

Reception¹

There is no writing or reading without bias. Both are acts of interpretation. What Theodor W. Adorno says of knowledge can be fruitfully applied to interpretation: “knowledge comes to us through a network of prejudices, opinions, innervations, self-corrections, presuppositions and exaggerations, in short through the dense, firmly-founded but by no means uniformly transparent medium of experience.”² In her book on the reception history of the Jonah story, Yvonne Sherwood cites much of the above quote by Adorno and goes on to show the biblical “original” is overwhelmed, eclipsed, and preceded by interpretation. She declares: “My premise is that biblical texts are literally sustained by interpretation, and the volume, ubiquity, and tenacity of interpretation make it impossible to dream that we can take the text back, through some kind of seductive academic striptease, to a pure and naked original state.... [T]hough the biblical text can always be re-deflected, it can never be recovered.”³ For Sherwood, interpreters of biblical texts are, despite their claims, less concerned with historical method, with encountering a text’s “pure and naked original state,” than with the desire to read it from his or her own “medium of experience.”

Like other scholars interested in reception, Sherwood locates the reader at the heart of textual meaning. Where she differs, however, is in her insistence on locating readers within the interrelations between cultural settings and ideological contexts. Commenting on the interpretative communities spoken of by Stanley Fish, Sherwood writes:

Interpretive communities sound rather vague and sinister to me these days, rather like Masonic clubs. In the world of Biblical Studies they are often reductively interpreted as religious communities so that readings can be simply and mechanistically dismissed as manifestations of the reader’s Protestantism, agnosticism, Jewishness, atheism, and so on. Since it is a fair assumption that Pusey, Eichorn, Augustine,

Calvin, Luther, *et al.* are all Christian, to point to the Christ-centredness of their readings is not to say very much. But what invites analysis is the radically different shapes the “Word” takes as it shapes itself, and accommodates itself, to different intellectual and social environments.⁴

Her reading politicizes authorship and readership, such that “the writing or interpreting subject is seen (after Foucault) as one who is subject to the influence of external forces, and the authors/interpreters become ‘cultural artefact[s]’ rather than creators *ex nihilo* who bequeath the text to the world.”⁵ In other words, there is no writing or reading without bias. Because of the elevated status of the Bible in Western culture, and because of dominant interpretive biases that favor certain groups at the expense and exclusion of others, Sherwood believes the defamiliarizing approach to the Bible and Biblical Studies is a vital one, and she assembles a host of different theorists to this end.⁶

In this essay, I want to get to the politicized account of reception that we find in Sherwood. I am interested in authors who are interpreters of biblical texts within communities of readers oriented towards improving human rights in the fields of race and gender. I use the term communities loosely, to denote people with one or several common attributes that direct them to a similar point of view or goal. Such communities both inform and reinforce how their writers might respond to, and appropriate, texts. Authors produce texts for particular audiences in mind, audiences that would normally have, or seek out, similar interpretive strategies. Thus, the text could be said to initiate and orientate a conversation by inviting its readers to recognize within it their own perspectives, ideas, and ideals—and perhaps, even, to test or expand them. German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, one of the leading figures of reception theory, says of such a hermeneutic conversation, “To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not

try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion."⁷ In discussing how writers from specific communities interpret the Bible, I am interested in how their interpretive strategies inform not only their work but also our own perception of the source material.

I have chosen two sets of reception responses that fall under the rubric of liberation theology: black theology and feminist theology. In exploring these, I will focus on the Song of Songs and its reading and counter-reading. My choice of the Song of Songs might be surprising to a modern reader who is more used to encountering the biblical text at weddings or in other romanticized contexts. But the Song of Songs has a long history of being interpreted and appropriated in a highly politicized manner by different interpretive communities. In her book, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England*, Elizabeth Clark argues that the Song of Songs played a significant role in the writings of oppositional politico-religious movements in the religious-driven warfare and rebellions following the Reformation. "In many ways," she says, "the struggle over the identity of the Church of England in the seventeenth century is a conflict over the meaning of the Song of Songs," given that the text's female lover had been interpreted since the second century as the true church.⁸ Having accumulated a number of interpretations in the seventeenth century, the Song of Songs "came to function as a kind of code for a politico-religious grouping," and, as I will show here, it has continued to play a role in liberation theology, notably, black theology and feminist theology.

Reception Theory—An Introduction

Reader-reception criticism is a term given to a number of diverse Anglo-American approaches that marked a movement, from the 1960s on, away from the assumptions of New Criticism, which had favored the supposed impersonality of reading and the self-sufficiency

of the text. Reader-response critics turned their interest away from the text towards the process of reading and the text-reader relationship; they drew attention to the implicit features of reading.⁹ “In one mode or another,” says Elizabeth Freund, “the swerve to the reader assumes that our relationship to reality is not a positive knowledge but a hermeneutic construct, that all perception is already an act of interpretation, that a notion of a ‘text-in-itself’ is empty, that a poem cannot be understood in isolation from its results, and that subject and object are indivisibly bound.”¹⁰ In his seminal work *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980), Fish argued: “An interpretive community is not objective because as a bundle of interests, of particular purposes and goals, its perspective is interested rather than neutral; but by the very same reasoning, the meanings and texts produced by an interpretive community are not subjective because they do not proceed from an isolated individual but from a public and conventional point of view.”¹¹

In Fish’s model, the reader is “freed from the tyranny of the text and given the central role in the production of meaning.”¹² But for Hans-Georg Gadamer and one of his pupils, Wolfgang Iser, text and reader are co-participants in a conversation that establishes meaning. Fish elevates the role of the reader simply by flipping the hierarchy between reader and text, while Gadamer and Iser emphasize the interactive nature of the encounter between reader and text. Gadamer and Iser appeal to the language of interpersonal relations and communication to describe the encounter between reader and text. It is an encounter that is situated in time and place. Robert C. Holub argues that Gadamer’s popularity in reception theory is “in no small part attributable to his radical insistence on the historical nature of understanding.”¹³ Gadamer says:

history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a

distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgements, constitute the historical reality of his being.*¹⁴

Gadamer's model, according to Jonathan Roberts, affirms the following: "as I encounter the past, I must enter a dialogical relationship with it, gradually coming to recognize the alterity of my historical interlocutor, and in the process coming to recognize my own prejudices through that difference.... The understanding gained thereby is dialogical."¹⁵ Prejudice (*vorurteil*), because it belongs to historical reality, is not a barrier to understanding, but, rather, the quality that makes understanding possible; prejudices and preconceptions are a fundamental part of any hermeneutic situation.¹⁶ Indeed, our prejudices open us up to what is to be understood because our preconceptions constitute a prior hermeneutical situatedness: what is subsequently interpreted is grasped at in a preliminary manner. For Gadamer, understanding is a "fusion of horizons," a process that is "continually going on, for ... old and new are always combining into something of living value."¹⁷ Unlike traditional hermeneutics, therefore, Gadamer advances a view of understanding as an ongoing process, and not something that is ever completed.

Wolfgang Iser has been especially influential on American literary critics and biblical scholars. In *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Iser posits that the text and the reader are "two partners in the communication process" and that these partners are subject to a particular kind of relationship.¹⁸ The text controls the reading process; it beckons the reader to interpret it and in the process be affected. "Reading is an activity that is guided by the text; this must be processed by the reader who is then, in turn, affected by what he has processed," he says.¹⁹ The text exists with a certain potentiality of meaning before any interpretive activity takes part; following cues offered by the text, the reader then actualizes or "concretizes" the text's potential. The reader attempts to bridge the gaps between

himself/herself and the text. According to this view, the autonomous text has a stable meaning, while the equally autonomous reader is led by textual clues to a proper realization of the text's potential. Fish critiques Iser's theory, arguing that meaning is possible only through communal reading strategies that precede a reader and the text.²⁰ But whatever faults Iser's model of a stable text and a transformed reader may have, it has proved attractive to biblical scholars who privilege formalist models of reading.

Iser's work struggles to acknowledge the extent to which biblical texts and interpretations are caught in a network of power relations. One of the main criticisms of reader-based theories—at least as they are practiced in the academy—is their avoidance of questions of ideologies and of educational and class biases.²¹ As the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* have noted, different readers (male, female, black, white, Asian, Latino, and so on), even within the same interpretive community, will stand in asymmetrical relationship to power and their ability to talk about the text.²² Reception theorists have generally avoided the question of politics and power by advancing an egalitarian or dialogical model of communication. Reception theory does not interrogate its own origins, complains Terry Eagleton, who declares that Iser's reception theory is based on a liberal humanist ideology, with its belief that readers should be flexible and open-minded, prepared to question their beliefs and willing to be transformed. "Behind this case lies the influence of Gadamerian hermeneutics," Eagleton states, "with its trust in that enriched self-knowledge which springs from an encounter with the unfamiliar. But Iser's liberal humanism, like most such doctrines, is less liberal than it looks at first sight."²³ Eagleton continues: notions of the unified self and the closed text "surreptitiously underlie the apparent open-endedness of much reception theory," for "the 'openness' of the work is something which is to be gradually eliminated," and textual indeterminacies, in Iser's authoritarian term, "normalized."²⁴

The Interpretive Strategies of Liberation Theology

The reception of the Bible, according to Jonathan Roberts, “comprises every single act or word of interpretation of that book (or books) over the course of three millennia. It includes everything from Jesus reading Isaiah, or Augustine reading Romans, to a Sunday-school nativity play, or the appearance of ‘2COR4:6’ as a stock number on military gunscofes.”²⁵

The study of readers’ reception of biblical texts, as Christopher Rowland confirms, is a significant departure from modern biblical exegesis, which tends to search for the original meaning of the text (what Sherwood calls its “pure and naked original state”), with little consideration for what the text means for later readers.²⁶ Rowland maintains, however, that the distinction between what the text might originally mean and what the text means for its readers is a difficult one to maintain: “There is a limit, after all, to how much one can say about the meaning of a text without reading into it things from elsewhere, whether they be insights from other texts, contemporary with the biblical text, antecedents of the text in earlier Scripture, or later traditions of interpretation which may guide our reading.”²⁷ Just as reader-response criticism sought to overturn the assumptions of New Criticism, reception theory applied to the Bible overturns the hierarchy of interpretation: exegesis of the original meaning of the Bible is no longer seen as primary to its subsequent readings.

Roberts rightly notes that “no individual, school, or group does or can own biblical reception. There is, and can be, no single common denominator between these readings, as their richness and value lies in their multiplicity and diversity.”²⁸ Rowland and Mark Knight are among those who argue that further scholarship is needed to rehabilitate the diversity of biblical reception within Christian theology, a diversity that includes Valentinus, the Montanists, the Anabaptists, feminist theologians, and the voices identified with the more famous exponents of liberation theology. “Not only is this theologically appropriate,”

Rowland argues, “it is necessary for the intellectual health of theology as a discipline as it looks ahead and reflects on its place within the academy and the broader culture.”²⁹

Liberal theological developments in the academy have coincided with the rise of the religious-based social activism of liberation theology. In *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction*, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn argue that, in a general sense, liberation theologies in the US are part of the larger liberal theological development and debate that marked the latter half of the twentieth century. As they assert, “Liberation theologies in the United States have matured over the past half-century, gaining both the attention of the publishing world and a solid place in the curriculum of seminaries and undergraduate and graduate institutions of higher learning.”³⁰ Liberal theology and the religious movements to which it corresponds attempt to bring theological inquiry and religious faith into line with pressing contemporary socio-political issues.³¹ In this essay, however, I am not simply interested in how the Bible has been read and adopted within the university but also outside it, by readers who might be unfamiliar with reception theory. In other words, I am interested in how the impulse of reception theory might be found in interpretive strategies that predate the theory, and how these strategies might avoid some of the political insularity that critics have found present in scholarly work on reception theory. These strategies fall under the rubric of reception activism or what Stephen Moore has called “exegetical activism.”³² Moore uses the term to refer specifically to the reading strategies of queer Christians seeking to appropriate the biblical texts to reflect positive views of queer existence; I extend the term to include the reading strategies undertaken by members of other groups involved in liberation theology and faith-based social activism.

1. Black Theology

Indigenous to the US, black theology (or black liberation theology) is a pioneering form of liberation theology.³³ While the claims of liberation theology originate from experiences of, and debates around the nature of, collective oppression, there is no single definition of liberation theology. As Edward P. Antonio notes, the field of liberation theologies “is marked by a wide-ranging methodological pluralism, ... [reflecting] genuine differences in history, content, experience of injustice, and of methods and approaches for identifying, analyzing, resisting, and overcoming the oppression that causes such injustice.”³⁴ For descendants of the African diaspora, black theology is inextricably linked with the history of slavery and subsequent experiences of racism. Leslie R. James argues in his introduction to *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel’s Scripture from Africa and the African Diaspora* that the forced migration of millions of Africans “is pivotal for understanding Africana biblical interpretation.”³⁵ Those who were transported to the New World and elsewhere engaged in a process of resistance and counter-reading to transcend the slavery experience:

The Bible, the central text of Western civilization, played a central, though contested, role in structuring the unequal relations between master and slave in the Americas. In the face of the dehumanizing and humiliating condition of slavery, African-descended peoples in the New World searched the Bible when they encountered it for vestiges of freedom, hope, justice, and an alternative future.... In other words, Africana biblical hermeneutics, particularly in the Americas, has always been in a dialectical relationship with the Black struggle to transcend slavery.³⁶

Given its history, therefore, black liberation theology differs from Latin American liberation theology—perhaps the most well-known of liberation theologies—which is traditionally focused on class struggle and capitalist exploitation.

To understand the relationship of black theology to reception theory, we need to turn to James H. Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969), which argues that the central message of Jesus is the liberation of society's most marginalized people. "This pioneering work, along with his subsequent publications," says Dwight N. Hopkins, "meant that Cone is generally cited, nationally and internationally, as the father of contemporary black theology of liberation"³⁷ Cone maintains that black theology originates in black power, which he defines as "an *attitude*, an inward affirmation of the essential worth of blackness."³⁸ To his mind, "there has been no sharp confrontation of the gospel with white racism," a failure which has led to "a desperate need for a *black theology*, a theology whose sole purpose is to apply the freeing power of the gospel to black people under white oppression."³⁹ Cone argues that in the New Testament, "Jesus is the man for others who views his own existence as inextricably tied to other men to the degree that his own Person is inexplicable apart from others. The others, of course, refer to all men, especially the oppressed, the unwanted of society, the 'sinners.' He is God himself coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of striking off the chains of slavery, thereby freeing man from ungodly principalities and powers that hinder their relationship with God."⁴⁰ Cone quotes from Luke 4:18-19 to support his reading, and recognizes the political nature of Christ's liberating ministry: "When black people begin to hear Jesus' message as contemporaneous with their life situation, they will quickly recognize what Jürgen Moltmann calls the 'political hermeneutics of the gospel.' Christianity becomes for them a religion of protest against the suffering and affliction of man."⁴¹ Black theology reads the Bible as a vindication of black power.

Much of the interest concerning the Song of Songs in black theology revolves around racism and methods of affirming the essential worth of blackness. In the late nineteenth-century, the American Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner discussed the color of Solomon's

skin in a monograph titled *The Color of Solomon—What? “My Beloved is White and Ruddy. A Monograph.”* In his Dedication, Tanner expresses the hope that the book will lead the way in encouraging “the rising scholars of the colored race” to explore similar issues to “vindicate the colored races of the earth and save them from the delusion: ‘The leading race in all history has been the white race.’” Moreover, in the Introduction, William S. Scarborough says that the book is a sign that “A new era has dawned and the colored man has begun to add his own stint of original thought to the forces that determine the character and status of a people.”⁴² In other words, the claim is made that the book marks a turning point in African American self-determination and a refutation of whiteness in the Bible. Through ethnographic and linguistic analyses, Tanner concludes that, despite his lover’s assertion in the English translation that Solomon “is white and ruddy,” he is in fact not white: “As we are sure he was not black, we are equally sure he was not white. What his color was, was ruddy; and his redness was bright. Bright, then, is the word, and not white.”⁴³ His bride, however, was, black. What’s more, like many subsequent African American commentators, Tanner believes the bride to be of royal lineage. And like contemporary critics, he notes that St. Jerome’s translation of her description has had damaging racial implications:⁴⁴ The Greek Septuagint translates a section of 1:5 as “I am black and comely,” but in his Latin translation, Jerome:

saw an adversative in it and so translated it:

“I am black but comely”

From him all others of his race have taken their cue; and the idea remains of a black queen in an age when black was popular and was in authority, apologizing for her blackness!⁴⁵

Song of Songs 1:5 also runs through womanist theology, which seeks to channel blackness away from feelings of shame and inferiority (or ugliness) towards pride and

empowerment (or beauty). The term “womanist” was introduced by Alice Walker in 1983 in her book, *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, and “allows women to claim their roots in black history, religion, and culture.”⁴⁶ Womanist scholar Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas notes that African Americans, to their very detriment, have internalized societal contempt and pity for blackness. Her semi-autobiographical essay, “‘I am Black and Beautiful, O Ye Daughters of Jerusalem...’: African American Virtue Ethics and a Womanist Hermeneutics of Redemption,” begins with two epigraphs pertaining to beauty. The first is from Toni Morrison’s novel, *The Bluest Eye*; the second is an adaptation of the Song of Songs 1:5:

It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, “You are ugly people.” They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. “Yes,” they had said. “You are right.” And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went home about the world with it. Dealing with it each according to his way.

*I am so black; but [you are] lovely and pleasant [the ladies assured her]. O you daughters of Jerusalem...*⁴⁷

Floyd-Thomas argues poignantly through autobiographical examples that the “gaze of contempt” by which the western world views African Americans has become “the mirror in which many black people have seen themselves.”⁴⁸ As with many previous commentators, Floyd-Thomas asserts that racialized readings of the Bible from a Eurocentric perspective have led to the demonization and marginalization of black people and to the rendering of Christianity as “conceived as an exclusively white religion.”⁴⁹ Nonetheless, reclaiming black presence in the Bible would in itself not be liberating if the presence were imbued with negative attributes: “The Bible must be seen also as a liberative text that does not convey an

immutable inferiority imposed by divine whim or wisdom. Black readers want to see themselves in the story and [in] the ultimate aim of their sacred scriptures.”⁵⁰ Hence, reclaiming a positive interpretation of the female protagonist in the Song of Songs (whom Floyd-Thomas, like many black theologians, claims is Solomon’s beloved Sheba) is part of this endeavor.

2. Feminist Theology

Womanist theology developed as a response to second wave feminism, which emerged in the 1960s and ran until the 1980s. While womanism is critical of aspects of feminism, it nonetheless could not have come into being without its predecessor. Feminism has played a significant role in reader-response criticism, with the latter often revealing “its sharpest political, ethical, and ideological edge when wielded by feminist critics.”⁵¹ Feminist theology emerged from second wave feminism. As with womanist theology, one of the endeavors of feminist theology is to recover female perspectives and voices from the Bible, wresting the sacred text away from male-centric perspectives and ensuring its relevance for women today. This endeavor includes the rehabilitation of Eve’s reputation, the location of female communities, and the recovery of women’s stories. The final aim in particular explains the place of the Song of Songs in feminist theology, according to Athalya Brenner, the editor of two feminist essay collections (1993, 2000) about the Song of Songs. In her introduction to the first collection, she states:

There is virtual consent among scholars today that some, at the very least, of the poetry of the Song of Songs should probably be attributed to female perspectives or even authorship. Hence, the text promotes opportunities for discussing female culture, its reclamation, and the affinities of the Song of Songs with other female poems in the Bible (such as the so-called Song of Miriam, Exod. 15; and the Song of Deborah,

Judg. 5). In short, it is relevant to quite a few of the issues that have stayed in the foreground of feminist biblical criticism for decades.⁵²

While the case for female authorship of the Song of Songs is weaker than this quotation suggests, the importance of the text to feminist theology is evident in the fact that it is the chosen text for the first volume in Sheffield Academic Press's *The Feminist Companion to the Bible* series. Brenner's co-editor for the second collection, Carole R. Fontaine, declares in the Preface that the later collection moves beyond the aims of the first to engage with questions of voice and methodology, among other things.⁵³ Fontaine and Brenner each have autobiographical essays in the final section called "Song of Songs, Personalized." Recalling the Song of Songs, the autobiographical style is perhaps the most explicit form articulating the reader response, and I will now turn to another of Fontaine's autobiographical essays.

In recent years, feminists have taken into account the intersection of feminism with other concerns such as class, disability, queer identities, and ethnicity. Fontaine addresses some of these issues in her autobiographical essay, "Song? Songs? *Whose* Song?: Reflections of a Radical Reader," published in 2006. Fontaine justifies the use of autobiography by claiming that in a "postmodern critical climate" it is clear that bias is always present in reading: "for how can we read except through the lens of bias and personal experience?"⁵⁴ Like Floyd-Thomas, she uses this genre to add to the reader's understanding of her current academic and ideological perspectives. Fontaine associates the suppression of the Song of Songs among Protestant readers in the American South with their blindness towards women's issues and the rights of African Americans. She believes that her reading of the text "as a Southern Baptist youngster [in the 1960s] in a racist South constituted a highly radical act for my community of faith."⁵⁵ As a child, her awareness of the suppression of the Song of Songs and her curiosity about the text led her to become a critical reader of her own society. Unlike

a church that is likely to favor the Prophets' characterization of women in denigrating terms,⁵⁶ Fontaine prefers the depiction of women in the Song of Songs. She says,

As a feminist critic with much to say about the distortion of sexuality that has been perpetuated by all churches, I view the Song in terms antithetical to those of the Southern Baptists with whom I first learned to read the Bible. The Song is a biblical corrective to the patriarchal denigration of women, their bodies, their capacities, and their loves. Thus it seems to me to be a place in the Scripture where the sickness appears next to its cure.⁵⁷

Armed with the Song of Songs, Fontaine takes up the combined issues of segregation, class, and women's issues: "My neighborhood did not yet know that black was beautiful," she declares.⁵⁸ Fontaine regards the Song of Songs as the original text of black empowerment, for it is "a harsh critic of the status quo, religious or secular."⁵⁹ Like some of the previous commentators I have referred to, she perceives equivalence between beauty and black pride in the Song of Songs. "Before there was Black Power or the defiant Afro haircut instead of straightening, there was the Song, calling out to racist culture that cherished its Bible that blackness did not rule out the presence of beauty. I was glad."⁶⁰ One of the most powerful sections of the essay is concerned with her neighbors who are among the most marginalized: black, working-class sex workers. These women faced injustice and prejudice based on the color of their skin, their occupation, and the location of their bodies in the social hierarchy. By reclaiming the inclusive translation of the Song of Songs 1:5, Fontaine upholds the women's inherent worth, despite their ostracism from society and the church alike: "These were black and beautiful, alright, but the church did not seem to have much place for them."⁶¹ The Song of Songs offered her hope, despite the injustices around her, for "at that time, the Song proved its contention that there was indeed something as strong as death, as relentless as the grave of racism and poverty in which I was mired, and love was its name."⁶²

The reading of the Song of Songs that we find in black theology and feminist theology reveals the importance of reception to biblical interpretation, but avoids the apolitical blindness that some critics have seen as inherent in reception theory. Black and feminist readings have their own limitations, as all readings do, but the awareness of readerly bias enables the Bible to be read in ways that benefit the socially marginalized and that is in line with a theme that most readers see as being of central importance to the biblical story: social justice. Rather than being a detriment to biblical interpretation, then, politicized instances of reception can highlight the significance of the Bible both within and outside the academy. Heavily politicized readings are likely to be contested, and rightly so. But thinking about how the Bible is read and received, and taking the historical reality of its readers seriously as we do so, is the means by which we can understand how the very text that has oppressed some communities can also become a source of their liberation.

¹ This essay was undertaken with the support of an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award and the UWA ECR Fellowship Support Program.

² Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (London: Verso, 2005), 80.

³ Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 53. The term “cultural artefacts” is from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

⁶ Sherwood, *Biblical Text*, 53-54.

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 360-61.

⁸ Elizabeth Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England: Rewriting the Bride* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

⁹ Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1987), 6.

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- ¹⁰ Ibid., 5.
- ¹¹ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), 14.
- ¹² Ibid., 7.
- ¹³ Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1984), 36.
- ¹⁴ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 178. Emphasis original.
- ¹⁵ Jonathan Roberts, "Introduction", in *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible*, ed. Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2.
- ¹⁶ Holub, *Reception Theory*, 41.
- ¹⁷ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 305.
- ¹⁸ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 89.
- ¹⁹ Ibid, 89.
- ²⁰ Stanley Fish, "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism* 11.1 (1981): 3.
- ²¹ The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 49.
- ²² Ibid., 58.
- ²³ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken: Wiley, 2011), 69.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 70, 71.
- ²⁵ Roberts, "Introduction", 1.
- ²⁶ Christopher Rowland, "Re-Imagining Biblical Exegesis," in *Religion, Literature and the Imagination: Sacred Words*, ed. Mark Knight and Louise Lee (London: Continuum, 2009), 141.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 142.
- ²⁸ Roberts, "Introduction," 7-8.
- ²⁹ Rowland, "Re-Imagining Biblical Exegesis," 145. See also Mark Knight, "Wirkungsgeschichte, Reception History, Reception Theory," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33.2 (2010): 141.
- ³⁰ Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn, "Introduction," in *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 11.
- ³¹ Ibid., 10.
- ³² Stephen D. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 209 n.10.
- ³³ Dwight N. Hopkins, "General Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 10. See also Edward P. Antonio, "Black Theology and Liberation Theologies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, 33-43.
- ³⁴ Antonio, "Black Theology and Liberation Theology," 34.
- ³⁵ Leslie R. James, "The African Diaspora as Construct and Lived Experience," in *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel's Scripture from Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. Hugh R. Page Jr. et al (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2010), 11.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 11.
- ³⁷ Hopkins, "General Introduction," 14.
- ³⁸ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), 8.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 31.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 35.

- ⁴¹ Ibid., 37.
- ⁴² William S. Scarborough, "Introduction," in *The Color of Solomon—What? "My Beloved Is White and Ruddy"* (Philadelphia, Pa.: A.M.E. Book Concern, 1895), v.
- ⁴³ Benjamin Tanner, *The Color of Solomon—What? "My Beloved Is White and Ruddy."* A Monograph (Philadelphia, Pa.: A.M.E. Book Concern, 1895), 83.
- ⁴⁴ See Robert Earl Hood, *Begrimed and Black: Christian Traditions on Blacks and Blackness* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1994); Abraham Smith, "The Bible, the Body and a Black Sexual Discourse of Resistance," in *Loving the Body: Black Religious Studies and the Erotic*, ed. Anthony B. Pinn and Dwight N. Hopkins (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 73-90.
- ⁴⁵ Tanner, *Color of Solomon*, 69-70.
- ⁴⁶ Dolores S. Williams, "Black Theology and Womanist Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 59.
- ⁴⁷ Qtd in Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, "'I Am Black and Beautiful, O Ye Daughters of Jerusalem...': African American Virtue Ethics and a Womanist Hermeneutics of Redemption," in *African American Religious Life and the Story of Nimrod*, ed. Anthony B. Pinn and Allen Dwight Callahan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 35.
- ⁴⁸ Floyd-Thomas, "I am Black and Beautiful," 36.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 37.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., 42.
- ⁵¹ The Bible and Culture Collective, *Postmodern Bible*, 37.
- ⁵² Athalya Brenner, "On Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Feminist Woman: Introduction to the Series," in *A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 28.
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- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 295.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 296.
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- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 305.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 299.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 302.
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