

1

A General Introduction to Cultural Studies and Cultural Studies Approaches to the Bible

Spreading the Word: The Bible's Viral Encounter with US Pop Culture

During the pandemic of 2020, cloistered inside my “bubble” of immediate family, with my books, the internet and this (proto)manuscript as company, I was struck by a metaphor for the Bible's prevalence in US culture: its influence is actually, not metaphorically, epidemic. Thinking so much of contagion and transmission, I simply can't imagine a person living in the United States for a year without, at some point, physically encountering a Bible or spending 15 minutes in proximity of someone who owned a Bible. The Bible, like a cultural pandemic, ripples through nearly every aspect of US history, media, and society. Bibles can be found everywhere, even in a winterized, backwoods cabin in Centre County, PA, in dozens of translations and editions. Bibles and Bible commentary flood the internet. Even during a pandemic, copies of the Bible are given away on street corners by earnest missionaries on (even largely empty) college campuses and (surreally quiet) city streets. The Bible permeates not only America's mass culture, but even its physical space. It's physical presence, like a virus, both produces and testifies to the influence of its effectiveness.

Viruses, like Bibles, are strange. Viruses are the margins of matter and “living.” They are a complicated, though small, “text” of genetic code that, when “read,” replicates its message. As the novel coronavirus Covid-19 has shown, again and again, a virus beguiles us into language of will and sentience (a “crafty” variation). Viruses, like Bibles, cannot travel alone; they need a host. But viruses, like Bibles, function by convincing their host to assist their spread. When one encounters a virus, “touches” it, the exchange – a moment of reading and interpretation and influence – begins.

I touch the Bible, open on the table beside me. It, like a virus, can be understood in a myriad of ways. One can trace its genealogy, its evolution, its mutations, its

processes; it can be understood in its lexemes and grammar, in terms of its affinity – or uniqueness – to other books (ancient and contemporary), in terms of its bookishness or in terms of its history of transmission, transcription, translation. It can be read by the devout as a message of spiritual truth, of divine importance, or it can be read with detachment, in terms of its impact on individual readers or upon whole streams of culture, present or historic. It is a book one can touch with one's hand, a physical thing, but it is also a breathtakingly effective meme.

This book, *American Standard*, a title that blends reference to one of the first best-selling translations of the Bible indigenous to the United States with acknowledgement of the Bible's central role in the US cultural repertoire, is in part an introduction to scholarship that blends biblical studies with the study of pop culture and mass media (particularly in a US context). The book offers both an introduction and theoretical framing for study of the Bible in/and/as popular culture, and a selection of essays performing that analysis in a variety of ways. For the critical theory, I have chosen to focus on classical and foundational authors and texts for the field of cultural studies. For engagement with popular culture, I have consistently erred to the side of accessibility, hopefully choosing moments of popular culture with sufficient cultural breadth and potential "staying power" to be recognizable to a wide variety of readers.

I am imagining readers who are trained in biblical studies meeting cultural studies, in an organized way, for the first time, but also readers well-versed in cultural studies who might be curious about Bible. I will argue that biblical scholarship on cultural studies can be grouped into three methodological categories that emerge, roughly, sequentially from the mid-twentieth century until the early twenty first, each in conversation with the one preceding it. I am arguing that the dialog between Bible and media/cultural studies both follow broader postwar transitions in humanities scholarship, moving from a defense of "high" culture to a sense of cultural Marxism then through into postmodern or late capitalist intertextuality and finally coalescing in affect studies and posthumanism. In this book, alongside this evolutionary taxonomy of method, I will present three sets of three essays, grouped and ordered to demonstrate those three methodological lenses (displaying both their independence and their inter-animation with one another). *American Standard* is divided into three sections with three chapters each. This introduction provides an overview of the lens for each section in the triad that follows; the essays will be a demonstration or example of that lens.

The first methodological lens is the development of "culture" and "cultural studies" as typified by the work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). This work (which I will discuss in Section 1.2 of this introduction) argued that popular or mass culture, previously seen as "vulgar" or beneath serious attention, was actually apt for serious scholarly critique. It further developed notions of how both "high" and "low" culture (and their designations)

function(ed) to create hierarchies in culture, creating hegemonic systems with clear winners and losers. This work, in Britain, was heavily Marxist. As it migrated to the United States, and to the late twentieth century and “postmodern” scholarship, many of its themes and interests coalesce in Fredrick Jameson’s “culture of Late Capitalism” which also marks a transition, in North American scholarship, to a sort of “postmodern” intertextuality. Section 1.2 of this introductory chapter will survey some examples of biblical scholarship in direct continuity with the Birmingham Centre and that resonate with Jameson’s critique. Chapters 2–4 of this book will feature essays contiguous with this approach.

When cultural studies began to gain ground among US biblical scholars, it did so, as we will see, without the overt Marxist focus found in earlier British work. In Section 1.3 of this introduction, I will argue that, for American biblical scholars, intertextuality, as voiced for by Fernando Segovia, was a much more important, though often unacknowledged, influence. Much (I would argue, the vast majority) of US-based scholarship on the Bible and popular culture unveils interconnections between seemingly disparate works, reveling in the productive comparison of art generated across vast differentials of time, culture, and community. Sometimes this unveiling is the articulation of ways the Bible or the cultural product draw directly upon other subjects. Within this broad intertextual set of readings lies yet another trend in scholarship on Bible and popular culture; reviewing contemporary (mass market) use of the Bible is, itself, a form of biblical interpretation, a type of biblical scholarship. This critical approach examines Bible in popular culture to see how contemporary people are (or have been) understanding – or better: creating – biblical meaning. In a few other cases, this examination of intertextuality is fully Kristevan – an exploration of how the modern reader (here, often, the scholar) creates (or discovers) meaning by the juxtaposition of the Bible and modern mass culture, interrogating the definitions of “author,” “reader,” and “text.” Section 1.3 of this introduction will survey some examples of this work in contemporary biblical scholarship. Chapters 5–7 of this book are examples of it as well.

Finally, work emerging in the early twenty-first century is not only contiguous with these prior methodological lenses, but also reflects emerging interests across the humanities in post-humanism (particularly new materialism) and in affect criticism. The Venn diagram of these two scholarly conversations overlap in the work of Giles Deleuze. Deleuze articulated the concepts of “the assemblage” and the book as “machine.” Both of these concepts are used by modern critics to discuss how the Bible (or culture) makes or manufactures “meaning” (among groups or for individual readers). Deleuze also developed the idea of juxtaposition and “becomingness,” of affect – the precognitive cognition of discovery and intersection. All of these concepts have been used by contemporary critics of Bible and popular culture. Section 1.4 of this introductory chapter will

explain these ideas further and will cite some examples among modern scholars. Chapters 8–10 of this book will be essays examining Bible and popular culture through this methodological lens.

As a beginning reader of modern biblical interpretation quickly learns, the nineteenth century of biblical scholarship is synonymous with the growth of “higher criticism” among European (largely German) scholarship. The early twenty-first century will be known for scholarship on the Bible and popular culture (its broader genus: “reception criticism”), particularly among Anglophone scholarship. Germanic higher criticism reflected larger academic and cultural values of its era; for example, a growing valuation of “scientific” or “reasoned” criticism in the humanities; assumptions about cultural evolution and social Darwinism; and the methodological refinement of supporting disciplines such as sociology, archaeology, linguistics, and philology. As I will argue, scholarship on Bible and mass culture reflects our (post)modern moment through shifting assumptions of authority and semiotic and literary “meaning”: analysis of cultural structures and power, keen interest in subjectivity and aesthetics, the sophistication inherent in consumption, and the assertion of complexity in what seems superficial and ephemeral. The study of Bible in/and/as popular culture is a hallmark of contemporary biblical scholarship.

The balance of this introduction is an overview of the origins of popular cultural studies, noting the broader transition of cultural studies from the late twentieth century until today, mapping briefly the intrusion of cultural studies into biblical studies, reviewing the migration of that work from British to US context, and exploring the Americanized versions, infused with intertextuality and affect, all set against broader intellectual trends at play in US academic work in the humanities. I want to proceed less as annotated bibliography and more as literature and contextual analysis. While I will offer an overview of the field (citing some representative examples), it is not a catalog of work that pretends to be exhaustive. In review and in example, I hope to trace what I would identify as three major theoretical foci of current work on Bible and pop culture. There are additional characteristics of US work that I will highlight.

Old School: Birmingham, Marxism, and Late Capitalism

Study of the Bible in/and mass, popular culture is a scholarly trend that presumes many (but by no means all) assumptions, methods, and queries from British-style “cultural studies” of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as American interest in mass media and internet culture. Despite some notable exceptions (which I highlight subsequently), there is disproportionate attention in biblical studies to

film, television, and visual culture and much less on other questions common to British-style cultural studies such as material culture (or “new materialism”), race and ethnicity (until very recently), food culture, civic practice, family and community studies (beyond race, class and gender), affect criticism, or cultural ideologies. Publication and dissemination of scholarship in popular culture are, however, growing rapidly in biblical scholarship, with the support of major scholarly societies (such as the Society of Biblical Literature), the focus of several journals (many published only electronically), significant – and extremely ambitious – new reference works, and several new monograph series.

The critical field of cultural studies begins with the question: What do we mean by “culture” and “popular/mass culture.”¹ Prior to Emile Durkheim, “society” referred to the economic and political elite, to “high society.” Durkheim transformed this term into our more modern usage of groups with common ideologies, technologies, etc. In a similar way, “culture” was redefined in the twentieth century. As the century dawned, “culture” referred to high art activities – say, opera, museums, serious plays and literature. Now, we understand culture to be ubiquitous, those elements of language, material, art, custom and values that are produced by, consumed by and defining of a given society (as per Butsch 1990 or Surdam 2015).

Culture is, indeed, difficult to define, largely because it is so encompassing. Kroeber and Kluckholm (1952, p. 104) describe it as a total system of negotiated interexchange – including language, religion, education, art, and more. Culture is material and systemic, but it is also ephemeral and ideological. It includes, as notes Schein (1984, 1990) broad values, norms, and assumptions alongside observable actions, legal and social bodies, and material objects. Tyler (1974), one of the originators of the concept, describes “culture” as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by Man [sic] as a member of society.” (1974, p. xx). Culture, by the late twentieth century, was understood as everything produced by humans, including scholarship of culture, which, as Culture’s product itself, adds to culture’s complexity, ambiguity, and variation.

The definition of both “society” and “culture” did not emerge overnight, nor by happenstance. Further, the transition (fueled by a growing middle and

1 A great deal of the following is outlined in Moore 1998a, pp. 1–32. Slightly more oriented toward historical development of the theory would be Exum and Moore 1998a, pp. 20–45. Strong outlines of methodology, though not as oriented to history of development or as explicitly rooted in continental thought, can also be found in Sawyer 2006, pp. 1–8. A briefer review of highlights is in Wainwright 2010, pp. 1–12. Of significant value for the background and basic assumptions of cultural studies and the CCCS, discussed later, see During 1993, 1996, 53–83; Hall 1980, pp. 57–72; 1982, pp. 56–90.

university class, post World War II) brought debates over whether there was merit (or even sense) in the scholarly analysis of “low” or “popular” forms of culture – items (chiefly entertainment, media, and consumables) notable for their popular appeal, but deemed “lower” or less worthy of serious analyses or enjoyment by educated classes.

For example, in the 1930s, F. R. Leavis argued (persuasively at the time) that education should consist of cultivating “proper” leisure and exposure to the mainstays of western literature, art, or music. The properly educated person avoided crass “mass” culture (1930). Richard Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* (1957) offered an alternative perspective. Hoggart analyzed how, where, why and what “working class” Britons read; he challenged much of the idea and content of “high” culture, celebrating instead working-class values, even as he also challenged a singular, homogenous “mass culture.” Raymond Williams’s *Culture and Society* took the argument further, arguing that differences between “high” and “low” culture are social norms designed to perpetuate and protect class divisions and distinction (Williams 1958; also of interest 1996, pp. 168–177). Understanding “low” or mass culture, they argued, was critically important, and popular or “pulp” culture was as worthy of rigorous scholarly attention as “mass” culture, and in many ways more revealing.

Hoggart founded the CCCS in the early 1960s to study, rigorously and seriously, mass culture as means of understanding present British society; the CCCS was led through the 1960s and 1970s by Stuart Hall (for an overview of Hall’s tenure and perspective(s) on his influence, see Radway 2016, 2, pp. 312–321). In these years, general Marxist assumptions were dominant, as the CCCS tended to assume elite social classes (normally, but not exclusively, the wealthy) maintained their social privilege by the exploitation of the labor and productivity of lower classes and used popular media to either create or to perpetuate these systems (note the array of essays and influences in Munns and Rajan 1995). Embedded within popular culture were the structures, and sometimes the mechanisms, of class distinction and social inequity. The CCCS was exploring how these social divisions were reflected in ideas of “culture” and how “culture” worked to create and perpetuate these distinctions.

The work of neo-Marxist philosophers Antonio Gramsci (particularly as represented in the collections Gramsci 1971, 1978) and Louis Althusser (most frequently engaging Althusser 1969 and Althusser and Balibar 1968) were particularly important. Gramsci argued for what he called cultural “hegemony” where subdominant social groups (the “subaltern”) participate willingly in the construction of systems that keep them oppressed (perpetuating, for example, systems of racism, gender control, religious persecution, etc.). Althusser argued that social structures called “institutions” (religion, family, the military, education) are constructed to perpetuate the social hierarchy on the whole. This of necessity means that they will

perpetuate forms of social domination, and this domination was created, maintained, and mediated via the vehicle of “culture,” particularly mass culture (note, also, Adorno 1991, which assumes this, throughout).

In the 1980s the Marxist focus of cultural studies (as practiced at the CCCS) became more tenuous. There were three general reasons for this. First, politically, the United States and Britain, led by conservative neoliberals Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, were experiencing rapid expansion in financial markets with a rapidly growing difference in wealth, and, in both nations, there was less interest in traditional Marxist ideology. The “middle class” was going away, and wealth has a vested interest in perpetuating economic and political structures. There was also a rise in nationalism. Fewer academics were interested in exploring Marxist questions (or, perhaps more cynically: fewer academic programs, grantors and book publishers were interested in their faculty pursuing Marxist questions); those who were met frequent pushback. A second, more intellectual reason is the sudden growth of a global perspective facilitated by new technologies that, with the rising suspicion of simple explanation inherent in postmodernity, revealed that the equation of state-vs.-worker or bourgeoisie-vs.-proletariat were too simple. “Bourgeoisie” with respect to whom? Subaltern where? Simple Marxist systems did not work as readily in the emerging complexity of both perspective and structure that globalism created.²

Cultural studies has shifted intellectual focus from professional scholars to public intellectuals and from exclusive attention to elite “culture” toward functions of mass culture. It looks at widely popular expressions of culture (including, indeed often seeking out, the “vulgar”). These are then interrogated for how they construct/reflect (often at once) popular assumptions that empower/disempower (often at the same time) particular groups and how they perpetuate/refute (again, often at once) particular ideologies. In the case of cultural studies and the Bible: what, precisely, are we doing when we study “the Bible and cultural studies?” Are we studying the Bible, using the insights of cultural studies or mass use, or are we studying mass culture via analysis of how the Bible floats through its various strata? Certainly, the latter is possible. Few books have been more “popular” (in the sense of widely known) in western culture. The Bible is also used as an instrument of control and restriction (say,

2 Marxist structures have had a resurgence in scholarly and popular thinking in the early twenty-first century. Part of this resurgence arises from general dissatisfaction with neoliberalism and traditional US and UK liberalism, particularly in its failure to best outright emerging conservative nationalism (and fascism). Part also arises from the use of Marxist structures to underpin contemporary critical race theory (especially as advocated by Derek Bell and Harvard University Law School), where racial privilege/subalterity replaces hegemonic tensions of bourgeoisie/proletariat.

opposition of some clergy to LGBTQ issues) and as a basis for arguments of liberation (as by Martin Luther King, Jr.). It is used in/as a variety of forms of art. It is dominator and dominated at once. For many (using a division articulated by Durkheim who argued that “religion” is exactly and always opposite the “profane” or ordinarily secular) the Bible cannot be “mass culture,” but it is little else. The use of the Bible is always-already a form of biblical interpretation. Its use reveals what someone wants or imagines the Bible to say and to be. In other words, observing the Bible in pop culture is the observation of significant and substantial political expression.

When cultural studies immigrated to the United States from the United Kingdom, it rapidly began to lose its historic connection to Marxism and theory even as it widely (and wildly) expanded its review of mass culture. Cultural studies is not a method, *per se*. In the diffuse context of America, it is also not really a common set of questions and assumptions. Instead, it tends to become a generic orientation (to revelation of systems of interpretation and structures that construct social organizations) turned to mass culture items. Cultural studies in biblical scholarship tends even further from political and theoretical analysis in recent literature, focused on questions of how/why biblical text, in its “use” in pop culture is a form of interpretation.

North American scholarship has tended to embrace the arguments from cultural studies regarding the dissolution of “high” vs. “popular,” formal vs. mass production of cultural artifacts and general art and literature. Cultural studies after the fashion of Hoggart, Hall, and others entered critical biblical scholarship in the 1990s. Ironically, however, biblical cultural studies very often moves on to critique the limits of the pop interpretation, implicitly re-inscribing a hierarchy of “professional” vs. “mass” interpreter, of “right” vs. “wrong” readings (where more often than not professional interests and “right” readings perpetuate the systems that privilege the professional biblical scholar making the argument). In other words, the lack of attention to methodological history often ends up with the biblical-cultural-studies essay reinscribing systems of domination, privilege, hegemony, hierarchy, and ideological oppression that the discipline of cultural studies was initially designed to at least expose (if not correct).

The majority of the US contribution to cultural studies is interwoven with post-modern criticism and philosophy. The late twentieth century saw a transition away from modernity toward “postmodernity.” In simplest terms, “postmodern” as an ideology can be summed up in a deliberate turn from high confidence in the values and ideals of modernity. One philosopher, J. E. Lyotard, defined postmodernism as a “suspicion of all metanarratives.” (Lyotard 1984). By “metanarratives,” Lyotard meant the large stories we construct, as a society, to explain and understand reality.

Perhaps. Yet a clear and substantive description of what postmodernity *is* (apart from an articulation of what it *isn't*) has remained problematic. Most

everyone concedes a definition of “modernity,” and most also acknowledge that by “post,” we mean we are in an era where the assumptions and assertions of modernism are under interrogation and reassessment. Yet there are real challenges to be made against assertions that postmodernity is a radical break. Perhaps a healthy suspicion of metanarrative is, itself, the apex of modernist thought; perhaps, far from being replaced, modernity is simply reaching its fullest expression.

In 1984, Frederick Jameson published an article, “Postmodernity: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” which he later expanded and used as the central chapter of a book of the same title (Jameson 1984, pp. 59–92; 1991). Jameson accepts the view of thinkers such as Lyotard that the present moment does, indeed, seem to reject the absolutes of modernity. He also concedes arguments about the destabilization of confidence in large, systemic metanarrative. For Jameson, however, Lyotard’s insistence upon rejection of *all* metanarrative doesn’t destabilize confidence at all. We have not, really, rejected metanarrative. Indeed, much the opposite seems to be the case; we have radically proliferated metanarratives and often become polemic in our defense of them (certainly this describes twenty-first century US social media). Late capitalism rejects *exclusive* metanarratives, but not metanarrative, per se. Multiple, even contradictory, metanarratives may coexist. Ideology does not cease in postmodernity; it becomes even more central and volatile. We chose ideology (or identity) from a marketplace of sorts. Epistemology and economics merge. For Jameson, these changes are the essential characteristics of “late capitalism.” The continuity with modernity results from capitalism’s integral relationship to the products of modernism. The “post” results in the natural breakdown of confidence and continuity resulting from the types of changes that global capitalism produces. Jameson sees the culture of late capitalism as one that foregrounds superficiality. His book, after laying out his initial premises, explores postmodernity/late capitalism in broader ideology, video, architecture, literature, “utopian” expectations, critical theory (epistemology), economics, and film. Through the examination of popular and mass culture, Jameson argues for:

[T]he following constitutive features of the postmodern: a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary “theory” and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship with public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose “schizophrenic” structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal arts; a whole new type of emotional ground tone – what I will call “intensities” – which can best be grasped by a return to older theories of the sublime; the deep

constitutive relationships of all this to a new technology, which is itself a figure for a whole new economic world system.

(Jameson 1991, p. 6)

Postmodernity is, indeed, a move away from metanarrative, but the move is an intentional separation from previous systems of mooring. The postmodern is defined by intentional superficiality, and this superficiality, Jameson argues, is a direct result of “late capitalism.” Capitalism’s ultimate expansion has, as we have seen, destabilized expectations of “truth.” It has also celebrated systems of competition which results in ethical strain and in a particular type of rootlessness where emphasis lies on result more than history or process. It has also, finally, resulted in expectations of consumption and, most critically, in choice. For Jameson, late capitalism and postmodernity are the rootlessness arising from dissolving confidence in metanarrative at the exact opportunity that consumption is most prized and most available. “Depth” is the antithesis of the postmodern.

Biblical scholarship that engages popular culture has expanded exponentially in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Much of the early, critical work positioned itself as inheritor of classic, CCCS scholarship; much of the contemporary work sees itself as the natural outgrowth of postmodernity and late capitalism having their influences upon the field. Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood have argued the present turn toward cultural studies by biblicists is the natural end of postmodern literary criticism in general and biblical studies, in particular; they also assert that, as a development, it is the future of biblical scholarship (Moore and Sherwood 2011).

At minimum, a cursory review of the shifting nature of biblical criticism reveals that some sort of encounter between cultural studies and modern, academic biblical scholarship would seem inevitable.³ Indeed, “reception critical” methodologies may be the capstone of modern, secular biblical criticism. Biblical scholarship that attends to or draws comparison with popular, mass culture is not the antithesis of “scholarly,” or “scientific” higher criticism; it is its perfection.

Late Renaissance/early Enlightenment scholars such as Hugo de Groot and Erasmus famously began to read the Bible according to the norms and standards of any other book from antiquity. The Bible was not read, primarily, as a book opened only via divine or supernatural guidance, read solely within the protected confines of dogma and community. Instead, it was subject to “normal” critical

3 For a quick review of what follows, consult Legaspi 2010. Readers will note, though his survey of the history and development of modern biblical studies is quite accurate, Legaspi, a theologian, clearly laments the loss of biblical authority resulting from the transition. Not all critics agree this loss – or perhaps better, “transformation” – is detrimental. For a manifesto for secular or political readings of the Bible un beholden to Christian or Jewish theology, see Boer 2007 and Berlinerblau 2005.

techniques of historical analysis and grammatical review. This seed germinated in the nineteenth century via “higher criticism” – where scholars intentionally set aside allegiances to faith and read the Bible as a historical text, asking sometimes rude questions about the Bible’s historical reliability, textual integrity or even claims to authorship and authority. By early twentieth century, these secular critiques were assumed: the Bible was a book from history, written by other humans within history, and best read according to the norms of reading, more generally. Scholars sought the “meaning” of the Bible not in spiritual revelation or disclosure, but by painstaking reconstruction of content and what scholars posited that the original authors most likely intended the text to mean. Nearly from its beginning, then, critical biblical studies has focused, at least in part, on the interpreter, the history of text and scholarship, and the reception of biblical text. Reception criticism is modern, secular biblical studies. By mid-to-late twentieth century, schooled against high modernism’s intellectual overconfidence in its own, purely rational dispassion, scholars were increasingly aware of the role of the interpreter’s bias in any reading – including in the reconstruction of the historical context(s) and “meaning” of the Bible. No longer confident a text can “mean” what an author intended, scholars looked more and more into analysis of how culture and bias shaped Bible readers (or how the Bible was used to construct cultures or defend biases). Cultural studies informed biblical criticism and continues this late-capitalist critique of Bible and its influence(s).

For example, Roland Boer’s *Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door* (1999; a book in many ways prefaced by Boer 1997) was an early, full-length monograph devoted to the study of the Bible in/and mass culture. Boer notes that a handful of volumes preceded his own work, largely edited volumes of collected essays that did not engage the broader history of cultural studies. Boer is a Marxist, arguing societies are divided, hierarchically, into categories of production and consumption where higher, more altern (to use Althusser’s term) groups enjoy privilege and benefit from the labor and production of subaltern groups. The subaltern communities are often exploited, though, as Gramsci has observed, and often also are participating themselves, willingly, in the system(s) of exploitation.

Boer outlines the general history of cultural studies as represented by the classic CCCS literature. He notes that the academic field of religion, particularly theology and biblical studies, historically is mother to numerous other academic subfields, and these fields generated the field of cultural studies. Cultural studies was coming home. For Boer, biblical scholarship is (and always is) cultural studies. Boer seeks to undermine the “censor” of broader culture – the cultural norms (often driven by implicit metanarratives) that determine what is “high” and “low” culture, what is “vulgar” and what is “refined,” what is “correct” and “incorrect” in interpretation, what is “sacred” and what is “profane,” – as he reads the Bible alongside popular fiction, rock-and-roll music (including heavy metal), pornography, and the fast-food industry.

Another significant scholar of this early work is Stephen D. Moore. Moore began his work exploring postmodern modes of reading, and as his work developed during his years on the faculty of the University of Sheffield, his interest shifted from analysis of language and theory of interpretation to exploration of popular modes of biblical appropriation and interpretation, with specific interest in cultural constructions of gender and power/hierarchy. Alongside editing two significant early collections of general scholarship on Bible and popular culture (Exum and Moore 1998b; Moore 1998b), Moore explored biblical depictions of the form/image of God and their popular appropriations in his (1996) *God's Gym*. His interest was how these images inscribe gender identity for God and how this inscribed gender identity appropriated by popular culture both created and perpetuated expectations of both divine and masculine power. Moore followed this with his 2001 *God's Beauty Parlor*.⁴ Many of the same themes (gender, power, cultural constructions of hierarchy) persist in this work, as well. Moore's focus moves toward Jesus and toward explicit analysis of gender, sexuality, and sexual preference with a particular focus on what culture deems as "queer" sexual identity. Examining "queerness" reveals cultural modes of constructing "normal" identity and expression that, in turn, reveals systems of cultural domination. Moore's work is characterized by a relentless interest in and precision toward theory.

It's in the Mix: Cultural Studies as Intertextuality

In American biblical criticism on popular culture and cultural studies, it would be difficult to underestimate the influence of Fernando Segovia. Writing in 1995, he defined and defended cultural studies of the Bible, grounding it within traditionally "postmodern" and literary approaches to biblical criticism. For Segovia, cultural studies is an opportunity for the critic to examine her own context-driven reading assumptions and investment(s).

It is the role assigned to the reader that, without doubt, most sharply differentiates cultural studies from other competing paradigms in contemporary biblical criticism. For cultural studies the reader does not and

4 A significant hallmark of Moore's work during this period was his use of autobiographical criticism and his interest in the emerging methodology of "new historicism." The former foregrounded the experience of the critic-as-reader in overt ways; the latter famously foregrounds the interpretive significance of "popular" or mass history and experience. Cultural studies, in many ways, fused these interests around questions of subjectivity and "meaning." One could argue that contemporary work in affect criticism is the continuation of all these various strands. Notably, Moore is a major contributor to the development of affect theory in/and biblical scholarship.

cannot remain ... in the background, even if so wished and attempted, but is actively and inevitably involved in the production and meaning of “texts” and history.⁵

Segovia argued that cultural studies readings of the Bible expose the way systems and ideologies worked to create culturally altern groups – specifically via colonial engagement and race and ethnicity. Following the work of the CCCS, biblical scholarship has maintained a principal focus on contemporary popular culture (vs. examination of ancient mass culture, as one might anticipate among biblicists. Exum and Moore 1998a, p. 39; Moore 1998a, pp. 2–3). In part, I would argue that this is because of the way Segovia’s seminal definition justifies cultural criticism by embedding it in the experience of the (contemporary) Bible reader, but also because his rationale, within the field of biblical studies, was itself an implicit rejection of traditional historical-grammatical exegetical work (which often asserts that the reader/interpreter is merely a conduit, neutrally discerning “meaning” after scholarly reconstruction of both text and context).

Segovia was reflecting a long conversation in the humanities surrounding the growing complexity of thought regarding “meaning” in texts and language. Under modernism, structuralist approaches to language (and critical theory) sought out the inherent “structures” in language, literature, indeed even in human thought itself. Human communication (and culture) produced a series of signs and signifiers. The task of the interpreter was to deduce the Signified. This worked on macro level (to interpret a document, story, narrative, etc.) and on the level of individual word (or, indeed, any specific Sign). The process of encoding and decoding Signs and Signifiers revealed a universalism, a commonality in human cognition.

Reflecting, however, notions of the *postmodern* (such as Lyotard), *poststructuralism* emerged in continental philosophy and critical theory in the late twentieth century. Essentially, these approaches denied any sense of universality in cognition, meaning or communication, challenging systems that simplified signifier–sign relationships. “Meaning” was a process, a construction, that varied from encounter to encounter. What a Sign (or a text) might “mean” varied based upon the interpreter, who brought her own sets of skills, insights, information, ignorance, and agendas to the process of interpretation. Meaning was constructed and constantly varied.

The Russian linguist and critical theorist Mikhail Bakhtin argued that language and meaning were dialogic. Bakhtin noted that words most commonly get

5 Segovia 1995, Vol. 2, p. 12. Segovia would later refine this, writing that cultural studies is a “joint critical study of texts and readers,” 2000, p. 30.

their meaning from their use in context (much more than from their codification in “standard” lists or lectionaries. Indeed, good lectionaries collect usages and determine word definitions from those contexts). Bakhtin (see esp. Bakhtin 1994) argued that a sentence is a “conversation” between its words, larger (external) grammar systems, histories of interpretation, scholarship and more – these latter mitigated through the experience of the reader. In an act of interpretation, there are three “voices” in dialog – text, author, and reader – but each node of this conversation is, itself, enmeshed in a series of contexts and conversations.

Bakhtin was a key influence on Roland Barthes. Barthes famously wrote his pivotal essay “death of the author” (“le mort de l’auteur”) in 1967 (note as well Logic 2013 for helpful overview). This essay was originally published as a pamphlet in a “journal” that was really a series of items – of signifiers – collected in a box. Ironically, in its own context, Barthes’s essay was the most conventional, at least in form. Barthes argued that authors (he preferred the term “scriptor”) vanish after writing. Meaning was a construction of the reader who brought their own experiences, insights, and ideas – including the influence of all other things, all other Signs and Signifiers, they knew and had “read.”

Julia Kristeva was a student of Barthes, attending his Paris seminar on Bakhtin. In her own work on Bakhtin (Kristeva 1969) she argued for interpretation as a form of “intertextuality.” A reader brings with her all the other “texts” she has encountered in her construction of reading. Signs (in our case, “texts” or items in culture) are actually vast networks of other signs (for us, other texts or items of culture) linked by the experience and engagement of the reader. Readers create meaning, but do so via the dialog of all semiotic exchange. For many biblical scholars “intertextuality” is reduced to an analysis of the ways in which one biblical text cites or quotes another text. An obvious moment would be the use of Hebrew Bible in the writings of Paul, or the use of written sources, such as Q, by the gospel authors. More subtle would be the appearance of Bible in subsequent western art, literature, film and mass culture. Such can be (indeed often is) little more than an analysis of where and how the Bible is cited (often with critique as to whether Bible is being used “correctly”). It may also, however, influenced by Kristeva and the conversation among poststructuralists before her, be an example of Segovia’s challenge – where modern Bible readers are acknowledging that the “meaning” of a biblical book is constructed in the viewer via the interanimation of encounter – that the “signifier” and “signified” are dialogic. Many critics don’t realize it, but they are doing an intertextual reading – pointing out how culture does or doesn’t use the Bible, but quietly evaluating the same, generally based on the way they as interpreters have been trained to read, in order to produce readings of both Bible and culture that reflect their own roles as interpreters.

The changes to cultural studies among biblical scholars, which were anticipated by Exum and Moore, have been revealed to be the combination of

Segovia's interest in the location of the reader (a reader herself embedded in, and influenced by, mass culture) wedded to work also drawing from Kristeva's notion of "intertextuality."⁶ Moving beyond the individual and her role as reader (and the attendant emphasis upon contemporary culture), a second line of scholarship has focused on reception history or "biblical afterlives," looking at systems of interpretation and ideological engagement with the Bible.

Kristevan "intertextuality" as a mode of scholarship on Bible and/in mass culture explores the inter-animation of "texts." Often highly disparate works – separated from one another by varied genre, chronology, language, or purpose – reflect or reveal a mutual interest in theme, ideology, and even structure. This may be because of intentional citation or allusion, but it is often via the analysis and close reading of a reader who brings her own interests and creates her own resonances and connections. Intertextuality is intentional "eisegesis" via comparative reading (though, most intertextual critics would argue all exegesis is, in the end, eisegetical). As intertextuality has entered cultural studies the meaning of "text" has been expanded to include recorded music, film, still image, web text, and more. Analogous to the knowledge potentially gained by comparative anatomy, the examination of moments of Intertextuality can reveal "this is that" analogies and parallels exposing implicit themes, ideas, or motives in both works; it can also clarify how more transparent structures "work" to create meaning. Intertextual approaches, rooted in scholarship of subjectivity, frequently took gender and feminist interests as a critical lens for examination of Bible in/and mass culture. Feminism has had a particular interest in the way images in general and film in particular construct and reflect popular ideas of the feminine ideal and gendered behavior, particularly asking (sometimes pointed) questions about the location of the viewer's "gaze." Images of women both create and perpetuate cultural norms about feminine beauty, for example. Yet, these images, as images, also draw the viewer/consumer into participation in this construction. As we watch or gaze, we become collaborators with the perpetuation of these larger cultural norms.

Yvonne Sherwood's (2001) analysis of the "afterlives" of the biblical character Jonah – how Jonah's myth and image were used in later Judeo-Christian art to create or reinforce ideology of later generations – is an example and early landmark in the formal development of "reception criticism" (on "reception history"

6 For early work, see Bach 1994, 1996, 1997. Much of this work arose from studies devoted to exploring the Bible in visual images and in film and had a notably feminist interest, as per Exum 1998, pp. 3–4; Pippin 1996; Aichele and Pippin 1997. Bach's early work in advancing cultural studies and popular culture among biblical scholars is difficult to underestimate. She founded, for example, the journal *Biblicon* for this express purpose and was early, and vocally, engaged in creating space for such work at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. On intertextuality and cultural studies readings, note in particular Aichele 2000.

note, to begin, England and Lyons 2015). Some key studies consider popular or mass cultural items from the past (See, for examples, Seesengood and Koosed 2013; Koosed 2011; Clanton 2006; Conway 2017). Reception criticism has become an increasingly broad approach to biblical criticism, generating major reference and research works such as *The Blackwell Bible Commentary*⁷ or the impressively ambitious *Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception* published by Walter de Gruyter and the SBL Press series *The Bible and Its Reception*.⁸

Work on the Bible in popular culture has expanded dramatically. The annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature now has several sections dedicated to popular culture, cultural studies, and the Bible in various forms of modern media. As I will discuss, several new monograph series with a focus on various aspects of Bible and popular culture/cultural studies have emerged. As this work has expanded, methodological structure has become even more diffuse, though still tending to orbit around issues of discovery of “meaning” and interpretation(s) of/in biblical text, the role of Bible in popular culture for the construction of identity (particularly gender), and center largely on visual images, film (including television), and music. This latter focus has foregrounded, for some, questions about the borders between work that is categorized as “high” and “low/mass” culture and the difference and similarity between “professional” and “popular/mass” interpretation.

On survey of some contemporary work in Bible and popular culture we find elements of “popular culture” examined by biblical scholars vary widely, but cluster (when they do) around (contemporary) mass entertainment. For example, Sawyer’s *The Blackwell Companion to Bible and Culture* demonstrates the breadth of the influence of the Bible in various forms of popular culture such as film, literature, music, and the visual arts, but also theater, architecture, and the Victorian circus (Sawyer 2006). Timothy K. Beal (2012) has written on the Bible as a cultural and mass publishing phenomenon, and has also examined the Bible and its role in American folk religion and tourism (2005). These themes echo work on the current state of popular “biblical literacy” (Edwards 2015; note, as well, Elliott and Boer 2012) and in critique of the American Bible tourism destination without equal: the Museum of the Bible (Baden and Moss 2017). Scholars have examined the role of the Bible in popular political rhetoric in America

7 *Blackwell Bible Commentaries*, edited by John Sawyer, Christopher Rowland, Judith Kovacs and David M. Gunn. Each of the 28 individually authored volumes is subtitled “Through the Centuries.”

8 *The Encyclopedia of the Bible and Its Reception*, ed. Christine Helmer, Steven Linn McKenzie, Thomas Chr. Römer, Jens Schröter, Barry Dov Walfish, and Eric Ziolkowski. It is published in print, but latest versions are available online at <https://www.degruyter.com/view/db/abr>.

(Berlinerblau 2008) and in England (Crossley 2014, 2018). The Bible's role in selling more than just political ideology – indeed, its place within the crass, very mass, world of modern advertising – has also received notice (Edwards 2012). Much work has been devoted to the Bible in various mass entertainment media, from comic books (Clanton 2012) to pop music (Gilmour 2005, 2004, 2009; Clanton 2009; Leneman 2007) but especially to film.⁹

Despite long-running interest at Society of Biblical Literature meetings and conferences, little of this scholarship, to date, has trickled down into the society's premier journal: the *Journal of Biblical Literature*. A number of essays, however, have appeared in the society's monograph series Semeia Studies. Some significant journals that have been leaders in reception criticism and popular culture are *Biblical Interpretation* and *Bible and Critical Theory*. Surprisingly, much of the work on the Bible and popular culture appears in various monograph series. Indeed, these are, at the time of this writing, not only prominent but proliferating. Some series titles include *Biblical Intersections* (Gorgias), *The Bible and Its Reception* (Society of Biblical Literature), *The Bible and the Moving Image* (Walter de Gruyter), *Biblical Reception and The Bible in the Age of Capital* (Rowman & Littlefield) and *The Bible in the Modern World* (Sheffield Phoenix). In the late 1990s, major publishers included Routledge, T & T Clark, Continuum, and Sheffield Academic Press.

Assembling the Pieces: Reception, Deleuzian Machines, Affect

The first waves of CCCS and Marxist-influenced Bible and cultural studies criticism looked at *why* the Bible was used in/as culture, at what was produced, arguing that the goal was creation and regulation of group status and systems of (hegemony) and control. Via attention to intertextuality, cultural studies has unveiled with increasing depth and acumen *where* and *when* Bible appears, noting how the juxtaposition is, itself, a form of interpretation and meaning making. An emerging body of work, focused upon affect and the creation of cultural meaning-making “machines” has taken on the question of *how* these intertextual moments produce meaning.

“Affect” in cultural or literary criticism may, superficially, be taken to mean the emotional significance and impact of a given work. It is rooted, however, in

9 The study of film and television is, without serious challenge, the broadest category of work on Bible and popular culture. A very select review of recent, methodology/survey oriented work (particularly multiauthor collections, which are good places for beginning reading) should include Burnette-Bletsch 2016; Copier and Vander Stichele 2016; Reinhartz 2012, 2013; and Walsh 2018.

psychology, particularly the work of Silvan Tomkins. Tomkins (Tomkins 1962–1992) identified a series of precognitive reactions, functioning as memes or ciphers for engaged thought. Tompkins would eventually collect his thinking into nine affects: distress-anguish, interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, surprise-startle, anger-rage, fear-terror, shame-humiliation, disgust, and dissmell (avoidance). These reactions are innate and from birth. They are not, in themselves, emotions or feelings; “feeling” is our term for our awareness of them. Awareness of affect (feeling) plus memory produces emotion. Affect is inherent in an object, as well. It is an involuntary response. Something has affected us, producing a cascading avalanche of affect-memes, feelings, memories, emotions and finally thoughts (and actions).

Tomkins’s work has influenced critical theory and the humanities via two general streams (see, in general Gregg and Seigworth 2009; Kotrosits 2016 or Koosed and Moore 2014b). The first, crystalized in the work of Eve Sedgwick, focuses on the psycho-biological aspects of affect (esp. Sedgwick 2003). Her work, and those influenced by it, is particularly interested in the way we construct a sense of identity and self. Literary and cultural studies influenced by her (particularly biblical scholarship that engages pop culture) examine the way meaning is broader than “reasoned” or “rational” aware engagement – that bodies, traumas, memories, and emotions are both influencing us as readers *and* embedded in books and culture themselves.

A second is work drawing from Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1980; seen by some as the natural extension of “postmodern” biblical criticism, e.g. Moore 2023). Deleuze concentrates on the moment of encounter and exchange between object and its perception – the potential in the moment of juxtaposition and exchange, the transfer of the affect. Appropriately, Deleuze has been quite influential on an array of work engaging the “posthuman” – scholarship that looks at how items in culture, cultural systems, and other “nonhuman” things (including, most obviously, the natural world and the animal) possess a form of agency and autonomy. Culture is produced by humans, yet it also, itself, *produces* humans – both making them, as an organism, “human” (as opposed to just another ape) *and* scripting to/for a culture what it recognizes and values as humane.

Three essay collections have been crucial to the introduction of affect criticism into biblical studies. Moore and Bray have edited a collection of essays by leading scholars in affect, encouraging each to think specifically about how their work intersects with religious studies (Bray and Moore 2020). Emerging from this theory work are two specific collections on affect in biblical studies – one edited by Jennifer Koosed and Stephen Moore (Koosed and Moore 2014a), the other edited by Fiona Black and Jennifer Koosed (Black and Koosed 2019; note also Kotrosits 2015).

Scholarship in posthuman studies has entered biblical scholarship initially via work on animals and animality (note, for example, Schaefer 2015). What does it mean to describe one being as “animal” and the other as “human?” What are the differences (or lack of difference) between their forms of cognition and experience? What are their obligations to one another (and in what ways do culture – and Bible – create ideologies or structures that affect planetary life? Should they?)? Both Hannah Strømmen (Strømmen 2018) and Ken Stone (Stone 2017) have written effectively on these questions, and the collection edited by Moore assembles an array of critical work by biblical scholars (2014). Koosed expands this collection, and augments it with work moving more toward general “post-human” studies in her edited collection of 2016 (Koosed 2014).

In thinking of the agency of Things – what can, for example, a Bible *do* in culture? Is it completely inert or does it have a form of agency in the communities it constructs? – nods again to the work of Giles Deleuze. Deleuze and Guatarri somewhat famously have referred to books (and other items such as music, painting, film, etc.) as meaning generating machines. Constructed by “authors” the book fuses an array of cultural symbols, signs, codes, memories, and more in affective ways. The Book is not invested with meaning; the Book becomes an assemblage, a machine that functions together to create “meaning.”

Again, several recent works of biblical scholarship explore the notion of the agency of Things (and of Bibles). Seesengood and Wilson have collected a series of essays exploring object-oriented ontology or “new materialism” in biblical studies (Seesengood and Wilson 2020a, b). Their essays take seriously the meaningfulness of Things (and question the limits of what we intend by “agency” and “action”). Two extremely provocative studies of Bible and New Materialism are those by Anne Elvey (Elvey 2005, 2011) and Maia Kotrosits (2020). Elvey demonstrates the transition from posthuman through ecofeminism to arrive at new materialism in her 2005 “Matter, Freedom and the Future.” Kotrosits (long a leading voice in affect and biblical studies) turns her attention to the affective agency of Things in her 2020 *The Lives of Objects*. Affect, posthumanism, animal studies, and new materialism have, more and more often, begun to coalesce in studies of mass culture (see Sencindirer 2017; Grusin 2015; Coole and Frost 2010; Bennett and Joyce 2010); we may expect the same in biblical studies.

The Plan of This Book

American Standard is a series of essays, case studies, that demonstrate all these methodological lenses in cultural studies by a series of essays ranging across several aspects of twentieth and early twenty-first century American pop culture. I will sort these essays into three major sections, each exploring one of the

critical lenses (classical CCCS and Marxist, intertextuality, and affect/posthuman studies). The essays will review methodology, literature, and assumptions but will do so via an original reading and interpretation of Bible. In each section, the three essays are sequenced from simpler to more nuanced methodology and subtlety; each runs a bit further afield into critical theory than the last, and the third essay is often a bridge into the next triad. The book will end with a conclusion that reviews the sweep of the all the work presented in the book and that suggests ways to integrate methods/foci into a productive reading of Bible in US mass culture, with a particular focus on race and political division the current crisis points in US culture.

Part I, “From CCCS to Late Capitalism” collects three essays that each draw from themes set by landmark CCCS scholarship or themes (or “CCCS adjacent” for the case of Chapter 3) and benefit from the CCCS attention to Gramsci and Althusser and Jameson’s “late capitalism.” All three (at least implicitly) rely on Marxist structures and logics (if not, necessarily, explicit argument). All three foreground the CCCS focus on the false binary of “high” and “low” culture, with attention to mass consumption and “popular” items being as meritorious as attention to – and scholarly rigor regarding – protected, “canonical” high or classical culture (in this case, we are also explicitly engaging with Bible and biblical scholarship). The essays take as their inspiration such foundational classical studies worthies as F. R. Leavis, Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and Michel de Certeau.

Chapter 2 is “Reading Readers: Modern Evangelicalism’s Material (Biblical) Renaissance.” If the Bible’s (self?) designation as *The Good Book* is challenged by some, there is little question that publishing Bibles (and books about the Bible) has been good for the book business. There is an abundance of printed Bibles to line the shelves of stores or pages of web-catalogs. Bibles are produced in a variety of English translations. Many have special notes or reference systems to lead readers into the secrets of the Bible’s meaning. Bibles are marketed to specific markets – men, women, youths, to a variety of denominations, racial and sexual identities, even to non-believers. Bible production – and Bible *consumption* – form a major segment of the US book market, and have been for centuries. This chapter will argue that, in the US context, individuals and communities often define themselves by the items they consume. This seems particularly true of evangelicals, one of the largest Bible-buying segments in the United States. Using Jameson’s notion of late capitalism, this essay will examine Bibles, themselves, as cultural products and will read Bible production, and consumption, as a device for identity and culture construction.

Chapter 3 is titled “Graphic Bibles: The Word Becomes (Affecting) Image.” Drawings and paintings have been used to represent biblical stories and characters for nearly as long as there has been a Bible. Contemporary scholarship has explored several genres of graphic representation of the Bible: “Bible-zines,”

“children’s” Bible illustrations, evangelistic tracts (ChickTracks), and more. The Bible has also been rendered as a graphic novel. One very recent and very engaging Bible-comic is Robert Crumb’s *Genesis*. When artists make the necessary decisions for depicting a biblical scene or story, they must make interpretations. What race, for example, were Adam and Eve? In this chapter, I will be exploring how Crumb “translates” biblical text into a new medium.

Chapter 4 takes up de Certeau’s notion of “everyday life” in/and cultural studies. “‘Eat This Book’: The Bible and the American Diet,” will explore the notions of “biblical eating,” an increasingly complex matrix of issues and concerns. Recent scholarship, for example, has addressed: the origins and transformation of the food production companies of Kellogg’s and Welch’s, the changing definition of kosher and kosher demarcation, the recent rise of “biblical vegetarianism,” the Bible’s role in contemporary discussions over the environment and animal rights, modern weight loss-via-Bible-guidance movements (Weigh Down Watchers, etc.) and contemporary evangelical “reclamation” of biblical kosher regulations. The chapter will explore several of these food-Bible intersections and will ask what these modern engagements reveal about the structure, content, and practicality of biblical instructions regarding food.

In Part II, “The Intertextual Bible,” Chapters 5–8, I will be looking at Bible and cultural studies as a moment of intertextuality. For the most part, these essays will conform to what one finds in the majority of US criticism of Bible in pop culture that is emerging from biblical studies circles. In general, this work is looking at ways Bible appears in mass culture (with a focus on film and television), and comparing this use to formal scholarship of the Bible (noting either commonalities, correcting pop culture, or demonstrating pop culture is a form, itself, of interpretation). These essays will proceed from those more explicit in their invocation of Bible to the more allusive. As before, these essays will largely demonstrate their critical underpinning via an original reading of both Bible and US mass culture. As we progress, as well, the essays will argue more and more that attention to intertextual engagement with the Bible in media can not only tell us how the Bible has been interpreted, but might even incline us (as per traditional, professional academic commentary) to new understandings of the Bible’s contents, themselves.

Chapter 5 is “The Ketuvim in the Coenim: Bible and Apocalyptic in the Films of Joel and Ethan Coen.” Film critic A.O. Scott, when reviewing Joel and Ethan Coen’s 2009 *A Serious Man*, commented on how this film, unlike their others, directly engaged both Judaica and the Bible. In some ways, Scott is quite correct. None of their films invoke Jewish-American culture or the rabbis on the scale seen in *A Serious Man*, and the Coens rarely to never directly refer to Torah. Yet I would take issue with suggestions that the Coens are sparing or reserved in their use of Bible. They have a particular penchant for the Ketuvim. Alongside *Serious Man*’s use of the narrative of Job (and also Ecclesiastes), the

Psalms appear in *The Big Lebowski* and *O Brother, Where Art Thou*. The book of Daniel has made several cameos (*Big Lebowski*, *Ladykillers*, and *Barton Fink*) where the Coens use the text of Daniel to establish a general “apocalyptic” tone for the film establishing an early warning of deadly chaos to come. When the Coens turn to Job or the Psalms, they also invoke themes of death and divine judgment (i.e. *Lebowski*’s famous funeral home scene or the closing whirlwind of *Serious Man*). I will argue that the Coens use biblical text much in the way they use set/location (*Fargo*, *No Country for Old Men*, etc.) or cinematography (particularly their reliance on Roger Deakins’s trademark light-and-shadow): to create a context of surreality, vacant-yet-dangerous space, and dramatic foreboding. In contrast, then, to Scott, I will argue that biblical literature, particularly the Ketuvim, regularly composes the very “landscape” of the Coen brothers’ imagination and vision. The early proto-apocalyptic elements in the Ketuvim, to the Coens, invoke the mystery, absence and risk that, in part, constructs a space for drama to unfold. In turn, the Coen’s use reveals the apocalyptic tenor of traditional “wisdom” literature like Job and Ecclesiastes.

Chapter 6 is “Do Not Forsake Me’: Biblical Motifs in Zinnemann’s *High Noon*,” looks at the use of Bible in US Western movies and literature. Jane Tomkins has argued Westerns are a form of American myth making, exploring identity, gender, and space. Stanley Corkin has argued Westerns reflect Cold War struggles and opportunities. Peter French has asserted that Westerns interpret and subvert Judeo-Christian ethics regarding death and violence. All three scholars identify Zinnemann’s *High Noon* as both a landmark in the genre and exemplar of how Westerns “work.” *High Noon* uses biblical motifs of the Day of the Lord, “forsakenness,” and the personifications of Wisdom and Folly as women to articulate that violence is necessary for true peace, civility, liberty, and honor. Such violence is likened to divine judgment. Understanding this is divine wisdom.

Finally, Chapter 7 is “God’s Dice: The Bible in/and Sci-Fi and Fantasy Gaming.” This chapter explores the role of biblical images and themes in sci-fi and fantasy role playing games, in both “tabletop” and video game formats. These games, largely emerging during the 1980s remain exceptionally popular today, particularly among US males – both teen and adult. Despite fears of “satanism” and corruption of young minds by evil powers (or spirits), the gaming industry has grown to become a multibillion-dollar annual industry spread into general merchandise, books, television, and film. Various gaming systems invoke several themes, motifs, and characters from mythology in general and the Bible in particular. Overwhelmingly, these symbols draw from apocalyptic literature with key characters such as Satan and key themes such as cosmic war between forces of Good (sometimes “order”) and Evil (or chaos). Focusing on Games Workshops “*Warhammer*” franchise, this chapter will explore how these themes provide a “thick” context of cosmic implication for the game but also

reflect a real ambivalence. “Good vs. Evil” provides a superficial frame narrative, but the struggle, in the game as in Revelation, often results in authoritarian overreach and fascism. This chapter will argue that biblical text *from Revelation* are chosen precisely because this book, with its motifs of God’s wrath, itself struggles with the same tensions.

The third and last part, “Affective Machines: Deleuze, Cultural Studies, and the Next Wave,” is the most theoretically dense. I have collected three essays (Chapters 8–10) that intersect with emerging work in both cultural studies and biblical studies on affect and Giles Deleuze’s notion of culture/books as assemblage. These essays, again, are ordered so as to proceed from more conventional expectations of “Bible in popular culture” to more theoretically dense work, culminating in post-humanism and new materialism.

In Chapter 8, I open with an essay that examines cultural construction of “Truth” and the commodification – and group co-option – of “nonfiction” or cultural literacy. Chapter 8 is titled “Mysteries of the Bible Documentary: The Bible in Popular Nonfiction Documentary Film.” This chapter will examine an array of books and (mostly made-for-TV) documentaries on the Bible. I will examine serious academic resources alongside clearly devotional and faith building documentaries and the somewhat titillating “Lost Bible Discovered” variety of documentary. My focus will be films about the historical Jesus and Noah’s ark. Using the techniques of film and documentary studies, this chapter would look at how these documentaries are constructing an experience for the viewer.

Chapter 9 is “‘I (Want to) Believe, Lord; Help Me in My Unbelief’: Revelation, Raëleans, Mayans, and North American Pop Eschatology.” In 1997, 39 members of a UFO cult called “Heaven’s Gate” took their own life in their southern California compound. They were convinced an alien spaceship was approaching earth, hiding in the tail of the Hale–Bopp comet. Their shocking act made many scholars aware of the burgeoning world of UFO religions. UFO religions, in many ways, mirror aspects of religious expression found in more mainstream religious communities; given that most UFO religions are located in the United States and Britain, they have a particular tendency to adopt and adapt elements of Judeo-Christian practice. For example, some UFO believers argue that the Bible, itself, is a record of human interaction with alien life (the Raëleans, for example). Other communities (the Urantians) have drafted their own “Bibles,” often claiming to have been possessed (“inspired?”) by an alien intelligence. The tendency of UFO aficionados to identify “pilgrimage” sites (Roswell, New Mexico) and celebrate a UFO material culture is very resonant with Jewish and Christian devotion to the Bible. This chapter will explore the parallels between some communities of UFO aficionados and some communities of dedicated Bible readers.

And, finally, Chapter 10 is titled “Bespoke Words: The Bible, Fashion, and the Mechanism(s) of Things” and uses Bible and fashion as entry points into work

on new materialism and object-oriented ontology. Elizabeth Chin's elegant *My Life with Things: The Consumer Diaries* is late-capitalist and new materialist review of Things and their accumulation and assemblage into complex systems of consumption that fuse subjectivity materiality. Theories of seamless materiality and subjectivity are also critical to Deleuze's idea of "assemblage," and Chin tacks this pattern to her reading of Marx, the politics of anthropology, and her relationship to the material things near and around her. Few materials are nearer or more enveloping than our clothing. Not merely providing warmth and protection, through mechanisms of fashion and the culture that emerges from it, clothing communicates our community, socioeconomic status, and sometimes occupation. Clothing and fashion create the identity we want to project and expose us in ways we don't realize or intend. Fashion and clothing are not just about the garments we put on, but the bodies we dress and the identities we wear (Damhorst, Miller, and Michelman 2000, pp. 12–17). Fashion, though itself just an assemblage of "things," produces emotions like joy, anxiety, desire, disgust, attraction, and alienation. As Brian Massumi might argue, clothing and the fashion industry behind it are (affective) assemblage. They amalgamate an array of materials, practices, and histories, all knit into complex mechanisms of affect, meaning, and ideology. This chapter hopes to tailor these conversations for examination of biblical passages on-and-about clothing and fashion (and the array of scholarly and interpretive communities arising from them). Biblical passages about clothing regulations, body ornament and body display are significant to many confessional readers and to many feminist and queer biblical scholars. As I read biblical text and survey some of its interpretation, I will argue that, like the clothing that we wear, the Bible is an active Thing, creating, through an assemblage of materials, concepts, and affects, social order and subjectivity. Like clothing, Bible is (after Deleuze and Massumi) a machine producing more machines, and biblical criticism is an industry of consumption and display not unlike fashion; in a strange fusion of materiality and agency, Bible and biblical interpretation shroud our body in affective tapestries, weaving themes of concealment and display, stitching and altering the material and social worlds we inhabit.

Works Cited

- Adorno, T.W. (1991). *The Culture Industry; Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (ed. J.M. Bernstein)). London: Routledge.
- Aichele, G. (2000). *Culture, Entertainment and the Bible*, Library of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Supplement Series, vol. 309. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

- Aichele, G. and Pippin, T. (1997). *The Monstrous and the Unspeakable: The Bible as Fantastic Literature*. New York: Routledge.
- Althusser, L. (1969). *For Marx*. London: Allen Lane.
- Althusser, L. and Balibar, E. (1968). *Reading Capital*. London: New Left Books.
- Bach, A. (ed.) (1994). *The Bible and Popular Culture. Biblical Interpretation 2* (1).
- Bach, A. (ed.) (1996). *Biblical Glamour and Hollywood Glitz*, Semeia Studies, vol. 74. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature.
- Bach, A. (ed.) (1997). *Women, Seduction and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baden, J. and Moss, C. (2017). *Bible Nation: The United States of Hobby-Lobby*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1994). *Speech, Genres and Other Essays*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Barthes, R. (1967). The death of the author. In: *Image-Music-Texts* (trans. S. Heath), 142–148. London: Fontana Press.
- Beal, T.K. (2005). *Roadside Religion: In Search of the Sacred, Strange and the Substance of Faith*. Boston: Beacon Hill.
- Beal, T.K. (2012). *The Rise and Fall of the Bible: The Unexpected History of an Accidental Book*. New York: Mariner Books.
- Bennett, T. and Joyce, P. (ed.) (2010). *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*. New York: Routledge.
- Berlinerblau, J. (2005). *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers Must Take Religion Seriously*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berlinerblau, J. (2008). *Thumpin' It: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in Today's Presidential Politics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Black, F. and Koosed, J.L. (ed.) (2019). *Reading with Feeling: Affect Theory and the Bible*, Semeia Studies, vol. 95. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press.
- Boer, R. (1997). *Novel Histories: The Fiction of Biblical Criticism*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Boer, R. (1999). *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*. New York: Routledge.
- Boer, R. (2007). *Rescuing the Bible*. Blackwell Manifestos. London: Blackwell.
- Bray, K. and Moore, S.D. (ed.) (2020). *Religion, Emotion, Sensation: Affect Theories and Theologies*. New York: Fordham.
- Burnette-Bletsch, R. (ed.) (2016). *The Bible in Motion: A Handbook of the Bible and its Reception in Film*. 2 vols., Handbooks of the Bible and Its Reception. Leiden: De Gruyter.
- Butsch, R. (1990). *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure to Consumption*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Clanton, D.W. (2006). *The Good, the Bold, and the Beautiful: The Story of Susanna and Its Renaissance Interpretations*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, vol. 430. London: T & T Clark.

- Clanton, D.W. (2009). *Daring, Disrespectful and Devout: Interpreting the Bible's Women in the Arts and Music*. New York: Continuum.
- Clanton, D.W. (ed.) (2012). *The End Will Be Graphic: Apocalyptic in Comic Books and Graphic Novels*, Bible in the Modern World, vol. 43; Apocalypse and Popular Culture, 5. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.
- Conway, C.M. (2017). *Sex and Slaughter in the Tent of Jael: A Cultural History of a Biblical Story*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Coole, D. and Frost, S. (ed.) (2010). *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Copier, L. and Vander Stichele, C. (ed.) (2016). *Close Encounters Between Bible and Film: An Interdisciplinary Engagement*, Semeia Studies, vol. 87. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press.
- Crossley, J. (2014). *Jesus in an Age of Neoliberalism: Quests, Scholarship and Ideology*. New York: Routledge.
- Crossley, J. (2018). *Cults, Martyrs & Good Samaritans: Religion in Contemporary English Political Discourse*. London: Pluto.
- Damhorst, M.L., Miller, K.A., and Michelman, S.O. (ed.) (2000). *The Meanings of Dress*. New York: Fairchild Publications.
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1980). *A Thousand Plateaus* (trans. B. Massumi). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- During, S. (ed.) (1993). *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 2e. New York: Routledge.
- During, S. (1996). From the new historicism to cultural studies. In: *Institutions and Cultures: Theory and Practice* (ed. R. Lumsden and R. Patke), 53–83. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Edwards, K. (2012). *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising*, Bible in the Modern World. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.
- Edwards, K. (ed.) (2015). *Rethinking Biblical Literacy*. London: T & T Clark.
- Elliott, S. and Boer, R. (ed.) (2012). *Ideology Culture and Translation*, Semeia Studies, vol. 69. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press.
- Elvey, A.F. (2005). Matter, freedom and the future: reframing feminist theologies through an ecological materialist lens. *Feminist Theology* 23 (2): 186–204.
- Elvey, A.F. (2011). *The Matter of the Text: Material Engagements between Luke and the Five Senses*, The Bible in the Modern World, vol. 37. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.
- England, E. and Lyons, W.J. (ed.) (2015). *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, vol. 615; Critical Perspectives on the Reception and Influence of the Bible, 6. London: T & T Clark.
- Exum, J. C. (ed.) (1998). *The Bible and the Arts. Biblical Interpretation* 6 (3–4).
- Exum, J.C. and Moore, S.D. (1998a). Biblical studies/cultural studies. In: *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium*, Journal for the Study

- of the Old Testament, Supplement Series, vol. 266; Gender, Culture and Theory, 7 (ed. J.C. Exum and S.D. Moore), 20–45. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Exum, J.C. and Moore, S.D. (ed.) (1998b). *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series, vol. 266; Gender, Culture and Theory, 7. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Gilmour, M.J. (2004). *Tangled Up in the Bible: Bob Dylan and Scripture*. New York: Continuum.
- Gilmour, M.J. (ed.) (2005). *“Call Me the Seeker”: Listening to Religion in Popular Music*. New York: Continuum.
- Gilmour, M.J. (2009). *Gods and Guitars: Seeking the Sacred in Post-1960s Popular Music*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (eds. and trans. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Gramsci, A. (1978). *Selections from Cultural Writings* (ed. D. Forgacs and G.N. Smith). London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- Gregg, M. and Steigworth, G.J. (ed.) (2009). *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Grusin, R. (ed.) (2015). *The Non-Human Turn*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Hall, S. (1980). Cultural studies: two paradigms. *Media Culture Society* 2: 57–72.
- Hall, S. (1982). The rediscovery of ‘ideology’: return of the repressed in media studies. In: *Culture, Society and the Media* (ed. M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran, and J. Woolcott), 56–90. London: Methuen.
- Hoggart, R. (1957). *The Uses of Literacy*. New York: Penguin.
- Jameson, F. (1984). Postmodernism, or: the cultural logic of late capitalism. *New Left Review* 146: 59–92.
- Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Koosed, J. (2011). *Gleaning Ruth: A Biblical Heroine and Her Afterlives*, Studies in Personalities of the Old Testament. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Koosed, J. (ed.) (2014). *The Bible and Posthumanism*, Semeia Studies, vol. 74. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press.
- Koosed, J.L. and Moore, S.D. (ed.) (2014a). From affect to exegesis. *Biblical Interpretation* 22: 4–5.
- Koosed, J.L. and Moore, S.D. (ed.) (2014b). Introduction. *Biblical Interpretation* 22 (4–5): 381–387.
- Kotrosits, M. (2015). *Rethinking Early Christianity: Affect, Violence and Belonging*. Louisville, KY: Fortress Press.

- Kotrosits, M. (2016). *How Things Feel: Affect Theory, Biblical Studies and the (Im) Personal*, Brill Research Perspectives. Biblical Interpretation. Leiden: Brill.
- Kotrosits, M. (2020). *The Lives of Objects: Material Culture, Experience and the Real in the History of Early Christianity*, Class 200: New Studies in Religion. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1969). *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kroeber, A.L. and Kluckhohn, C. (1952). *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press.
- Leavis, F.R. (1930). *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Legaspi, M. (2010). *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Leneman, H. (2007). *The Performed Bible: The Story of Ruth in Opera and Oratorio*, Bible in the Modern World. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.
- Logic, J. (2013). 1967: The birth of the death of the author. *College English* 75 (5): 493–512.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (trans. G. Bennington and Brian Massumi). In: *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 10. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Moore, S.D. (1996). *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible*. New York: Routledge.
- Moore, S.D. (1998a). Between Birmingham and Jerusalem: cultural studies and biblical studies. In: *In Search of the Present: The Bible through Cultural Studies*, Semeia Studies, vol. 82 (ed. S.D. Moore), 20–45. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press.
- Moore, S.D. (ed.) (1998b). *In Search of the Present: The Bible through Cultural Studies*, Semeia Studies, vol. 82. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press.
- Moore, S.D. (2001). *God's Beauty Parlor and Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible*, Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Moore, S.D. (ed.) (2014). *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Moore, S.D. (2023). *The Bible after Deleuze: Affects, Assemblages, Bodies without Organs*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Moore, S.D. and Sherwood, Y. (2011). *The Invention of a Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.
- Munns, J. and Rajan, G. (ed.) (1995). *A Cultural Studies Reader: History, Theory and Practice*. New York: Longman.

- Pippin, T. (1996). *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image*. New York: Routledge.
- Radway, J. (2016). In honor of Stuart Hall. *Cultural Studies* 30 (2): 312–321.
- Reinhartz, A. (ed.) (2012). *Bible and Cinema: Fifty Key Films*, Routledge Key Guides. New York: Routledge.
- Reinhartz, A. (ed.) (2013). *Bible and Cinema: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge.
- Sawyer, J.F.A. (ed.) (2006). *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture*. New York: Blackwell.
- Schaefer, D.O. (2015). *Religious Affect: Animality, Evolution, and Power*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Schein, E.H. (1984). Coming to a new awareness of organizational culture. *Sloan Management Review* 25 (2): 3–16.
- Schein, E.H. (1990). Organizational culture. *American Psychologist* 45 (2): 109–119.
- Sedgewick, E.K. (2003). *Touching Feelings: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Seesengood, R.P. and Koosed, J.L. (2013). *Jesse's Lineage: The Legendary Lives of David, Jesus and Jesse James*, Library of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, vol. 548; Playing the Texts, 14. London: Bloomsbury.
- Seesengood, R.P. and Wilson, A. (eds.) (2020a). New materialism and the bible. *Bible and Critical Theory* 17 (2). <https://www.bibleandcriticaltheory.com/issues/vol-16-no-2-2020-bible-and-critical-theory/> (accessed 16 October 2023).
- Seesengood, R.P. and Wilson, A. (ed.) (2020b). Biblical stuff: the Bible and new materialism. *Bible and Critical Theory* 17 (2): 1–6.
- Segovia, F. (1995). Cultural studies and contemporary biblical criticism: ideological criticism as mode of discourse. In: *Reading from This Place* (ed. F.F. Segovia and M.A. Tolbert), 1–17. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress.
- Segovia, F. (2000). *Decolonizing Biblical Studies: A View from the Margins*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Sencindirer, S.Y. (2017). New Materialism. *Oxford Bibliographies*. <http://Oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0016.xml> (accessed 17 October 2023).
- Sherwood, Y. (2001). *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stone, K. (2017). *Reading the Hebrew Bible with Animal Studies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Strømmen, H. (2018). *Biblical Animality after Jacques Derrida*, Semeia Studies, vol. 91. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press.
- Surdam, D.G. (2015). *Century of the Leisured Masses: Entertainment and the Transformation of 20th Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Tomkins, S. (1962–1992). *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. 4 vols. London: Tavistock.
- Tyler, E.B. (1974). *Primitive Culture*. New York: Gordon.
- Wainwright, E. (2010). Introduction. In: *The Bible in/and Popular Culture: A Creative Encounter*, Semeia Studies, vol. 65 (ed. P. Culbertson and E. Wainwright), 1–9. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press.
- Walsh, R. (ed.) (2018). *Bloomsbury Bible and Film Handbook*. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark.
- Williams, R. (1958). *Culture and Society 1780–1950*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Williams, R. (1996). The future of cultural studies. In: *What Is Cultural Studies? A Reader* (ed. J. Storey), 168–177. London: Arnold.