

○ INTRODUCTION

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In this issue of *The Bible and Critical Theory*, we begin with an article by Em McAvan that explores the notion of sacrifice in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. In 'Economies of Sacrifice in The Merchant of Venice: God, the Gift and Shakespeare', McAvan reads *The Merchant of Venice* in relation to the Kiekegaardian influenced thoughts Derrida developed in the *The Gift of Death*. She traces the religiously mediated economies of debt and sacrifice through the play. Who sacrifices, and to what end, she argues, is a highly contentious and pressing question for both critical theory of religion and the study of Shakespeare.

Leaping into the very current domain of those biblical scholars who regularly author and/or contribute to blogs is James G. Crossley. In his article 'N.T. Wrong and the Bibliobloggers', Crossley builds upon an earlier political analysis of the phenomenon of biblical scholars blogging ('bibliobloggers') by incorporating the pseudonymous biblioblogger, 'N.T. Wrong'. Developing Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model and various ideas concerning surveillance, Crossley claims that it is clear Wrong was (and is) a stark opposite to the consistent trend among bibliobloggers that buys into the language and ideas of US-led power, most notably concerning the 'war on terror' and Orientalism.

David Fiorovanti's 'Language, exception, messianism: The thematics of Agamben on Derrida' revisits Giorgio Agamben's text, *The Time That Remains*, and through a comparative analysis, contrasts the author's reading of St Paul's Romans to relevant Derridean thematics prevalent in the text. Specific themes include language, the law, and the subject. Fiorovanti illustrates how Agamben attempts to revitalise the idea of philosophical anthropology by breaking away from the deconstructive approach.

According to Alfred Knight, in his article titled 'Habermas' Formal Pragmatics and the Speech Act of Stephen', the concept of formal pragmatics exhibits the potential for rationality that is supposed to be implicit in the everyday language practices of societies. It is located in certain idealisations that guide communicative action to the extent that communication is linked to validity. While this reconstructive theory seeks to identify universal presuppositions of everyday communication in *modern* societies, Knight argues that it can be transposed onto an ancient communication (Stephen's speech) as an example of communicative action. Interpreting Stephen's speech according to Habermas' formal pragmatics in the communicative framework infers a conception of purpose and potential to build on this example for other speech acts and communicative processes in the Bible.

In 'Do Israelis Understand the Hebrew Bible?', the prolific and controversial linguist Ghil'ad Zuckermann continues to demonstrate why Israeli should not be understood simply as 'modern Hebrew.' In fact, he claims that the Hebrew Bible should be taught like a foreign language, endorsing Avraham Ahuvia's recently-launched translation of the Old Testament into what Zuckermann calls high-register 'Israeli'. Tanakh RAM fulfills the mission of 'red 'el ha'am' not only in its Hebrew meaning (Go down to the people) but also – more importantly – in its Yiddish meaning ('red' meaning 'speak!', as opposed to its colorful communist sense). Ahuvia's translation is most useful and dignified. Given its high register, however, Zuckermann predicts that the future

promises consequent translations into more colloquial forms of Israeli, a beautifully multi-layered and intricately multi-sourced language, of which to be proud.

Finally, we have twelve book reviews:

1. Deborah W. Rooke (ed), *A Question of Sex? Gender and Difference in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (Roland Boer);
2. Christl M. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Michael Carden);
3. Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Esther Fuchs);
4. Timothy J.M. Ling, *The Judean Poor and the Fourth Gospel*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 136 (Peter Phillips);
5. Philip R. Davies, *Memories of Ancient Israel. An Introduction to Biblical History – Ancient and Modern* (Peter Miscall);
6. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West and Thomas Bohache (eds), *The Queer Bible Commentary* (Stephen D. Moore);
7. Jean-Luc Marion, *The Visible and the Revealed*. Trans. by Christina M. Gschwandtner and others (Eric Repphun);
8. David M. Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions: A Satirical Reading of Daniel 1-6*. Hebrew Bible Monographs, 12 (Peter Miscall);
9. John Riches, *Galatians through the Centuries*. Blackwell Bible Commentaries (V. Henry T. Nguyen)
10. Ela Nutu, *Incarnate Word, Inscribed Flesh: John's Prologue and the Postmodern*. The Bible in the Modern World, 6 (Peter Phillips);
11. Marcella Althaus-Reid & Lisa Isherwood (eds), *Controversies in Contextual Theology* (Gillian Townsley); and
12. David Shepherd (ed), *Images of the Word: Hollywood's Bible and Beyond*. Semeia Studies, 54 (Eric Repphun).

Enjoy!