of readily identifiable methodologies or even general strategies of reading. What does immediately leap to mind are the immensely influential concepts set forth (in thoroughly unsystematic fashion) by Homi Bhabha in certain of his early essays on nineteenth-century India collected in *The Location of Culture*—colonial ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity.¹⁰¹ These three interrelated concepts do provide a productive reading grid that can readily, if not unproblematically, be superimposed on texts emerging from empire, including biblical texts.¹⁰²

Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000–2002). A thriving subfield of ecocriticism centres on human-animal relations, and has been dubbed “animal studies,” “animality studies,” or “posthuman animality studies.” For an excellent overview, see Cary Wolfe, “Human, All Too Human: ‘Animal Studies’ and the Humanities,” *PMLA* 124 (2009): 564–75. This subfield receives its primary impetus, at least within the field of literary studies, from certain animal books written by leading Theorists (see the works listed in n. 59 above).

99. As briefly outlined in Stephen D. Moore, “Between Birmingham and Jerusalem: Cultural Studies and Biblical Studies,” *Semeia* 82 (1998): 7–8.

100. A lack (if that indeed is what it is) that James Schwoch, Mimi White, and Dilip Gaonkar, eds., *The Question of Method in Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005) attempts to redress. The thing to be noted for our purposes, however, is that the volume emerges out of a general perception that the question of method in cultural studies is a puzzling and vexing one.

101. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

102. See, for example, Tat-siong Benny Liew, *Politics of Parousia: Reading Mark Inter(textually)* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 42; Leiden: Brill, 1999); Erin Runions, *Changing Subjects: Gender, Nation and Future in Micah* (Playing the Texts, 7; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002); Jin Hee Han, “Homi Bhabha and the Mixed Blessings of Hybridity in Biblical Hermeneutics,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 1 (2005): <http://publications.epress.monash.edu/loi/bc>; Yong-Sung Ahn, *The Reign of God and Rome in Luke’s Passion Narrative: An East Asian Global Perspective* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 80; Leiden: Brill, 2006); Stephen D. Moore, *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament* (The Bible in the Modern World, 12; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006); Robert Paul Seesengood, *Competing Identities: The Athlete and the Gladiator in Early Christianity* (Library of New Testament Studies, 346; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2006); Simon Samuel, *A Postcolonial Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Library of New Testament Studies; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2007); and for

Gayatri Spivak's no less influential oeuvre, however, offers exceedingly slim pickings for the method-hungry biblical critic,¹⁰³ as, indeed, does Edward Said's, the latter arguably yielding only the sweepingly general strategy of "contrapuntal reading."¹⁰⁴

Queer studies and masculinity studies, too, along with autobiographical criticism (a more fleeting but also influential product of the 1990s), offer extremely little in the way of repeatable methodological procedures.¹⁰⁵ They seem to offer nothing comparable even to Derrida's early (and, for many years, endlessly cited) description of deconstruction as an operation conducted in two successive phases, "reversal" and

incisive critique of Bhabha, Joseph A. Marchal, *The Politics of Heaven: Women, Gender, and Empire in the Study of Paul* (Paul in Critical Contexts; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

103. Although one can do a surprising amount with a few scraps; see especially Laura E. Donaldson, "Gospel Hauntings: The Postcolonial Demons of New Testament Criticism," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (The Bible and Postcolonialism, 8; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2005), 97–113; and Tat-siong Benny Liew, "Postcolonial Criticism: Echoes of a Subaltern's Contribution and Exclusion," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 211–31. Then again, what would constitute a famine for many biblical critics constitutes a feast for many literary critics: "A Spivakian methodology hinges on the following: acknowledging complicity, learning to learn from below, unlearning one's privilege as loss, working without guarantees, persistently critiquing the structures that one inhabits intimately and that one cannot say no to, and giving attention to subject formation such that it 'produc[es] the reflexive basis for self-conscious social agency.'" Sangeeta Ray, "An Ethics on the Run," *PMLA* 123 (2008): 238, quoting Spivak, "Not Really a Properly Intellectual Response: An Interview with Gayatri Spivak" (conducted by Tani E. Barlow), *Positions* 12 (2004): 153.

104. On which see Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), especially 51, 66–67.

105. Queer theory, the most visible manifestation of queer studies, is a quintessentially poststructuralist "take" on sex and sexual identity that argues their constructedness and fluidity. Masculinity studies, though less intimately intertwined with poststructuralism, also tends to be thoroughly constructionist in its approach to gender. See further Iain Morland and Annabelle Willox, eds., *Queer Theory* (Readers in Cultural Criticism; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Lynne Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (Gender and Culture; New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Tim Edwards, *Cultures of Masculinity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Todd W. Reeser, *Masculinities in Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010). For biblical work informed by queer theory, see Stephen D. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible* (Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001); Ken Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex and Bible in Queer Perspective* (Queering Theology; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004); and certain of the contributions to Ken Stone, ed., *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (Journal for the Study of the

“reinscription”;¹⁰⁶ or of Aram Veesser’s encapsulation of New Historicism (at least as practiced by its preeminent exponent, Stephen Greenblatt) as an analytic strategy that typically moves through five successive “moments”: anecdote, outrage, resistance, containment, and autobiography.¹⁰⁷ Queer studies and masculinity studies do effect a radical reframing of sex, sexuality, and/or gender that draws the critic’s eye compulsively to certain features of a text and even predetermines the broad contours of a reading. But each of these developments, along with postcolonial studies and cultural studies, seem to have more in common methodologically with feminist studies, say, than with form criticism, redaction criticism, rhetorical criticism, structuralism, narrative criticism, or any of the other major “-isms” in biblical studies. In literary studies, as in biblical studies, feminist criticism has not been associated with any one methodology. Rather it has been a radically eclectic enterprise, methodologically speaking. What feminist scholars do share in common is a critical sensibility, an encompassing angle of vision that, in a more fundamental fashion than a methodological framework, brings previously unperceived or disavowed data into focus.¹⁰⁸ And postcolonial studies, cultural studies, queer studies, and masculinity studies seem to operate similarly.¹⁰⁹ Autobiographical criticism, for its part (a more fleeting but nonetheless influential product of the same era), also diverges strikingly from traditional methodology, the critic’s personal history forming the explicit reading frame into which the text is placed and in relation to which it assumes fresh meaning.¹¹⁰

Old Testament Supplement Series, 334; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), and Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache, eds., *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM, 2006). For masculinity studies as biblical studies, see Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, eds., *New Testament Masculinities* (Semeia Studies, 45; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Ovidiu Creangă, ed., *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010). Autobiographical criticism is discussed below.

106. Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (trans. Alan Bass; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981 [French original 1972]), 41–43.

107. H. Aram Veesser, “The New Historicism,” in *The New Historicism Reader*, ed. H. Aram Veesser (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 5.

108. Cf. Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook, eds., *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1991).

109. Cultural studies is discussed in more detail below.

110. See Diane P. Freedman, Olivia Frey, and Frances Murphy Zauhar, eds., *The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press,

This post-methodological swerve in literary studies (effected unself-consciously, it would seem, with no manifestos to herald it) offers an instructive contrast to the established modes of reading in biblical studies. For methodology has long been the *sine qua non* of biblical studies as an academic discipline.¹¹¹ Methodology is what is meant to keep our discourse on the Bible from being subjective, personal, private, pietistic, pastoral, devotional, or homiletical. Methodology is what is meant to maintain the dividing partition between sermon and scholarship, and prevent the lecturer's podium from morphing into a pulpit. The homily has long been the constitutive other of biblical criticism, in other words, and methodology the enabling condition of such criticism—"methodology" here being a cipher for "objectivity," "neutrality," "disinterestedness," and all of the other related and foundational values of biblical studies as an academic discipline. These values are rarely trumpeted nowadays, at least in Anglophone biblical scholarship (evidence of the impact of postmodernism on the field), but continue to hold sway, seemingly, over most practitioners of the discipline anyway, at least to the extent that scholars resist seeing their own scholarship as advocacy for the interests of their class or any other—that being the perceived preserve of other (less scholarly) scholars who wear their political agenda on their sleeve. (That perception is evidence of the lack of impact of postmodernism on the field.)¹¹²

But our quarantining of the biblical-critical from the homiletical has not occurred without cost. Most obviously, our obsession with method has made for a mountainous excess of dull and dreary books, essays,

1993); and Diane P. Freedman and Olivia Frey, eds., *Autobiographical Writings Across the Disciplines: A Reader* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003). For autobiographical criticism in biblical studies, see Janice Capel Anderson and Jeffrey L. Staley, eds., *Taking It Personally: Autobiographical Biblical Criticism* (Semeia, 72; Atlanta: Scholars, 1995); Jeffrey L. Staley, *Reading with a Passion: Rhetoric, Autobiography, and the American West in the Gospel of John* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, ed., *The Personal Voice in Biblical Interpretation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); idem, ed., *Autobiographical Biblical Criticism: Between Text and Reader* (Leiden: Deo, 2002); and Fiona C. Black, ed., *The Recycled Bible: Autobiographical Criticism, Cultural Studies, and the Space Between* (Semeia Studies, 51; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

111. More precisely, since the Enlightenment, as we shall see.

112. Homiletics, too, of course, is a field much preoccupied with method. It seems to us, however, that methodology plays a substantially different role in homiletics than in traditional biblical scholarship. To put it mildly, the function of method in homiletics is hardly that of facilitating a disinterested stance on the part of interpreter and audience toward the biblical text.

and articles: here, first, in numbing dry detail is my method; now watch and be amazed while I apply it woodenly to this unsuspecting biblical text. In addition, the restless quest for ever-new methods with which to read the same old texts has always predetermined our dealings as biblical scholars with literary studies. Even celebrations of readerly subjectivity and autonomy in literary studies, or impassioned cries for freedom from the straitjackets of Theory and methodology, have quickly congealed into still further methods as soon as they came into contact with biblical studies, as we shall see. Meanwhile, important historiographical developments in literary studies have gone largely unnoticed in biblical studies, even, or especially, by historical critics.

Unhistorical Criticism

In a move that was at once inevitable and unfortunate, Theory as it entered biblical studies was stamped quite specifically as *Literary Theory*, campaigning for freedom from *History's* Empire. The original wagon train setting off into the sunset of Theory was packed with self-proclaimed dissidents, discontents, refugees, and asylum seekers from the totalitarian state of historical criticism, demanding the right to do something, anything, else—and the overdetermined heading of (Literary) Theory came to stand for that anything, and everything, else. The advent of Theory in biblical studies was caught up in the dichotomy of the literary and the historical, or in much-loved terms that smacked reassuringly of scientific specialization, the “synchronic” and the “diachronic.” The dichotomization of Theory and historiography was inevitable, given historical criticism’s monopoly of the field, but it also served to ensure from the outset that Theory’s impact on the field would be minimal. To invite the accusation or even the suspicion that one’s work was “ahistorical” was to put oneself beyond the pale of “serious” biblical scholarship and beyond the kinds of questions that the guild was predisposed to recognize as the ones that really mattered. That is why tirades against Theory have been few and far between in biblical studies—Theory has had too little impact, all told, to merit much attention—while the confrontation between historical “minimalism” and “maximalism” is frequently the occasion for sell-out duels with pistols at dawn.

Ironically, however, even as the wagon train of Theorists was trundling out of historical-critical territory in biblical studies, literary Theorists were busy rediscovering history. In reaction to the perceived

ahistorical formalism of early American deconstruction (epitomized by the work of Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller), Theory in literary studies began to take a sharp historiographical turn. Driving this development were such field-reorienting phenomena as colonial discourse analysis (later to be relabelled postcolonial theory) and New Historicism.¹¹³ New “historicisms” replaced old “formalisms,” and “formalism” became a term of abuse in literary circles.¹¹⁴ Had biblical literary criticism, in its first youthful flush of attraction to Theory, been more attuned to and more taken with these poststructuralist experiments in historiography, what difference, if any, might it have made for Theory’s reception and dissemination in biblical studies?¹¹⁵ We can only speculate.

Yet it is not as though the fixation with history characteristic of biblical scholarship had no effect whatsoever on biblical literary critics, even those ostensibly in flight from historical criticism. For the importation

113. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978) came to be seen retrospectively as the charter document of colonial discourse analysis (and then of postcolonial theory), while Stephen Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) came to be seen as the seminal text of New Historicism (even though Greenblatt did not coin the term until 1982). For an excellent introduction to New Historicism, see Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), together with Veenser, *The New Historicism Reader*.

114. More recently, the very concept of formalism has been problematized, certain critics arguing that it was in fact, and of necessity, always covertly attached to histories, contexts, authors, and referents. See, for example, Culler, *The Literary in Theory*, 9–12, 99–116, esp. 101–3; Butler, Guillory and Thomas, “Preface,” in idem, *What’s Left of Theory?* viii–x. Culler argues that “the text itself” was always a “complicated positivity,” even for the New Critics (102), while Butler, Guillory, and Thomas argue that deconstruction entailed the following complexification of New Critical formalism: “There is always that which calls the form into question, and that is not simply another formal element, but a resistant remainder that sets limits to formalism itself” (ix).

115. Biblical studies engagement with New Historicism, in particular, has been slight and sporadic. See Lori L. Rowlett, *Joshua and the Rhetoric of Violence: A New Historicist Analysis* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 226; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996); Stephen D. Moore, ed., “The New Historicism,” *Biblical Interpretation* 5:4, 1997 (thematic issue); Gina Hens-Piazza, *The New Historicism* (Guides to Biblical Scholarship; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002); Colleen M. Conway, “The Production of the Johannine Community: A New Historicist Approach,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121 (2002): 479–95; idem, “The New Historicism and the Historical Jesus in John: Friends or Foe?” in *John, Jesus, and History*; Vol. 1: *Critical Appraisals of Critical Views*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, S.J., and Tom Thatcher (Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series, 44; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 199–216; and idem, “Supplying the Missing Body of Onesimus: Readings of Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” in *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur’an as Literature and Culture*, ed. Roberta Sterman Sabath (Biblical Interpretation 98; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 475–84.

of Theory into biblical studies soon led to an almost obsessive concern with the author, tethered as he was to history, and his troubled relationship with the reader. Reader-oriented Theory, in particular, quickly morphed into a debate about the power of the historical author, abetted by his intratextual henchman the implied author, relative to that of the reader in their perpetual tug-of-war over the text's meaning, a tussle in which the reader could only ever be on the losing side, given the biblical scholar's fixation on authorial intentions. No works of reader-response criticism were more warmly received by biblical scholars than Wolfgang Iser's *The Implied Reader* and *The Act of Reading*, notwithstanding the fact that they were repeatedly panned by secular literary critics for seeming to offer the reader a bill of emancipation from the author with one hand while surreptitiously tearing it up with the other.¹¹⁶ To this day, meanwhile, no major works of reader-response criticism have received less attention from biblical reader-response critics than David Bleich's *Subjective Criticism*, Norman Holland's *5 Readers Reading*, and other work similarly focused on the unpredictable meanderings of "real" readers as opposed to the lockstep goose-stepping of "ideal" readers.¹¹⁷ Real readers did not fit well into the machinery of method. We were much more comfortable with readerly cyborgs—ideal readers, intended readers, model readers, inscribed readers, encoded readers, implied readers, informed readers, competent readers, narratees, readers-in-the-text—who had been programed by historical authors to read in rigidly predetermined ways. More precisely, we ourselves had been programed by our disciplinary formation to read in these mechanical ways. But what were the historical and cultural forces that had formed the discipline itself? How do we account for the ineluctable strangeness of the biblical scholar? To those questions we now turn.

116. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), and idem, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). For discussion of Iser's practice of granting the implied reader freedom in theory only to withdraw it in the actual interpretation of literary works, see Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 100–7 passim.

117. David Bleich, *Subjective Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); Norman N. Holland, *5 Readers Reading* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975). For more recent attempts to complicate overly generic and idealized "reader constructs," see the essays collected in Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart, eds., *Reading Sites: Social Difference and Reader Response* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2004).