
Rita Felski’s argument in *Hooked: Art and Attachment* seems basic: namely, humans engage with art because we *are attached* to it. Drawing loosely on Bruno Latour’s actor-network-theory (she labels her approach “ANT-ish”), Felski highlights three kinds of aesthetic experience – attunement, identification, and attachment – in a multifaceted exploration of why and how art (including literary texts) works.

*Hooked* builds on Felski’s widely-read 2015 monograph, *The Limits of Critique*. Together, these works have made her one of the most prominent proponents of what literary and cultural critics are now calling “postcriticism.” In brief, this movement objects to the constraints of conventional academic discourse and defends the value (and the values) of “lay” readers who engage with art not to explain or expose, dissect or analyze it, but simply to experience and enjoy it.

Nevertheless, biblical scholars who are for myriad reasons wary of the critical theories and methods that challenge traditional disciplinary boundaries, or who long to make biblical studies great again, will find no salvation here. Felski is an equal-opportunity iconoclast; she is as eagle-eyed and probing when interrogating forms of faith and fealty as when picking apart hegemonic hermeneutics of suspicion. Felski pushes professional critics to recognize that attachment is a fundamental “condition of any conceivable form of intellectual life” (122). We are simply taught not to acknowledge this: “Scholars are adept at theorizing, historicizing, and politicizing the investments of others – while often remaining coy or evasive about their own” (3).

Felski has hooked her own critics in both positive and negative ways. While some praise *Hooked* as “erudite and compelling” or a “marvelous achievement,” others experience her rhetoric as a personal affront (one reviewer describes the book as “an inventory of abuse” directed at other critics). Yet this mixed reception illustrates Felski’s primary point: we engage with art (including critical scholarship) in affective, often unpredictable and even opposing ways. “Commentary,” Felski writes, “is connection” (122).

This is precisely what makes *Hooked* relevant for the increasingly fractured field of biblical studies. Felski’s invitation to accept and foreground our own attachments might help us to forge affinities and communicate across the rifts.
that currently keep us distanced and detached – from our objects of study and from each other. Beyond the robust intellectual challenges posed in *Hooked*, Felski’s writing is powerful and engaging, at times elegant and emotive. I remain – in a word – hooked.

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*Homo Psyche* makes the startling claim there are erotophobic tendencies within queer theory. The book illustrates how some of the most important queer theorists rely on normative psychological ideas that cannot explain the complexity or diversity of queer desire and queer gender. Psychoanalyst and scholar Gila Ashtor follows the metapsychology of psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche to argue that sexuality – meaning the structure of unconscious drives that generate fantasy and desire – is formed relationally. As the infant relates with their caregiver, they receive and must translate the caregiver’s unconscious messages, binding affect to symbolization to produce their own unconscious. Sexuality is produced in unique relationships with differing outcomes, even under larger structural norms. The relational development of the psyche accounts for the existence of myriad nonnormative desires. Ashtor demonstrates that essential and groundbreaking works of Eve Sedgwick, Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, Judith Butler, and Lauren Berlant are limited in their use of universalizing and erotophobic frameworks (Freud, Lacan, Klein, Althusser). Laplanche’s metapsychology allows for a more erotophilic, dynamic, and power-attentive view of gender and sexuality. Ashtor thus counters the argument advanced in some corners of queer theory that psychoanalysis can only ever imagine a universalized psyche.

Ashtor takes issue with the monadism of queer negativity, but her view of sexuality is not pastoral. Indeed, Laplanche’s theory is predicated on the idea that the infant is overwhelmed, even assaulted, by the adult’s unconscious messages. This means that queer theory must think seriously about the differential between adult and child sexuality and rigorously theorize boundaries rather than eschew them in the name of antinormativity. Likewise, attending to this uneven power dynamic in the origins of the psyche means thinking carefully about what affective transformation can look like.

Beautifully written, this book provides lucid summaries and perspicacious critiques of the giants in queer theory. Readers can expect repetition in the
exposition of Laplanche, with some development along the way – presumably reiterated so that chapters can stand alone. Biblical scholars working in queer and affect theory will be interested in its bold theoretical claims and its conceptualization of the unconscious as a store of questions that generates or reactivates questions in others (186). Others may read it for its consideration of narrative structure, textuality, hermeneutics, or even for what it implies for their own becoming in the world.

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Women as victims of sexual trauma capture the headlines. Less told are the stories of women who subvert regimes of sexual exploitation for their survival and benefit. Jessica Marie Johnson accepts that in patriarchal contexts, heterosexual relationships will disadvantage women. Add enslavement and the lure of economic exploitation, and women are further disadvantaged. Without spending too much time on these givens, Johnson tells the stories of women from the Black Atlantic who used the inevitable exploitative relationship with mostly white enslavers to their advantage, even Johnson acknowledges the negative stereotypes of Black female sexuality that these stories also contain. Sexual relationships as one of the pathways to freedom for Black women in the Atlantic world are tales that are “murky, messy, and contingent,” as Johnson writes. Unafraid to tell these stories, Johnson spends less time on ethical arguments and more time highlighting how women claim bodily autonomy through messy sexual entanglements. Essentially, these are stories of freedom, even though not all the women whose stories Johnson relates are enslaved. Mapping stories of women from Senegambia to Haiti, Cuba, and New Orleans reveals kinship practices that thicken narratives of freedom in order to present an archipelagic palette of Blackness. The multivalence of wickedness is apparent in the book. However, Johnson wants readers to encounter “wickedness as freedom.”

Stories of women in the Hebrew Bible who claim control of their sexuality function as “smash the patriarchy” slogans. From Rachel and Leah negotiating rivalries to ensure male heirs, to Tamar’s trickery, and the cunning of Ruth and Naomi, work on these narratives sits within the limits of women empowered to push the boundaries of heterosexual relationships. Johnson’s work however introduces the layer of racial capitalism to explore biblical stories for the
ways in which women's bodies and their sexuality support or undermine the imperial imagination. Sex as a commodity and women's bodies as assets in imperial economies—as determinants of royal genealogies, imperial histories, and mechanisms of imperial rule—become important issues for consideration. Johnson's narratives thus have the potential to rethink the stories of Esther, Ruth, the Queen of Sheba, and other ethnically othered women caught in the economies of empire.

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In biblical studies, increasing interest and analytical attention has been given to disability, from Paul's thorn in the flesh to the implicit violence of metaphors of blindness (for example). Much of the discourse on disability in the field, however, has operated primarily on the assumption of disability as identity (“the disabled person”), or disability as a set of conditions with universal meanings across time. Sterne's *Diminished Faculties* is instructional in this respect, helpfully summarizing, launching from, and expanding the much more nuanced discourse in cultural studies that theorizes beyond disability and towards notions of debility and impairment. Debility and impairment, as analytical keywords, keep culture and history in play while demonstrating how there simply is no intact body/mind that “becomes” disabled (33).

Sterne, through a lovely, raw, and even funny phenomenology of his own experience of voice after thyroid surgery that affected his vocal cords, asks what kind of politics then emerge out of this new understanding of impairment as a shared condition. Not only does this book offer resources for thinking more carefully about what we consider disability and why we do so in both ancient and contemporary worlds; it also invites the field into a method that has seen almost no attention in biblical studies: critical phenomenology. (See also Cressida Heyes’ *Anaesthetics of Existence: Essays on Experience at the Edge*, Duke University Press, 2020). Read Sterne, if not for this, then for his book’s theorizing of exhaustion and fatigue, a form of impairment that appears more and more viscerally present in our lives by the day.

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Political scientist Glory Liu traces the reception of Adam Smith and his landmark volume, *An Inquiry into the Causes of The Wealth of Nations* from its 1776 publication to the present. Her core argument is that “Smith's reputation as the ‘father of economics’ is an historical invention and that the foundational status of *The Wealth of Nations* is a belated construction” (xv). In supporting this claim, Liu outlines a lengthy reception of the text in relation to specific historical settings such as the American Revolution, Industrialization, the Great Depression, the 1950s threat of European totalitarianism, and the 1970s stagflation. The last two phases were critical in associating Adam Smith with an unfettered free market. The rising ideological concerns against socialism enabled the so-called “Chicago School” economists to brand laissez faire capitalism with Adam Smith. These economists highlighted self-interest as central to *The Wealth of Nations*. Such self-interest in its best form would efficiently replace state interventions. But Adam Smith was far more balanced as a political economist and moral philosopher, and this prioritization of self-interest effectively displaced other Smithian values such as fair wages and moral virtue.

*Adam Smith’s America* has multiple points of relevance to biblical scholars but perhaps the most obvious benefit is for those interested in reception history. Liu’s monograph is a reception history of a canonized text. She articulates a complicated reception in different social settings, revealing the notion that the contents of Adam Smith’s works can be superseded by the actual readers of these texts. I was surprised, then not surprised, at the rise of source criticism in accounting for different perspectives in Adam Smith’s published work. This conundrum, labeled “Das Adam Smith Problem” emerged at the same time Wellhausen was articulating his own compositional schema of the Pentateuch. Furthermore, this complicated reception cannot be isolated into simple categories. Indeed, the reception of Adam Smith necessitates exploration into ideological, political, and social questions of contexts. Biblical scholars who engage in reception history, whether in early intrabiblical exegesis or more modern readings can similarly appreciate the complexities of interpretation. Overall, this book is a helpful illustration that it is not just the text, but the social lens of the reader that shapes interpretations.

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