

Article

Biblical Hermeneutics without Interpretation? After Affect, beyond Representation, and Other Minor Apocalypses

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Abstract: Affect theory, non-representational theory, and assemblage theory have been among the most impactful developments in the theoretical humanities in the wake of, and in reaction to, poststructuralism. These interlocking bodies of theory and critical practice call into question two concepts foundational for biblical hermeneutics, namely, interpretation and representation. In literary studies, the poststructuralist “death of the author” has been succeeded by a post-poststructuralist “death of the interpreter”. How might biblical exegesis be reimagined on the far side of this double demise? Non-representational theory, meanwhile, in tandem with affect theory, has dismantled traditional understandings of representation; this article argues that traditional biblical scholarship, epitomized by biblical commentary, is driven by a representation compulsion. Assemblage theory, for its part, more than any other body of thought, reveals the immense complexity of the act of reading, not least biblical reading—after which even explicit evocations of contemporary contexts in contextual biblical hermeneutics amount to skeletally thin descriptions. These and other related lines of inquiry impel the rethinking of academic biblical reading attempted in this article.

Keywords: biblical hermeneutics; affect theory; non-representational theory; assemblage theory; Gilles Deleuze; Félix Guattari; narratology; narrative criticism



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Theory is addictive, even for certain biblical scholars. It imparts a reinvigorating newness, an infusion of the previously unthought, to the straitjacketed act of reading a biblical text “professionally”. “Theory” is shorthand here for certain of the more innovative strains of critical and cultural theory. Specifically, non-representational theory is the principal focus of the present article, together with other strands of thought intimately intertwined with it, notably, affect theory and assemblage theory.

Expository interjection: “Affect studies”, the editors of The Affect Theory Reader 2 (Seigworth and Pedwell 2023, p. 4) teasingly remark, “continues to evolve and mutate as a rangy and writhing poly-jumble of a creature (with far more than eight tentacles)”. Nevertheless, affect as ordinarily understood in affect theory is emotion, feeling, and/or an infinitely open-ended list of harder-to-name ephemera, insignificant and consequential by turns: diffuse sensations, reflexive reactions, vague apprehensions, shocking encounters, deadening atmospheres, and the like. “Language, representation, and consciousness are . . . always fringed with and permeated by affective forces”, Seigworth and Pedwell observe (p. 19). Assemblage theory merits its own exposition, and will receive it in due course.

1. The Geography of Non-Representational Theory

Introducing the collection *Non-Representational Methodologies* in 2015, Phillip Vannini boldly announced: “Non-representational theory is now widely considered to be the successor of postmodern theory, . . . and the most notable intellectual force behind the turn away from cognition, symbolic meaning, and textuality” (p. 2). We will shortly consider the “turn to” that this “turn away” entails. Suffice it for now to note that if this shake-up is indeed to be regarded as a revolution, it is far quieter than the postmodern upheaval of the 1980s and 1990s that had even some biblical scholars alarmed. By and large, traditionally minded biblical scholars are now inoculated against such anxiety. And although some

theory-imbibing biblical scholars have embraced affect theory (e.g., [Kooseed and Moore 2014](#); [Kotrosits 2015, 2016](#); [Moore 2017](#), pp. 15–59; [Moore 2023](#), pp. 34–54, 233–84; [Black and Kooseed 2019](#); [Hoke 2021](#); [Schellenberg 2022](#)), I know of no one who has written on, or with, non-representational theory.¹

What might be the stakes in such an engagement? As Vannini’s statement implies, non-representational theory is, in no small part, a pendulum-swinging reaction to post-modern theory, the latter epitomized by poststructuralist theory with its trademark fixation on language and its preeminent byproducts: cognition, discourse, ideology, and representation.² But the pendulum is also a potential wrecking ball when it comes to biblical scholarship. Or it would be if the inherited edifice of biblical scholarship did not have deep foundations and massive walls. What the specific innovations in theory this article explores potentially erode, in any case, are several of the main conceptual and practical pillars of the biblical-scholarly institution: meaning, interpretation, method, and, of course, representation.

Self-deprecatory interjection: Enough of silly apocalypticism. This is already turning out to be yet another end-of-the-scholarly-world-as-we-know-it melodrama. I have crafted more than my share of them over the decades, God knows, beginning when poststructuralism loomed eschatologically on my own hermeneutical horizon. But I do like a good story.

What, more precisely, is non-representational theory? Vannini’s claim that non-representational theory “is now widely considered to be the successor of postmodern theory” ([Vannini 2015](#), p. 2) is either entirely overblown or altogether accurate, depending on whether one brings a macro lens or a panoramic lens to it. The panorama will be unveiled later. Speaking narrowly for now, non-representational theory is a disciplinarily specific and nationally localized field. For once, the discipline in question is not literary studies or cultural studies; rather, it is human geography. And the nation in question is not France or the United States; rather, it is the United Kingdom. The acknowledged doyen of non-representational theory is British human geographer Nigel Thrift, whose restless ruminations through the 1990s were catalytic for the emerging field, and whose *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect* ([Thrift 2008](#)) is its best-known product. Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison’s edited collection, *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography* ([Anderson and Harrison 2010b](#)), has also been highly impactful, it appears to me, not least the editors’ programmatic opening statement, “The Promise of Non-Representational Theories” ([Anderson and Harrison 2010a](#)).

The enduring disciplinary specificity of non-representational theory, in the narrow sense of the term, is evident from the fact that its first true (late-arriving) textbook, Paul Simpson’s *Non-Representational Theory* ([Simpson 2021](#)), is explicitly written out of a human geography context and primarily for other human geographers.³ Yet, the discourse of non-representational theory is so expansive and transposable as to overspill its disciplinary boundaries at every turn. As one example of many possible examples of non-representational theory’s transdisciplinary reach, consider the following statement by Hayden Lorimer, another British geographer, on how it “[expands] our once comfortable understanding of ‘the social’” ([Lorimer 2005](#), p. 84). The social phenomena to which non-representational theory—“more-than-representational theory” is Lorimer’s preferred term—typically turns our attention may, “at first, . . . seem remarkable only by their apparent insignificance. The focus falls on how life takes shape and gains expression in shared experiences, everyday routines, fleeting encounters, embodied movements, precognitive triggers, practical skills, affective intensities, enduring urges, unexceptional interactions and sensuous dispositions”—such focus enabling “an escape from the established academic habit of striving to uncover meanings and values that apparently await our discovery, interpretation, judgement and ultimate representation” (p. 84).

2. The Death of the Interpreter

Lorimer's escape clause ("an escape from . . . established academic habit") begs application to the inherited assumptions of standard biblical scholarship, not least the concept of interpretation that is the enabling engine for most forms of biblical criticism. This inherited concept of interpretation is wedded to an inherited concept of meaning—of biblical meaning imagined to "await our discovery", the uncovering of which is the preeminent purpose of most of our scholarly industry, meaning unveiled through acts of "interpretation, [critical] judgement", and if not "ultimate representation", then at least provisional representation in our scholarly prose (Lorimer 2005, p. 84).

Let a single example of our habitual reading tactic suffice for the purpose of illustration: Adela Yarbro Collins's dissection of the Gerasene demoniac pericope in her magisterial commentary on Mark (Collins 2007, pp. 263–73; Mark 5:1–20).⁴ Collins's construal of the pericope typifies the customary, delicate, biblical-scholarly dance between the putative reconstruction of plausible authorial intention, on the one hand, and earliest audience reception, on the other, the former mirroring the latter and vice versa.⁵ "It may be that, in the original [pre-Markan] form of the account, the 'name' Legion was chosen to express an anti-Roman sentiment", Collins muses (p. 269). "There is, however, no theme of opposition to Rome in Mark", she continues, and so "it is more likely that the earliest audiences would have read the story . . . in connection with the theme of the battle between Jesus and Satan" (pp. 269–70). Implicitly, for Collins, the earliest audiences (that plural reducing to "the audience" in her next paragraph) would have understood the story to mean what the Markan author intended it to mean, although she employs the word "aim" rather than "intention": "The aim of the story is not—at least not primarily—to make a statement about the Romans" (p. 270).⁶ "Discovering" by "uncovering" and "representing" (cf. Lorimer 2005, p. 84) the "aims", or intentions, of the shadowy author whom tradition dubbed *Markos*, and, simultaneously, the realization of those intentions in the responses of (an) equally shadowy, non-localizable "earliest audience(s)", is the principal project of Collins's commentary on Mark; and it contributes to the communal project of mainstream New Testament scholarship in general.

The concept of meaning that underwrites this communal endeavor is immanentist through and through. As French philosopher Gilles Deleuze—whose thought has been catalytic for non-representational theory, affect theory, and every other form of theory tapped in the present article—once phrased it, interpretation, as classically conceived, approaches the book "as a box with something inside" (Deleuze 1995, p. 7). For biblical scholars, that something has almost always been the meaning, or meanings, which the book's author, the box's maker, is imagined to have delicately placed within it millennia ago (we have tended to proceed, in any case, as though we presupposed such an act), meanings that must now, with equal delicacy, be extracted whole and entire from the book-box by accredited experts. Deleuze irreverently described such reverent reading practices as both the preserve of a self-appointed priestly class and a neurosis, a condition he dubbed "interpretosis" (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, p. 47; Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, pp. 114, 117).

Biblical studies has been siphoning from literary studies for more than half a century. How has interpretation, again as classically conceived, fared in literary studies in recent decades? Particularly interesting here are the provocative pronouncements of Jeffrey T. Nealon, Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, first in the "Interpretation" chapter of his book *Post-Postmodernism* (Nealon 2012, pp. 126–45), and subsequently in a prominent interview (Nealon 2020). At issue here is less a Death of the Author (cf. Barthes [1967] 1977) than a Death of the Reader-as-Interpreter. In his book, Nealon argued that "research in and around language and literature" was "no longer primarily concerned with producing interpretations of . . . literary artifacts", a "thrust" that, intriguingly for biblical studies, he termed "anti-hermeneutic" (Nealon 2012, pp. 127–28).

The waves of French critical theory assailing the shores of American literary studies in the 1970s and 1980s did not, in Nealon's view, erode the reading-as-interpretation model.

Literary “meaning . . . remained *the* privileged site of poststructuralist critical endeavor” (Nealon 2012, p. 129)—all the more so, paradoxically, for having become elusive and undecidable under the influence of deconstruction. Even in the era of High French Theory, then, interpretation remained “the only game in town” (p. 222). The “tacit agreement” regulating this game was “that (1) the project was interpretation and (2) the objects were largely literary objects of fairly high-culture value” (Nealon 2020, p. 231).

But two further developments were creeping up on the interpretation game and would rip its tacit agreement to shreds. The U.S. “canon wars” of the 1980s and 1990s expanded the classic Western literary canon until it exploded. The 1990s, too, saw the dissemination of cultural studies in U.S. academia. At the outermost edge of that iconoclastic field, any pop-cultural artifact whatsoever (a graphic novel, a Barbie doll, a death metal album) became as worthy a candidate for academic engagement as *Hamlet*, *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Ulysses*. These and other related developments gradually engendered a situation in which “the work of interpretation” was “no longer the primary research work of literature departments” (Nealon 2012, p. 133).

Similar pronouncements on the current state of U.S. literary studies are not hard to come by. In the same volume of interviews (Veesser 2020) on the pasts and presents of literary studies in which Nealon ruminates on the demise of interpretation (Nealon 2020), Kenneth W. Warren, Professor of English at the University of Chicago, reflects: “Even the term ‘English Department’ is [now] something of a misnomer. What you often find are people . . . who spend most of their time engaging with colleagues and work that falls outside of what we think an English Department to be—a kind of centrifugal pressure. It’s harder to find something that seems to be a center” (Warren 2020, p. 173).

Reactions to this dissolution have been varied. Some, like Nealon, have raised a celebratory glass to the Death of the Interpreter. Others have lamented the Interpreter’s passing. As a poignant instance of such lament, consider Roland Greene’s “Literary Criticism? Really?” (Greene 2010). He concedes: “Many people in the industry of writing about literature shrink from the term *literary criticism*, which has a pungent, mid-20th-century odor about it. And many students don’t accept the need for a class of interpreters oriented toward literary art, either because they think of interpretation as something less than a discrete activity, or they question the object, that is, literature” (n.p.). Greene further concedes: “Now there is no reason that this particular convention [literary interpretation] must survive: maybe its time has passed. Maybe literary critics are like Sovietologists or metaphysicians, scholars whose fields have been transformed almost to the point of vanishing—or outside the academy, like vaudeville performers or typewriter repairmen, relics of a closed era” (n.p.). But Greene himself is not yet ready to deliver a graveside eulogy for interpretation: “There remains a franchise for interpretation, however we have attenuated or abandoned it” (n.p.).

Another name for the demise of interpretation in U.S. literary studies is the demise of close reading, and on that topic, too, much has been written. Again a “defensive” example, this time from Barbara Herrnstein Smith. In “What Was ‘Close Reading?’” (Smith 2016), she inquires: “If, as seems to be the case, the practices of close reading have operated in literary studies not as one method among others but as virtually definitive of the field, then how are we to understand [any] method whose advocates define it in opposition to—and, indeed, as superseding—precisely those practices?” (p. 58). Such a development might “be seen as marking the dissolution of literary studies” (p. 58).

In 2012, Nealon still felt able to qualify, “The question of meaning is, and I think will remain, the bread and butter of classroom practice in literature departments; in particular, the undergraduate theory class will continue to function as an invaluable introduction to interpretive protocols for some time to come” (Nealon 2012, p. 133). But he adds, “On the other side of the podium . . . it’s a different story . . . It’s almost impossible [now] to imagine a publishing future that consists of new and improved interpretations of Pynchon, Renaissance tragedies, or Melville” (p. 133). The 2020 Nealon fully concurs with the 2012 Nealon on this point: “I really can’t imagine what a ‘new interpretation’ of *Robinson Crusoe*

would look like. So we're on to the myriad other things you can do with texts, other than talking about their 'meaning'" (Nealon 2020, p. 231).

Confessional interjection: More on that myriad in a moment. First, let me confess, in reflexive reaction to Nealon's implicit summons, that I personally feel no desire whatsoever to set foot on the first yellow brick of the post-interpretive road, to shrug my own interpretation compulsion aside, to be cured of my chronic interpretosis. In my writing, even in my teaching, interpretation is still what matters most to me. While recognizing that the concept of meaning brims over with post-poststructuralist problems, I still find interpretation to be the most meaning-full aspect of my peculiar existence as a biblical studies professional.

But how dead is interpretation, really, in literary studies? (Yes, it is time for my own plaintive pushback.) Even some of what is still published in literary studies under the banner of theory presents as interpretation to the casual glance. Or is "interpretation" no longer the best term for such reading? Is the term too burdened with immanentist baggage, too tied to "text-as-box" thinking, to capture what post-structuralist theory, in our age of post-postmodernism (an unassuming age, all told, relative to the brash postmodern age that preceded it), offers for reading literary texts, including biblical texts?

Consider, for instance (to come back to affect theory), the recent collection *Affect Theory and Literary Critical Practice* (Ahern 2019b). What kind of literary critical practice does this collection showcase? There are no explicit theatrics around interpretation or non-interpretation in the volume. Yet, its essays employ an approach to literary reading that, implicitly at least, is post-hermeneutical. Stephen Ahern in his introduction to the essays distills their reading strategies down to two guiding questions: "What explanatory power is affect theory affording me here as a critic? What can the insights of the theory help me to *do* with a [literary] text?" (Ahern 2019a, p. 2).

The latter question, that of *doing*, is a recurrent one in contemporary theory—in affect theory, but also in other related modes of theory, not least non-representational theory—and is customarily seen as a quintessentially Deleuzian question. For Deleuze, "the literary machine" posed "no problem of meaning" but "only a problem of use" (Deleuze [1976] 2000, p. 146). Deleuze's close collaborator, Félix Guattari, meanwhile, was saying such things as "one does not interpret a content" in a literary production; rather, "one makes it work" by activating it as "a pragmatic field" (Guattari [1979] 2011, p. 304). And from there it was but a short step to the anti-hermeneutic manifesto with which Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987) begins: "We will never ask what a book means, . . . we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities [that is, affects], in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed" (p. 4). More on this below when we come to talk about assemblages.

In the meanwhile, note that the emerging answer to my interrogatory article title—"Biblical Hermeneutics Without Interpretation?"—is twofold. Biblical hermeneutics without interpretation is, of course, no longer biblical hermeneutics, since, strictly speaking, biblical hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of biblical interpretation (*hermēneia*). That's the easy part. But what does biblical hermeneutics without interpretation then become? *Biblical pragmatics* would seem to be the answer. The "what does this biblical text *mean*?" question is replaced by the "what does this biblical text *do*?" question, as interpretation is displaced by function. Or, more precisely, perhaps, attention to function, to the uses and abuses of the biblical text, becomes the primary engine of biblical scholarship thus reconceived, while a chastened preoccupation with a demystified interpretation assumes an ancillary role within the machine, a ghost within it, not entirely possible to exorcise—and not entirely necessary to exorcise either, since it, too, has its *uses*.

To think such thoughts, however, about biblical reading *within* the academy is simply to catch up, to draw level, with how biblical reading has long been conceived *outside* the academy, especially in liberationist circles. Already in 1983, Carlos Mesters could write of Christian base communities in Brazil and their strategies of biblical reception:

“The emphasis is not placed on the [biblical] text’s meaning in itself but rather on the meaning the text has for the people reading it. . . . Life takes first place!” (Mesters 1983, p. 122). Such declarations are not hard to find in liberationist discourse. Thirty years later, for instance, we find Gerald O. West, preeminent South African proponent of the “reading with” tactic that pairs socially engaged biblical scholars with extra-academic Bible readers/hearers from marginalized communities, declaring: “Contextual Bible reading is not about understanding the Bible better. The Bible is read for change. The Bible as a site of struggle itself. . . is wrestled with (or re-read) until it contributes to real, substantive, systemic change” (West 2015, p. 240).

3. The Erosion of Representation

Let us return to non-representational theory and Phillip Vannini’s (2015, p. 2) claim that it “is now widely considered to be the successor of postmodern theory” and “the most notable intellectual force” behind certain consequential “turns”, including the turn from meaning to function, from hermeneutics to pragmatics, we have been considering. The claim is credible only if the term “non-representational theory” is unfurled, umbrella-like, to encompass other theoretical movements—movements with which non-representational theory (in the narrow, British-located, human-geography-related sense) is in a relationship of “rough adherence”, as Richard Grusin phrases it in his introduction to *The Nonhuman Turn* (Grusin 2015, p. x). Grusin’s list of such movements is expansive (pp. viii–ix), but includes actor–network theory, affect theory, assemblage theory, and new materialism. “Among the features that loosely link these [intellectual movements]”, Grusin explains, “is that they [are] all opposed, in one way or another, to the more linguistic or representational turns of the 1970s through the 1990s” (p. x).

A little more on those earlier turns and the counterturns they triggered. “Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s social constructivism was the dominant mode of social and cultural analysis”, Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison observe in “The Promise of Non-Representational Theories” (Anderson and Harrison 2010a, p. 4), and representation in turn was the overarching preoccupation of social constructivism—not least when the body was its ostensible focus, as it so often was, the body being conceived as the preeminent representational vehicle for innumerable cultural scripts and symbolic meanings: gendered, raced, ethnic, classed, abled, and so on. But what was lost in such analysis, paradoxically, was the body itself,⁷ materiality itself—indeed, a “multiplicity of materialities” (p. 14), including “‘almost-not quite’ entities such as affects” (p. 13).

Non-representational theory (again, in the narrow sense) has long been in bed with affect theory. That intimacy is conspicuously on display, for instance, not only in Nigel Thrift’s field-consolidating monograph, *Non-Representational Theory*, which enshrines the word affect in its subtitle (*Space, Politics, Affect*), affect being the main focus of the book’s third and final part (Thrift 2008, pp. 151–254), but also in Paul Simpson’s introductory textbook, *Non-Representational Theory*, which includes a chapter titled “Non-Representational Theories and Affect” (Simpson 2021, pp. 72–103; see also Anderson 2014, esp. pp. 84–92, “How Is Affect Non-Representational?”; and O’Grady 2018). The brand of affect theory favored by non-representational theory is that which stems ultimately from Baruch Spinoza ([1677] 2002) as channeled and extended, first by Gilles Deleuze ([1968] 1992, [1981] 1988), and then by Brian Massumi ([2002] 2021), which is to say, all too simply put, the brand whose version of affect is the mainly-under-the-radar, dimly-if-at-all-perceived, everywhere-and-nowhere-at-once kind. As Simpson succinctly encapsulates it, “there are a whole host of affective transformation going on in our bodies (and a host of other bodies) at any given moment that we barely notice or realize and certainly not as they are actually happening” (Simpson 2021, p. 75). He notes how, in consequence, the “affective turn in human geography” has enormously expanded its potential subject matter (p. 82).

In affect theory, meanwhile, as it has developed in North America, one rarely encounters mentions of British non-representational theory; however, one does encounter problematizations of inherited concepts of representation that further disclose the ties that

bind affect theory to non-representational theory. First, consider one of the many examples proffered by Simpson (2021, pp. 82–83) of how bodily and social existence is an incessantly unfolding sequence of affects, occasionally spectacular, but more often quotidian. He begins a section titled “Sound Affects” with the observation that a nightclub or live music event plunges us into a plethora of “affective relations”—the “quite visceral” way, for instance, in which the treble, throbbing, and rumbling of amplified music is “felt in our bodies”, sound thus becoming “physically felt as well as heard”. Cut now to *The Affect Theory Reader* (Gregg and Seigworth 2010), specifically, to the interview with which it ends (Grossberg 2010). The interviewee, Lawrence Grossberg, commonly regarded as the preeminent pioneer of U.S. cultural studies, emerges in the interview as also an accidental early practitioner of affect theory. Grossberg reminisces that his path into affect analysis “was probably predetermined” by the fact that he entered graduate work with popular music as his subject and quickly became “convinced that theories of representation, of meaning, of ideology had little to offer any attempt to understand [it]”, which sent him into the arms of affect, even though he had as yet “no idea what it was” (Grossberg 2010, pp. 310–11).

Representation also features significantly in Seigworth and Gregg’s celebrated introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*. Musing on why “first encounters” with affect theory can feel like a “methodological and conceptual free fall”, they note how it renders “decidedly less sure” all of “the tried-and-true handholds and footholds” on which academic inquiry customarily relies, including concepts of “representation and meaning” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, p. 4). They add, “approaches to affect would feel a great deal less like a free fall if our most familiar modes of inquiry had begun with movement rather than stasis” (p. 4).

Let’s speak further of stasis. Non-representational theory is engaged in a “constant war on frozen states”, Thrift (2008, p. 5) remarks.⁸ Representation itself, as classically conceived, would, presumably, be the preeminent example of such petrification for non-representational theory, although Thrift never tells us why, exactly. By the time he is writing, the problematization of representation has already had a long history in critical theory.⁹ In particular, we already find Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition*, his first major book, intent on dismantling what he calls both “the four shackles of mediation” and “the four iron collars of representation”: identity, opposition, analogy, and resemblance (Deleuze [1968] 1994, pp. 29, 262).¹⁰

It is not so much, however, that non-representational theory, in its British manifestations, tosses out the concept of representation altogether as that it radically redefines it. No longer are representations conceived as “simple go-betweens tasked with re-presenting some pre-existing order or force”, Anderson and Harrison explain in “The Promise of Non-Representational Theories” (Anderson and Harrison 2010a, p. 14). How might this reconception of representation relate to biblical scholarship? Mainstream biblical hermeneutics, after all, predisposes us to think in terms of a historical world “behind the text” representationally mediated though a world “within the text” (whether narrative, poetic, or epistolary) to readers or hearers in a world “in front of the text”,¹¹ representation thus being implicitly conceived as the fulcrum of the entire author–audience transaction.

But the text–reader or text–hearer encounter is far too fast, far too fluid for this cumbersome *representation* of representation (cf. Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, pp. 86–87). There is an immediacy to what we customarily call “representation”, an immediacy the term belies, coupled as it is with the concept of “mediation”. Bodies of inscription, not least biblical texts, in which incorporeal bodies act and interact (see further Moore 2023, pp. 123–33 *passim*), themselves act directly on our corporeal bodies, viscerally and affectively—which is to say instantaneously—whether to enthrall us, repel us, or simply numb us with the already too often told. The world “behind” the biblical text, including the author behind the text (“the flesh-and-blood author”, as is often said),¹² together with the author “within” the text (“the implied author”, an intratextual persona whom we revisit below), are only ever encountered “in front of” the text—more precisely, in and through the pan-sensory organ that is our flesh-and-blood body. This behind-the-text world and these behind-the-text

and within-the-text authors are among the host of incorporeal bodies—both simple and complex, human and nonhuman—that the words of the text conjure up, with no palpable delay, no perceptible interval, no discernible passage “from sounds to images and from images to sense” (Deleuze 1990, p. 28), sensory sense being the semantically seething and affect-saturated sphere in which we always already find ourselves.

Ultimately, however, the act of reading makes nonsense of the “in front of the text” metaphor no less than the “behind the text” metaphor. No guardrail, no fence, no reinforced glass separates us from the text so that we can safely stand in front of it. We are automatically inside it, and it is inside us, the moment we begin to read it. Deleuze’s symbiotic collaborator Guattari (1995, pp. 92–93) puts it best. Musing on what literary and other “virtual machines”¹³ might be, Guattari writes:

Strange contraptions, you will tell me, these machines of virtuality, these blocks of mutant percepts and affects,¹⁴ half-object and half-subject . . . They have neither inside nor outside. They are limitless interfaces which secrete interiority and exteriority . . . They are becomings . . . One gets to know them not through representation but through affective contamination. They start to exist in you, in spite of you. And not only as crude, undifferentiated affects, but as hyper-complex compositions . . . But whatever their sophistication, a block of percept and affect . . . agglomerates in the same transversal flash the subject and object, the self and other, the material and incorporeal . . . In short, affect is not a question of representation . . . but of existence.

4. The Representation Compulsion and the Biblical Scholar

But can biblical scholarship, as traditionally practiced, function without the concept of representation as its fulcrum? A further British exercise in non-representational theory, Marcus Doel’s “Representation and Difference” (Doel 2010), while also having nothing to say about the Bible, will nonetheless enable us to parse out the notion of representation around which biblical historical criticism pivots.

Not only are we biblical scholars schooled to see biblical texts as representational through and through—we speak reflexively of the Priestly source’s representations of divine transcendence, of the Deuteronomist’s representations of polytheism, of Johannine representations of Judaism, of Pauline representations of the cross—but, tacitly at least, we also conceive of the bulk of our scholarly activities as themselves labors of representation.

Writes Doel: “Through representation, what has already been given will come to have been given again. Such is its fidelity: to give again, and again, what has always already been given” (Doel 2010, p. 117). Consider the biblical commentary in particular. Why are there so many—so very, very many—commentaries on biblical texts? There are, to be sure, standout commentaries in the crowd, whether because of their sheer size—Craig Keener’s 4640 page commentary on the Acts of the Apostles (Keener 2014–2015) is still the behemoth of this outsized breed—or because of their hermeneutical singularity: *Women’s Bible Commentary* (Newsom and Ringe 1992), *The Queer Bible Commentary* (Guest et al. 2006), *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Blount et al. 2007), *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (Segovia and Sugirtharajah 2007), and so on. But the overwhelming majority of commentaries are medium-sized historical-critical expositions of individual biblical books or clusters of books, commentaries that overlap enormously in terms of recycled, even if reworded, content. With apologies to Ecclesiastes 12:12, of the persistent proliferation of interchangeable biblical commentary series there is, apparently, no end.

But why? Whence the attraction for biblical scholars of commentary writing? Why is the commentary the most distinctive product of biblical studies as an academic discipline? The commentary compulsion is a representation compulsion, as Doel enables us to see. Its implicit ethic is “fidelity to an original” that it seeks to represent “through a profusion of dutiful copies; an original whose identity is secured and re-secured through a perpetual return of the same” (Doel 2010, p. 117). More precisely, what biblical commentary, at least

in the historical-critical mode, seeks to represent is, in essence (and implicitly more often than explicitly), the original meaning of the biblical text—painstakingly restored, sentence by fragile sentence—in its reconstructed original context of production and reception.¹⁵

The vast commentarial chorus, then, seeks unceasingly to secure and re-secure the identity of the lost original through a perpetual return of the same—or the practically the same, but, of course, never precisely the same, commentators mostly saying much the same thing with minor differences. Invisible but acutely felt bonds constrict the production of these differences. The representation compulsion is regulated by the shared assumption that any scholarspeak copy of the original is inherently capable of being “a deviant or degraded repetition, a repetition that may introduce an illicit differentiation in the place ostensibly reserved for an identification” (Doel 2010, p. 117). Biblical historical critics, in the course of their training, are issued with a list of damning names for such illicit differentiation; prominent on the list are such terms as “anachronism” and “eisegesis”. Illicit differentiation is the impermissible intrusion of the scholar’s context of reception into the scholar’s reconstruction of the biblical text’s “plausible meaning”—which, presumably, is why that context must be erased, rendered invisible, in historical-critical biblical commentary.

Concessive interjection: Granted, the notion of “lost originals” (of the canonical gospels, say) has fallen on hard times in certain scholarly circles in recent decades.¹⁶ Most biblical scholars are also well aware that authorial intentionalism has been stabbed through the heart repeatedly in literary studies since the mid-twentieth century.¹⁷ And some of us even take pains to adjust our language accordingly. But the ground rules of the disciplinary discourse in which we are enmeshed were put in place long before the author began to bleed, powerfully predisposing us to speak and write as though we still believed fervently in original, finalized gospel autographs brimming over with ultimately retrievable (even if squirmy and slippery) authorial intentions.¹⁸ It is our default modus operandi as biblical scholars, the bedrock of our disciplinary practice, and it would take a seismic shock to dislodge it, disturbances like biblical-critical postmodernism or contextual biblical hermeneutics merely eroding the edges but leaving the core intact. We call it “mainstream biblical scholarship”, but, in reality, it is less a free-flowing stream than a massive instance of what Nigel Thrift would call a “frozen state” (Thrift 2008, p. 5). And it is locked in place by the representation compulsion.

Yet, what could be more natural than to represent? “Representation is second nature”, the repetition in one medium of “what has already been given in some other medium. A face is painted. A sunset is photographed. A room is described” (Doel 2010, p. 119). A biblical text is exegeted. In all of these actions, the representation compulsion is exercised. “To be spellbound by representation” is to feel “bound by a certain duty”, which is to return “a true semblance” of an assumed original (p. 119). Another name, indeed, for representation in biblical studies—representation now as action-word rather than concept-word—is *exegesis*.

Anecdotal interjection: The present author, now aged, is reminded of a conference in his youth in which, following a plenary address, and trembling a little at his own audacity, he addressed a question to an illustrious figure in the field, one that began, “In your reading of Romans just now . . .”. The presenter’s response to the question in turn began, “First of all, I do not ‘read’; I exegete”. What the elder me now wishes the junior me had replied: “I’m not sure either of us yet know what it means to ‘read.’ Until we do, neither can we know what it means to ‘exegete.’”

Exegesis, provisionally defined, is the disciplinary, which is to say disciplined, practice of (re)constructing a true semblance of the biblical meanings it purports to represent. But because a gap of non-resemblance (much more on which below) necessarily separates the original from the semblance, the labor of representation is, in principle, endless. This is why the biblical commentary, as traditionally conceived, never admits of completion, and is always in need of supplementation. One can end the commentary on Mark on which

one has been laboring, whether for three years or thirty, but one can never end Markan commentary as such.

How else might one think about biblical reading, or even about biblical exegesis? “Non-representational styles of thought treat everything usually regarded as representational . . . as events in their own right” (Doel 2010, p. 120). Now Doel waxes Christological: “By refusing to yield to the onto-theological dogma of re-presentational second comings, . . . the dutiful copying of revered originals” (not least, the conjectural original intentions of biblical authors), “non-representational styles of thought foreground the eventfulness of ‘a moment-ary world . . . which must be acted into’—the world into which one is always already plunged anyway, in every moment—as distinct from a world “held at a reverential or critical distance” (Doel 2010, p. 120, quoting Thrift 2000, p. 217), such as an ancient world so fetishized that it fills every work of biblical historical criticism so completely as to leave no room for any contemporary world, aside from the world of fellow ancient-world-obsessing scholars whose voices rise, whether in chorus or cacophony, from the footnotes of those works. Again, how else might one think about biblical scholarship? A comment of Vannini (2015, p. 12) pairs well with those of Doel: “You cease to be so preoccupied with how the past unfolded and with your responsibility for capturing it It is no longer what happened that matters so much but rather what is happening now and what can happen next”.

5. Biblical Scholarship Is a Mess

What is happening now and what can happen next continually begs description, even when it comes to an activity ostensibly as simple as reading. We have still only scratched the surface complexities of biblical reading. This is because the world in which we read is infinitely intricate, immeasurably messy. The messiness of “real reading” is something we biblical hermeneuts have never been able to get our overly disciplined, excessively tidy minds around.

In what does the mess of which I speak consist? It needs to be considered in tandem with *method*, the biblical-scholarly bulwark for keeping mess at bay. We learn from the editors of *The Affect Theory Reader 2* (Seigworth and Pedwell 2023, p. 54 n. 21) that a certain book “played in the background”, as it were, while the editors of the original *Affect Theory Reader* (Gregg and Seigworth 2010) pondered what they wanted to say about method in their introduction. That book was *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (Law 2004) by British sociologist John Law, a book that has also been inspirational for British non-representational theory (see, e.g., Thrift 2008, p. 18; Williams 2020, p. 424).¹⁹

Law describes his book as “an attempt to imagine what it might be to remake social science in ways better equipped to deal with mess, confusion and relative disorder” (Law 2004, p. 2). What kind of mess are we talking about? From the “potentially endless” mess-list, Law extracts the following: “Pains and pleasures, hopes and horrors, intuitions and apprehensions, losses and redemptions, mundanities and visions, angels and demons, things that slip and slide, or appear and disappear, change shape or don’t have much form at all, unpredictabilities” (p. 2). *Affects* for the most part, then, as we have learned to say.

Law continues: “Parts of the world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories and our statistics. But other parts are not, or if they are then this is because they have been distorted into clarity” (p. 2). Extreme clarity, then, including acute methodological precision, far from capturing the world, only serves to ensure that it continually escapes the precise academic instruments brought to bear on it. Law asks: “If much of the world is vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct, changes like a kaleidoscope, or doesn’t really have much of a pattern at all, then where does this leave social science?” (p. 2). Where, for that matter, does it leave biblical scholarship, the ancient world that traditionally has been its principal concern marked by the same immeasurable messiness that Law ascribes to the contemporary world—but, compounding the conundrum immensely, also being separated from the contemporary world by a gaping temporal gulf? I do not pretend to have an answer to that question.

Free-associative interjection: What does strike me, however, is that Law's initial reflections on how "teach[ing] ourselves to know" our messy world "using methods unusual to or unknown in social science" (Law 2004, p. 2) have affinities with how practitioners of contextual biblical hermeneutics approach their work (once they have substituted the contemporary world, or particular localized corners of it, for the ancient world as their primary world of concern). Perhaps our world needs to be known "through the hungers, tastes, discomforts, or pains of our bodies", muses Law. "These would be forms of knowing as embodiment" (pp. 2–3). Such embodied knowing thoroughly infuses much contextual biblical scholarship, impelled as it is by intense social "hungers", pressing social "discomforts", and intolerable social "pains".

In any case, it is easier to redescribe "the world in front of the biblical text" in which and through which we read it, to defamiliarize that world by bringing its mess in from the (imagined) margins to the center (where the mess has actually been all along), than to unlearn our scholarly strategies for accessing "the world behind the biblical text", strategies designed to tidy and domesticate its mess, to keep it at bay while attempting to cut paths through it, paths with walls made of books.

Seminal New Testament scholar Albert Schweitzer, in researching and writing his classic study *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (1905), better known in the Anglophone world as *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (Schweitzer 1968), had recourse to a methodology that literally entailed paths made with walls of books laid through an ever-encroaching chaos. He described his mess-surmounting method in his autobiography, *Out of My Life and Thought* (Schweitzer [1931] 2009, p. 46):

When I had worked through the numerous [nineteenth-century] lives of Jesus, I found it very difficult to organize them into chapters. After vainly attempting to do this on paper, I piled all the "lives" in one big heap in the middle of my room, selected a place for each of the chapters in a corner or between the pieces of furniture, and then . . . sorted the volumes into the piles in which they belonged. I pledged myself . . . to leave each heap undisturbed in its place until the corresponding chapter in the manuscript was finished . . . For many months people who visited me had to thread their way across the room along paths that ran between heaps of books.

But what if the historical Jesus was to be found not at the end of Schweitzer's book-maze but, rather, in the mess out of which it emerged? Do we, perhaps, need to distinguish "between becoming and history", as Deleuze (1995, p. 170) recommended we do, which, in this case, would mean distinguishing between a Jesus capable of coming again, of being re-presented in a historical narrative (*parousia*, we recall, means "presence"), and a Jesus who is ever be-coming and hence always escaping, slipping away into the microhistorical mess in which he lives processually, moves incessantly, and has his non-representational being? For "the opposite of history is not the eternal, but becoming" (Deleuze 2006, p. 377).

6. What Happens When I Read My Bible (in an Assemblage)?

But let us move from historiography with its sublime demands back to the mundane matter of reading (to the extent that the two can be distinguished). Even with the "mess" megametaphor, we are still only scratching the surface convolutions of what it means to read a biblical text (or any text, indeed, from a shopping list scrawled on a scrap of paper, to the *Aeneid*, or our social media feed). For we never read on our own even when we appear to be alone. That is because we always read—can only ever read—in assemblages. John Law makes significant use of the assemblage concept in rethinking what method might be (see esp. Law 2004, pp. 38–42), but let us see what happens when we allow the concept to seep fully into our understanding of reading in general, and biblical reading in particular—making a mess in the process. For assemblages *are* messy, as Jasbir Puar remarks (Puar 2007, p. 211), "a series of dispersed but mutually implicated and messy networks".

“Assemblage” (*agencement*) is a concept principally associated with [Deleuze and Guattari \(1986, pp. 81–88; \[1980\] 1987, pp. 3–4, 88–91, 323–37, 503–5\)](#).²⁰ “What is an assemblage?” Deleuze muses in a dialogue with Claire Parnet, answering: “It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them Thus, the assemblage’s only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis” ([Deleuze and Parnet 2007, p. 69](#)). In an assemblage, “bodies interpenetrate, mix together, transmit affects to one another” (p. 70). These bodies are both human and nonhuman. An elementary example: An early twentieth-century omnibus-pulling draft horse, collapsed in the street, flogged by its enraged owner, and witnessed by Little Hans in Freud’s famous case study “is an element . . . in a machinic assemblage: draft horse-omnibus-street. It is defined by . . . active and passive affects . . . : having eyes blocked by blinders, having a bit and a bridle, . . . having a big peepee-maker, pulling heavy loads, being whipped, . . . making a din with its legs These affects circulate and are transformed within the assemblage” ([Deleuze and Guattari \[1980\] 1987, p. 257](#)).²¹

What might any of this have to do with literature—biblical literature or any literature? Much in every way, beginning with the proposition that “literature is [itself] an assemblage” ([Deleuze and Guattari \[1980\] 1987, p. 4](#)). The question that most matters for Deleuze and Guattari when it comes to literature “is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into, in order to work” (p. 4). But this is not a mere restatement of the theory of intertextuality, for the other machines to which the literary machine can be connected, must be connected, in order to operate are both textual and nontextual, discursive and nondiscursive, organic and inorganic.

Deleuze and Guattari, either in their collaborative or solo writings, did not unpack exactly, or at least not in detail, what it means to *read* in an assemblage—or, more precisely, in assemblages, each intricately interconnected with, containing or nesting within, still other assemblages. But other theorists have. The most compelling example I have come across occurs, in effect,²² in the “What Happens When I Read?” chapter of Nathan Snaza’s *Animate Literacies: Literature, Affect, and the Politics of Humanism* ([Snaza 2019](#)).

Although Snaza does not reference non-representational theory per se, or any of the thinkers most closely associated with it, his theoretical and critical sensibilities have profound affinities with theirs. One may set the scene for what Snaza is doing, indeed, by appealing to certain things non-representational theorists have said. Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison, for instance, note how “non-representational theories are concerned with the distribution of ‘the human’” across assemblages “that include all manner of materialities” ([Anderson and Harrison 2010a, p. 13](#)). And to reconceive “the human” as “the human in assemblage” is simultaneously to reconceive “the social” (pp. 13–14; cf. [Latour 2005, pp. 5–6](#)).

Illustrative interjection: I type these words—indeed, to no small degree, I think these words—in symbiotic assemblage with the machine quasi-intelligence I familiarly call “my computer”, while the other human-mimicking, human-surpassing machine I call “my phone” buzzes beguilingly in my pocket, always eager to distract me. But even the worn wooden desk on which the computer sits, and the creaky wooden chair on which I sit, are also intimately in assemblage with me, as are the layers of clothes that equally enable me to function as a “biblical professional” on this chilly winter morning.

The social now shares permeable borders with the “inanimate objects” with which human beings are constantly in relation, and with all nonhuman animals also, beginning with the internal, innumerable, and indispensable “tiny companions” ([Haraway 2008, pp. 3–4](#)) that populate the human microbiome, this expanded social also extending out to the larger nonhuman animals whom I (also) do not know and will likely never encounter but whose lives are being slowly crushed out under my oversized carbon footprint.

If, as non-representational theory and assemblage theory insist, “practical action” always takes place “in more-than-human configurations”, then the question for hermeneutics, and even for anti-hermeneutics, becomes, “How do sense and significance” emerge from practical action, thus reconceived—specifically, from the practical act we call “reading”?

(adapting Anderson and Harrison 2010a, pp. 23–24). This brings us back to Nathan Snaza’s “What Happens When I Read?” (Snaza 2019, pp. 99–114).

Rethinking the act of reading, Snaza zooms in on “the preindividual level of corporeal systems and affective encounters that happen largely outside of conscious awareness” (Snaza 2019, p. 99). What Snaza’s zoom lens, powered by the assemblage concept, brings into view is a realm of reading beyond the human. Specifically, the assemblage concept dislodges the human as the imagined sole actor in the drama of reading, but also in the drama of writing. Biblical hermeneutics, as traditionally conceived, is exclusively an inter-human transaction—except to the extent that, in confessional conceptions of hermeneutics, the divine is also assigned an active role in the exchange. Aside from the biblical text itself, its materiality continually dissolving into meaning, the hermeneutical transaction, again in the traditional conception, is an event of mind communi(cati)ng with mind, authorial mind with readerly mind, God being the optional (holy) ghost in this mental machine.

Writes Snaza: “‘Beyond, beneath and beside’ the conscious work that most humanists”—biblical scholars included—reductively identify as the act of reading “is a whole swarming, networked, distributed, and mind-bogglingly complex world of movement, affect, and touching” (Snaza 2019, p. 107; cf. Sedgwick 2003, p. 8). He continues: “We can start by thinking about the objects and furniture that make the reading possible” (Snaza 2019, p. 111; cf. Ahmed 2006, pp. 3–4, 11, 22, 26–63 passim). I tried to do this myself a few paragraphs ago in my illustrative interjection, beginning with my computer, that (generally) benign quasi-deity enshrined on the altar of my desk, whose creation this article is at least as much as mine.

Self-interrogatory interjection: When did I last physically enter my university’s library, that sacral scholarly space, for the purpose of literally laying hands on a print book or journal? The computer god would scoff at such a primitive notion, its innumerable, pulsing, infinitely extendable tentacles lighting up with amusement.

Further on reading, Snaza writes: “If it is daylight, the relative conditions of the sun passing into the room . . . creates a certain mood If that light is not sufficient . . . , we light candles or turn on lamps. There might be music playing Perhaps there is the sound of birds or crickets or barking dogs” (Snaza 2019, p. 111). All thoroughly middle class, to be sure—precisely as middle class as the circumstances in which I myself ordinarily read and write. Snaza is not oblivious to the privileged circumstances of the setting he evokes: “I’m imagining, of course, conditions in which we—by we, I mean academics mostly—have control of such things” (p. 111). For many students, and some instructors, reading contexts can be considerably less idyllic, the written word competing with “the blaring of the stereo, the flickering of multiple LCD screens, yelling children at home or peers in residence halls, traffic sounds, fighting neighbors, gunshots. The room might smell like freshly baked bread, or patchouli incense, or body odor that accumulates with heat, or the noxious pollution caused by a factory down the road” (p. 111).

Or the written word competes with other distractions or disruptions even harder for the privileged reader, including the privileged Bible-reader, to imagine, such as those experienced in their cell blocks by the “inside students” in the academic program my seminary runs in New Jersey’s oldest prison and in which I myself teach. Now the assemblage in which, and through which, Bible reading and biblical-scholarship reading takes place has become tomblike in structure and dimensions. It has a locked steel door, a bunk bed, a possibly hostile cellmate, and a shared toilet.

But this is only an acute example of a planetary phenomenon. In the case of Bible-reading, less privileged reading settings (or hearing settings, in situations of limited literacy) outnumber more privileged reading settings globally, Christianity having shifted demographically from North to South and West to East, as is well known, the shift intensifying exponentially over the past half-century or so, Christianity prospering in communities of the poor while atrophying in communities of the comfortable, and the Bible consequently being read/heard with more attention and more passion in the former than in the latter.

But back to the assemblage, the assemblages, in which Bible-reading, or any reading, occurs. Snaza again: “A literally infinite set of agencies appears around the edges of any scene of reading”, but they are not extrinsic to that scene. “The smells, sounds, sensations, tastes, visions” infiltrate, perhaps permeate, one’s “perceptual system” as one reads (Snaza 2019, p. 111). “And while a very disciplined reader can subtract out” much of that interference so as “to get caught up in or carried away by the book, all of us know what it’s like to have our attention split and dispersed. The attention required for literacy events is, then, a question of a subtractive relation to the totality of what is perceived by a body as it, even if sitting still, exists in a rush of agentic movement”, in the flood of all that is affecting it, from moment to moment, both consciously and subconsciously (p. 111).

Some of this affective inundation might correspond to the idealized scene of reading “imagined by humanists”—including that humanist subspecies known as the biblical scholar—“where a reader responds simply to the words on the page” (Snaza 2019, p. 112), much as the author might have hoped, perhaps, or optimistically imagined, that they would. “But not all of it, maybe even not most of it”, will correspond to that idyll (p. 112). Much of the reading experience will be catalyzed by “the body’s being affected by all the other agencies caught up in the contact zone” (p. 112). It may well be that our affective state as reader is triggered less by the words inscribed in the text than by its other material traits: how it “feels in our hands”; how it engages our eyes as a crafted object; even how it smells (p. 112). Here we are as far as can be imagined from the classic biblical-scholarly paradigm of verbalized thought proceeding in preprogrammed fashion from the mind of the biblical author to the mind of the biblical reader through the mediating instrumentality of the biblical text. Now the reader has shut their eyes and is not only hefting their Bible in their hands, relishing its reassuring weight (literal no less than metaphorical), but is also sniffing it intently, their face displaying the same deep thoughtfulness I have so often seen on the faces of my canine companions as they sample a particularly intriguing, information-laden scent in a field (although not, as yet, a scholarly field).

Too-much-informational interjection: I once attempted briefly (Moore 2014, pp. 160–62), without much success, to write about the asignifying, non-representational dimension of Bible reading on which we have just been ruminating, of my inordinate sensory attachment to my first-edition New Revised Standard Version and my far older preferred Greek New Testament (so many editions out of date), which accompany me into every classroom, both of them grubby, dog-eared, mercilessly scribbled upon, and essentially falling apart, but intimate symbiotic extensions of the yet more aged body of this “biblical professional”, their moldering pages indelibly marked by the secretions and excretions of his sebaceous and sudoriferous glands, so that he is bonded chemically no less than affectively with them. As Nigel Thrift (2010, p. 293) aptly observes, “The human contains all manner of objects within its envelope”.

Such readerly attunements are not only utterly extrinsic to biblical hermeneutics as traditionally conceived; they are also altogether unManly. For, as Snaza notes, to be a Man, in the inherited humanist understanding of Man, “is to have disciplined one’s perceptual system in such a way that one does not attend . . . to the nonhuman forces acting in and as the literacy situation” (Snaza 2019, p. 113). In effect, Snaza’s assertion amounts to an intensified version of what many biblical scholars have been saying for many years. Although biblical scholarship is likely the last thing on Snaza’s mind when he writes, “when reading happens, there is no such thing as a single meaning generated from a text by an ideal, disinterested, unmarked subject” (p. 113), he might well be referencing the zigzagging trajectory of biblical hermeneutics extending from Rudolf Bultmann’s mid-twentieth-century insistence “that there cannot be any such thing as a presuppositionless exegesis” (Bultmann [1957] 1960, p. 289) through the incremental entrance into biblical academia of contextual hermeneutics, in many varieties, in the closing decades of that century.

Snaza’s next statement has a more oblique relationship to biblical hermeneutics: “As reader-response theory studied with great vigor, the race, gender, class, sexuality, and social positionality of the readers has everything to do with the kinds of meanings that get made,

the kinds of identifications and disidentifications that are generated” (Snaza 2019, p. 113). Reader-response theory may have exhibited this contextualizing energy in literary studies, but not in biblical studies. In particular, New Testament reader-response criticism (with which biblical reader-response criticism began), during the decades in which it sparked interest and excitement (the 1980s and the 1990s), was unable, or unwilling, to break with a constricted practice of reading that centered on an intratextual reader construct (usually dubbed “the implied reader”), and was content to track the hypothetical progress of that reader construct through the text (most often, a narrative text, but occasionally an epistolary text) as it actualized the role of reading scripted for it by the “implied author”, the “real author” standing authoritatively behind the latter’s shoulder (see further Moore and Sherwood 2011, pp. 101–7). What biblical reader-response criticism in this regimented mode shunted aside, elbowed into invisibility, was much, or most, of the items on Snaza’s list of what extrabiblical reader-response theory “studied with great vigor” (p. 113), especially race, class, and social positionality more generally. Explicit attention to such meaning-determining factors was instead the province of contextual biblical hermeneutics, whether stemming from much of the Global South, but above all sub-Saharan Africa, or from minoritized communities in the Global North, but above all the United States.

That being said, the articulation of readerly location in contextual biblical hermeneutics tends to be highly generalized. One reads as a Black South African, say, or as an African American womanist, or as a queer South Korean, or as a Brazilian ecofeminist. Such specifications of sociocultural location and identity merely scratch the surface of the sayable. This is not intended as a criticism. What is revealed or implied about the circumstances in which, and the community for which, such reading is conducted is frequently enough to imbue it with a contemporary relevance and affective impact that a purely historical-critical exposition of the same biblical material could not match.

Arguably, however, contextual biblical hermeneutics, so often emerging out of and oriented to communities of the marginalized and under-resourced, invites thicker description of the circumstances in which the reading/writing occurs than is normally provided. Again, it is Nathan Snaza (still not talking about biblical hermeneutics), prompted by Sara Ahmed (2006, pp. 11, 30–63 *passim*), who prompts me in turn to think this. Snaza insists that adequate reflection on the act of reading requires close attunement to “literacy as a problematic of space and territorialization” that is inseparable “from the political question of how bodies . . . are oriented in those spaces”—not least, the socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and gendered conditions “that make it possible for some bodies (and not others) to have ‘a room of [their] own’ and the materials and time necessary to write” (Snaza 2019, pp. 93–94).

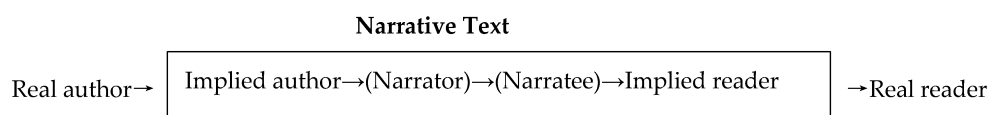
But writing itself presupposes an education, a *degree* (as we say) of incorporation in an educational system extended lavishly to some bodies and extended parsimoniously to, or altogether withheld from, other bodies (cf. Snaza 2019, p. 94). This age-old giving with one hand while withholding with the other has a specific history in modernity. When modern states, initially European, began “to invest in compulsory schooling . . . , a basic ability to understand and manipulate [written] marks [became] a point of differentiation between those admitted into the human community . . . and those consigned to the outside via dehumanization. Slaves, natives, women, the subaltern, the poor” were all “marked as different, inferior, based in part on their (socially enforced and produced) illiteracy” (p. 95).²³ The present world in which reading and writing occurs, including Bible reading and biblical-scholarly writing, is heir to that earlier, more transparently colonial world—an inherited world order that Latin American decolonial theorists call the coloniality of power (see esp. Quijano 2000, 2007), one of whose subareas is the coloniality of knowledge (see further Moore 2024, pp. 3–14, 23–48). That is the macrocontext within which every act of reading or writing takes place, including every act of Bible reading/hearing and every act of Bible-interpretive writing.

And the microcontexts within which such acts occur? Each of them unfolds in a singular convergence of an “enormous complexity of forces and affects . . . , a whole host of agential participants. . . , a diffuse . . . set of conditions . . . constituted by a very large, but not

infinite, set of objects, systems, and relations” (Snaza 2019, p. 94). Across the exceedingly vast, but not infinite, spectrum of social spaces that separate us, we read our Bible, whether lounging by a private swimming pool in a gated community, or crouched in a crowded shelter in a refugee camp. Perhaps we also write on our Bible, whether directly on its pages, with pencil or pen, in words that may be personal, or on a different surface, a computer screen, in words that may be impersonal (the sort a biblical scholar has been trained to write). But we always read and write in the midst of mess, of complexly interacting forces and affects, in symbiotic affiliation with an ever-changing host of agential co-actors, some of them human. All of which is to say that we always read and write in assemblage.

7. A Bible Kept in a Box

How might we diagram the flow of biblical sense at the nexus of the incalculable, but not infinite, series of imbricated assemblages in which the Bible functions? It is easier to sketch the diagram that will no longer suffice. I speak of the diagram of narrative communication associated with narratologist Seymour Chatman (1978, p. 151) that was imported into New Testament narrative criticism in the 1980s. More precisely, a particular understanding of how narrative communicates flowed into New Testament studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s and was a prime catalyst for the emergence of narrative criticism; and Chatman’s synthetic diagram of narrative communication (combining concepts from narrative theorists as different as Wayne Booth, Gerald Prince, and Wolfgang Iser) perfectly captured that understanding, irrespective of how frequently or infrequently the diagram was explicitly reproduced in works of New Testament narrative criticism.²⁴



In the diagram, a rectangular box represents the narrative text (the book of Revelation, say). The *real author* (John of Patmos, in our example) is situated to the left of the box, outside or “behind” it. From that real author, an arrow representing the transmission of narrative communication passes through the box—that is, through the narrative world “within” the text—and emerges from the other side, where it impacts the *real reader* (any reader anywhere, in any time), who is situated “in front of” the text, in the path of its arrow.²⁵ But first the arrow must pass through four intratextual personae: the *implied author* (the image of the real author that the real reader constructs as they read—a fantastical image, in the case of Revelation, an author persona who encounters chimerical creatures at every turn, both divine and demonic); the *narrator* (a first-person narrator in this instance: “I, John . . .” [1:9; 22:8; cf. 1:1, 4]); the *narratee* (the narrator’s intratextual addressee—a group addressee in Revelation, seven named churches in the Roman province of Asia [1:11; cf. 2:1—3:22]); and the *implied reader* (the intratextual reader persona presupposed or produced by the text, a more expansive entity than the narratee: “The narratee-character is only one device by which the implied author informs the real reader how to perform as the implied reader” (Chatman 1978, p. 150)).

Performance is, indeed, pivotal to the formalist mode of reading to which Chatman gestures here, and is also foundational for New Testament narrative criticism (together with its symbiotic twin, New Testament reader-response criticism). The narrative-critical implied reader has tended overwhelmingly, almost invariably, to be the text’s “ideal” interpreter, as noted earlier—the reader led, guided, every step of the way through the narrative world by the implied author, in a tightly scripted performance, and hence also by the real author, whose agent or instrument the implied author is assumed to be. This is why narrative criticism was so easily assimilable to historical criticism (most of all, redaction criticism; see further Elliott 2011) once its appearance of startling novelty had worn off.

Relatedly, the “container” model of communication that Chatman’s diagram epitomizes is, in its essentials, also the model of communication presupposed by historical-

critical exegetes of the biblical text (even without explicit recourse to such terms as “implied author”, “narrator”, “narratee”, or “implied reader”). It is the book-as-box model that we pondered earlier (that box literalized in Chatman’s diagrammatic text box). For historical critics and narrative critics alike, the biblical text is implicitly conceived as a container or repository for an inexhaustible treasure trove of semantic content that the biblical author has entrusted to it, and which the appropriately trained reader (the implied reader now become the accredited expert expositor) is commissioned to extract and describe (in refereed articles, technical monographs, and learned commentaries). Mainstream biblical scholars devote themselves professionally to the unfinalizable communal project of (re)constructing from the multitude of clues provided by an individual biblical book the authorial intelligence presumed to preside over it—namely, its implied author. Matthean specialists, say, will almost certainly never know the real name of the real author behind the narrative that early Christian tradition ascribed to an elite member of Jesus’s entourage. As the years and then the decades go by, however, that scholar may come to feel that they know that unknown author better than many people they rub shoulders with daily. They have succeeded spectacularly in turning themselves into the Matthean implied reader. Writes Chatman: “The implied author names the convention by which we naturalize the reading experience as a personal encounter with some single, historically identifiable author. . . , even if we know nothing about that person’s life” (Chatman 1990, pp. 90–91). Affect ekes out a bare-bones existence, nonetheless, within the constricting box that is Chatman’s structuralist diagram of narrative communication. Affect’s mode of being within “real reading”, however—that uncontainably messy space of pan-sensory encounters—is another matter altogether, as we have seen.

Ultimately, Chatman’s diagram is disrupted by poor archery. In mainstream biblical scholarship, for instance, whether historical-critical or narrative-critical, the arrow of communication never reaches the real reader positioned “in front of” the narrative text box, outside it but, ostensibly at least, in the arrow’s direct path. This is because the real reader—in this case the biblical scholar—has thrown himself, herself, or themselves so fully into performing the role of the implied reader as to disappear altogether into it. So deeply is the arrow embedded in this meticulously (re)constructed implied reader as never to exit the text box. Like Zeno’s arrow, it never arrives at its ostensible real target, the extratextual, socioculturally located, real reader. Moreover, in non-mainstream modes of biblical reading, such as explicitly contextual modes, each time the arrow passes through the implied reader and proceeds on to the real reader, provoking a contemporarily situated reaction from them, cries of “Anachronism!” arise with predictable regularity from the adjudicating panel of historical-critical judges.²⁶

All of this prompts skeptical questions. What if the container model of communication, with its flurry of informational arrows speeding from real authors to real readers (including real readers who love to dress up as implied readers), is a fiction? What if reading, even biblical-scholarly reading, cannot be boxed in by the model’s straight lines and sharp angles, or accounted for by its unidirectional arrows? What if, in the case of biblical studies, the model is a quasi-theological way of thinking about theological texts? Roland Barthes long ago argued, in effect, in “The Death of the Author” that there is no unitary box-builder, no singular arrow-shooter. What he said, specifically, is that “a text is not a line of words releasing . . . the ‘message’ of [an] Author-God”, but rather “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (Barthes [1967] 1977, p. 146). Michel Foucault in “What Is an Author?” replied, in effect, that the author was not nearly as dead as Barthes took him, her, or them to be, that the author lives, lives on, although only as a discursive construct, and a construct of relatively recent vintage at that, the preoccupation with posing such questions to certain texts as “who wrote it, when, . . . and under what circumstances . . . ?” (Foucault [1969] 1998, vol. 2, p. 213), together with the intolerability of “literary anonymity” except as “an enigma” to be deciphered (p. 213), having coalesced only when texts became “goods caught up in a circuit of ownership”, as began to happen in eighteenth-century Europe with the formal codification of copyright law (p. 212).

Implicitly, then, the book-as-box, as information container, packed by an author-owner, would, for Foucault, be a modern discursive construct. The biblical book-boxes that biblical scholars dutifully unpack would, of necessity, be counterfeit, since there were no ancient book-boxes, communication containers filled with recoverable intentions by individual ancient authors and labeled as private intellectual property. “Anachronism!” the historical-critical adjudicating panel should, paradoxically, declare concerning its own exegetical practice.

8. Why My Bible Keeps Falling into the Gulf of Non-Resemblance

Foucault’s convention-and-regulation-attuned approach to reading, however, fails to take the measure of its messiness, that property whose importance we pondered earlier, impelled by John Law. Deleuze and Guattari’s less regimented concept of reading, and also of writing, is more suited to the mess. Imagine a markedly different diagram than Chatman’s. The terms *expression* and *content* would feature prominently in it. That hardly sounds revolutionary, admittedly. In traditional biblical hermeneutics, the text expresses, and thereby transmits to the reader, a content that originated with the author. Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of expression, however, is inseparable from their concept of assemblage.

Their principal description of how assemblages operate begins, “On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression” (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, p. 88). Less even than Barthes’s dead Author-God is their author “a fictitious voice from on high” (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, p. 240) who summons structured content into being out of the *tōhū wātōhū* of formless chaos (cf. Gen. 1:2). As Brian Massumi explains, “It is important not to think of the creativity of expression [as reconceived by Deleuze and Guattari] as if it brought something into being from nothing. There is no tabula rasa of expression. It always takes place in a cluttered world” (Massumi 2002, p. xxix). In short, expression is an *event* in the special Deleuzian sense of the term, which is to say that its matrix of emergence is “a fog of a million droplets” (Deleuze and Parnet 2007, p. 65). Or it is an immensely complex plane of nested assemblages. Imagine on the left-hand side of this impossible-to-draw diagram an expression event that is also a literary event, a million droplets rising off the face of the deep. That is the *expression* side of the undrawable diagram. Facing it is its other side, the *content* side, but between the two sides a gap, indeed a gulf, of non-resemblance gapes. Why and how does this gulf open up?

The text would be a form of expression, for Deleuze and Guattari, a material form that expression takes. Nothing controversial there. But they separate content from expression, assigning content its own form: “Precisely because content, like expression, has a form of its own, one can never assign the form of expression the function of simply representing, describing, or averring a corresponding content: there is neither correspondence nor conformity” (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, p. 86). In other words, as Massumi phrases it, “a gap of non-resemblance” shatters “the symmetry between content and expression” assumed by traditional models of communication (Massumi 2002, p. xix), biblical hermeneutics included.

Content no longer “pre-exists” the literary text, in the Deleuzoguattarian model, as an immaterial body of thought residing within the mind of a real author (Mark’s Christology, say, swirling around restlessly in Mark’s cranium, awaiting expression). Neither does it inhere *in* the text, in its formal properties (Mark’s plotted narrative, say), as if deposited there by the author to await extraction. Rather, we might say (resorting to a crude spatiality) that the content is located on the right-hand side of the impossible diagram, opposite the expression event exploding on the left-hand side.

But “content” in the singular is a further mystification. Content is always plural—infinitely plural, indeed—which is to say that the forms taken by “the” content are potentially innumerable. The Deleuzoguattarian diagram of narrative (non)communication is impossible to display precisely because the content boxes—or, more precisely, content events (which could only be symbolized, diagrammed, as boxed frozen states)—needed

for its right-hand side, the unchartable region east of the Gulf of Non-Resemblance, are, in principle, multiplicitous to infinity.

What do I mean by that? Well, here is Mark, as content, nestled snugly in my Nestle–Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, and there, too, is Mark, as divergent content, nestled in my New Revised Standard Version, and also in that KJV, that NIV, and too many other translations to list in too many languages to name, but also in that Gospel of Mark film, that Gospel of Mark graphic novel, in every drop of that veritable ocean of oral sermons on Mark, and half-remembered quotations from Mark, to sample only the surface ripples of this teeming tehom. As Massumi might say of certain of these actualizations, perhaps even of all of them, “There is no logical or teleological reason why that particular articulation had to be. Its power was the cumulative result of a thousand tiny performative struggles peppered throughout the social field” (Massumi 2002, p. xix). A thousand tiny performative struggles, a million or billion eventful droplets, unfolding, emerging, in a trillion interconnected assemblages.

And here too is Mark, there too are Marks, lined up on my scholarly bookshelves, still further Mark-contents differently realized but recognizably related, actualized according to predetermined rules, a rather sedate set of Marks, all told, which, while eager to dialogue with one another, also politely agree to differ from one another. Like all the Marks always and everywhere, down through all the Christian centuries, these scholarly Marks have each been actualized in singular assemblages whose fine-grained complexities beggar itemization. Most of these Mark-actualizations, those we label “historical-critical”, take pains to conceal the particular assemblages that occasioned the event of their conception and birth; they throw an obscuring sheet over those assemblages as they have been trained to do. But certain other Mark-actualizations allow the sheet to slip slightly, explicitly revealing selected aspects of the generative assemblages that bore them.

Our generic term for these latter actualizations is “contextual biblical hermeneutics”. This term denotes what biblical reading discovers itself to be when it begins to become aware of the assemblages in which it is conducted, “assemblage” being another name here for the social, for an expanded social (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1986, pp. 81–82; Deleuze and Parnet 1996, pp. 22–23). But that awareness is always needing to emerge anew, because the social that is the assemblage is always in excess of human attempts to comprehend it. It is an always-more-than-human social (cf. Anderson and Harrison 2010a, pp. 13–14), a social made up of maddened pigs, say, no less than tormented human beings (“and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea . . .”), of polluted bodies of water (“ . . . and were drowned in the sea”—Mark 5:13; cf. Jeong 2023, pp. 81–83), no less than streams of knowledge-conducting matter, both organic and inorganic: papyrus fragments, printed books, and computer monitors; preachers preaching and scholars scholaring. In short, it is a social made up ultimately, through processes of infinite interconnection, of an entire intricately entangled world. “Interpretation” and “representation” are two names for the attempted containment of that entanglement.

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Notes

- ¹ What of the cognate field(s) of theology? Petra Carlsson Redell appears to be the theologian who has engaged most extensively with the non-representational (see esp. Carlsson Redell 2014, 2018).
- ² Ashley Barnwell’s (2020, p. 3) inventory of recent schools of thought that break with the classic poststructuralist preoccupations also includes affect theory, speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, new materialism, actor-network theory, and feminist science studies.
- ³ Simpson (2021, pp. 223–24) is disarmingly frank on his book’s belatedness: “This book is probably a decade late. Someone really should have written it before me and before now. I think it probably would have been a much easier task to complete when NRTs

[Non-Representational Theories] were easier to bound and less diffuse in their influence and spread . . . ‘NRT’ as a singular thing is increasingly hard to see . . . This book might . . . end up being something more like a eulogy for something—a movement, a moment, a feeling, a confluence of energies—that has now passed”. In biblical studies, however, we have a hospitable tradition of welcoming into our midst theories that have been bled dry, even declared dead, in neighboring fields, feeding them fresh primary material, and raising them to new life.

4 I am, of course, compressing Collins’s detailed analysis of the material in what follows.

5 I had the privilege of participating in the 2016 conference at the Universität Wien that yielded the volume, *Biblical Exegesis without Authorial Intention?* (Breu 2019b), and the present article is a further offshoot of the thought-provoking discussions the conference stimulated. A parallel conference collection, exploring a comparable set of concerns, has since appeared: *Authorship and the Hebrew Bible* (Ammann et al. 2022b). But the present article is also indirectly indebted to far earlier precursors, most of all George Aichele’s poststructuralist explorations in biblical semiotics (Aichele 1997, 2001).

6 It is not that Collins is uncomfortable with the term “intention”; it recurs in her commentary. Again, let a single example suffice: “The intention of the evangelist comes out even more clearly in the editorial summary given in 1:34 . . .” (Collins 2007, p. 172). On the persistence of authorial intentionalism in biblical scholarship, see the representative catena of quotations in Dinkler (2019, pp. 74–75). More on this matter below.

7 Not least in the extensive corpus of work on New Testament and other early Christian bodies that has flowed forth since the mid-1990s. I have reflected elsewhere (Moore 2023, pp. 112–22) on the paradoxical eclipse of the ancient body in such work.

8 Thrift, not coincidentally, has an essay in *The Affect Theory Reader*, one that begins on a somewhat jaded note: “The affective moment has passed in that it is no longer enough to observe that affect is important: in that sense at least we are in the moment after the affective moment” (Thrift 2010, p. 289).

9 Cf. Lorimer (2005, pp. 84–85): “The now well-established critique of ‘representationalism’ . . . is that it framed, fixed, and rendered inert all that ought to be most lively”.

10 And the relationship of this project to affect? Deleuze expresses it as follows: “Every mode of thought insofar as it is non-representational will be termed affect” (Deleuze 1978–1981, n.p.).

11 A single illustrative example from a vast pool of potential examples: W. Randolph Tate (2013), whose standard hermeneutical handbook, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, has as its three constitutive parts “The World Behind the Text”, “The World Within the Text”, and “The World in Front of the Text”, understands the relationship between author and text to be one of representation. With considerable nuance, he expresses that understanding as follows: “Textual meaning is the cultural specificity of the author’s original object of consciousness. There is no way to determine definitively just how accurately the text represents the object of intention” (Tate 2013, p. 13, emphasis added).

12 Clarissa Breu remarks that “biblical studies could make use of much more differentiated views on the author than are predominantly presumed within the discipline. Particularly, exegetical commentaries tend to reconstruct details about the historical person behind the text and hardly ever debate the category of ‘author’ and its role in the process of interpretation” (Breu 2019a, p. 2)

13 In Deleuzoguattarian parlance, the virtual has (as yet) nothing to do with the digital. Rather, the virtual is the actual’s condition of emergence and vice versa. The actual unfolds continuously from the virtual, but every actualization is itself replete with further virtualities (see esp. Deleuze and Parnet 2007, pp. 148–52, together with Aichele 2011, pp. 1–46). Biblical texts are virtual in this sense (as are all works of literature), in that they are actualized by readers and hearers in interminable variations, each actualization virtually enabling still further actualizations in an exponential spiral (not least, but also not only, when the actualization is academic: a conference paper, an article, a book). Significantly, Brian Massumi, in a retrospective reflection on his 2002 book, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, commonly viewed as a coalescing catalyst for affect theory in the Deleuzian mode, remarks: “While writing the book, I felt affect to be absolutely crucial, but . . . if pressed to say in one word what the book was about, I would have said ‘the virtual’” (Massumi [2002] 2021, p. xiii).

14 For Deleuze and Guattari, sensation is “a compound of percepts and affects” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 164). Percepts are not perceptions: prepersonal, impersonal, they do not entail a distinction between perceiver and perceived, subject and world. “We are not in the world, we become with the world” (p. 169), and the percept is “a perception in becoming” (Deleuze 1997, p. 88). As such, it (logically) precedes perception, just as affect precedes emotion.

15 A simplifying summation of a more complex process, I realize. I turn to the intricacies of the process below.

16 See Larsen (2017, 2018, 2023), intensifying a line of inquiry that Parker (1997) and Epp (1999) are commonly credited with having initiated.

17 Since 1946, it is usually said, the year “The Intentional Fallacy” appeared; but that article begins *in media res*, Wimsatt and Beardsley (1946) noting that interrogation of authorial intentionalism is already underway (p. 468).

18 Even in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies, the author is far from dead and buried. On the one hand, as Sonja Ammann notes, introducing the collection *Authorship and the Hebrew Bible*, it is “broadly acknowledged” that the texts that comprise the Hebrew Bible were not the work of single authors “or handed down unchanged” (Ammann 2022, p. 2). The complex literary process that birthed the Pentateuch, for instance, thoroughly upends such notions. Similarly, the hypothesis, classically propounded by Martin Noth, that “an individual author determined the shape of [the Deuteronomistic History] has been abandoned in recent

models" (p. 2). In research on the prophets, likewise, scholars have relinquished earlier ideas revolving around "the creative genius" of individual authors (p. 2). On the other hand, however, "many scholars still use the term 'author' without further clarification" in exegetical practice, while "others replace the term 'author' by concepts with little meaningful distinction from how authorial intentions and motivations were conceptualized in earlier scholarship" (p. 4). In their preface to *Authorship and the Hebrew Bible*, the editors observe, relatedly, that recent scholarship is characterized by "an increased appreciation of the creativity of redactors, editors, scribes etc.", and this creativity tends to be treated essentially as authorial intentionality. "Hence, scholars working from historical perspectives, even though they may reject the idea of a creative single individual who holds absolute power and ownership over his text(s), do adhere to (implicit) concepts of authorship, which are rarely discussed or subjected to theoretical evaluation" (Ammann et al. 2022a, pp. v–vi). If anything, this bifurcation is even more pronounced in New Testament studies, a work like Luke-Acts, say, or the Letter to the Galatians, or the book of Revelation (and too many others to name) appearing to invite laser-focused engagement with an individual author to an extent that few works of the Hebrew Bible do.

- 19 Law is best known as one of the progenitors of actor-network theory (see esp. Law 1992; Law and Hassard 1999), a field that intersects substantially with both non-representational theory and assemblage theory.
- 20 Further on assemblage theory, see esp. DeLanda (2016) and Buchanan (2021); and for biblical applications, see Graybill (2016, pp. 37–39, 121–42); Moore (2017, pp. 41–59; 2023); Jeong (2020); Rawson (2020); McLean (2022, pp. 77–97); and E. C. Smith (2022).
- 21 Deleuze and Guattari continue: "Hans is also taken up in an assemblage: his mother's bed, the paternal element, the house, the café across the street, the nearby warehouse, . . . the right to go out onto the street . . . Is there an as yet unknown assemblage that would be neither Han's nor the horse's, but that of the becoming-horse of Hans?" (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 1987, pp. 257–58).
- 22 In effect, because the term "assemblage" makes few explicit appearances in Snaza's "What Happens When I Read?" But he has earlier signaled (Snaza 2019, p. 166 n. 2) that the Deleuzoguattarian concept of assemblage undergirds his reflections throughout his book on what he terms "the literacy event".
- 23 Ramón Grosfoguel (2007, p. 214) notes, relatedly, how the five-hundred-year progression of overt colonization into covert coloniality extends from sixteenth century Europe and its dehumanizing characterization of the colonized as "people without writing", to the eighteenth and nineteenth century characterization of them as "people without history", to the twentieth century Euro-American characterization of their descendants as "people without development", to the early twenty-first century characterization of them as "people without democracy".
- 24 The most notable early appearance in New Testament narrative criticism of Chatman's diagram of narrative communication is in R. Alan Culpepper's highly influential *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel* (Culpepper 1983, p. 6), Culpepper adding further details to Chatman's model. The diagram shows up in unadulterated form in Elizabeth Struthers Malbon's widely read "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean?" (Malbon [1992] 2008, p. 33), and in various other books and articles. For a recent reappearance of the diagram, see James L. Resseguie's "A Glossary of New Testament Narrative Criticism with Illustrations" (Resseguie 2019, p. 24). Tellingly, Chatman features more prominently in Resseguie's comprehensive article than any other narrative theorist.
- 25 In other words, the "three worlds" model I earlier identified as commonplace in mainstream biblical hermeneutics (the world "behind" the text, the world "within" the text, and the world "in front of" the text) is also implicit in Chatman's narrative communication model.
- 26 Womanist New Testament scholar M. J. Smith (2022, p. 55) responds to the panel as follows: "Mainstream dominant white biblical scholars ask, 'how do you know when you have crossed the line, gone too far?' It is the Black interpreter, the interpreter of color, or the woman to whom this question is put. And with that question, we are rendered fungible and Black(ened) because we overtly contextualize our readings, which are replaceable with other darkened bodies and readings that do not transgress the boundaries of whiteness".

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