

Reading List

Matthew Bowman, *The Abduction of Betty and Barney Hill: Alien Encounters, Civil Rights, and the New Age in America*. Yale University Press, 2023.

Before UAP (Unidentified Aerial Phenomena) replaced UFO in the style sheet of the *New York Times*, before the *X-Files*, before *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, there was the case of Betty and Barney Hill. Returning home from a trip to Montreal on September 19, 1961, the Hills encountered a UFO on New Hampshire's Route 3. The Hills were an extraordinary couple in many ways. They had an interracial marriage at a time when many states maintained anti-miscegenation laws (finally ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1967). Barney, a Black man from Philadelphia, and Betty, a white woman from Kansas, were married in 1960. They moved to Portsmouth and joined a Unitarian church, eager to participate in a religious community that valued reason and civil rights.

Matthew Bowman's *The Abduction of Betty and Barney Hill* follows the experience of the Hills in post-WWII America. Their early reports, like others about “flying saucers,” were dismissed by experts and filed away, out of view, in Project Bluebook. (Later, Carl Sagan would openly try to debunk the Hill case in the PBS miniseries, *Cosmos*.) When the Hills sought help in extracting memories of the encounter, they turned to Dr. Benjamin Simon, a psychiatrist. In appointments the UFO encounter was transformed into an alien abduction. Under hypnosis, Barney and Betty relived their time on the spacecraft in screams and tears. (Chapter Nine, “In Simon's Office,” is difficult to read.) Dr. Simon diagnosed a stress-induced fantasy, eventually telling a reporter that “anxiety over the interracial marriage” was to blame. The Hills rejected his theory. They wanted to know what had happened on Route 3. Like some of their peers, they turned away from mainstream experts and toward New Age spirituality and conspiracy theories for answers. All of this belongs to the Hills' story. So too there is tragedy: Barney Hill died suddenly in February 1969 at the age of forty-six.

As a scholar of ancient apocalypses, I recognize Bowman's goal: to expose the webbing between societal change, trauma, and bizarre visions. But this remarkable book also dwells on the conflict between expert criticism and the Hills' persistence of belief. There may be a lesson here for biblical scholars. Consider how we smooth over the jagged edges of our apocalypses, scrape

away the surplus, for the sake of analysis. After viewing the final version of a 1975 television adaptation of the Hills' story, Betty Hill was disappointed: "the original had much more of the ufo in it." What matters is the strangeness. What matters is the UFO.

Christopher Frilingos, Michigan State University

Geneviève Zubrzycki, *Resurrecting the Jew: Nationalism, Philosemitism, and Poland's Jewish Revival*. Princeton University Press, 2022.

Before the Nazi takeover in September 1939, Poland was a major center of Jewish life and culture, and home to over 3 million Jews. The Holocaust erased nearly all of Poland's Jewish population, which today sits at approximately 10,000.

Over the past two decades, however, Poland has seen a resurgence of interest in Jews and Jewish culture. Responsibility for this resurgence lies with philosemitic non-Jewish Poles. It is they who are teaching university courses in Yiddish language and literature, Hebrew, Jewish history, religion, and philosophy. It is they who are playing in Klezmer bands and engaging in large-scale public projects such as memorials, museums, and Jewish cultural festivals.

In *Resurrecting the Jew: Nationalism, Philosemitism, and Poland's Jewish Revival*, Geneviève Zubrzycki discusses the phenomenon of philosemitism, its origins, its roles in contemporary Polish society, and some of its more unusual manifestations. One example of the latter is the "I Miss You, Jew" project begun in 2009 when the activist Rafal Betlejewski began painting this slogan in locations that had been significant to the pre-Holocaust Polish Jewish population.

For someone like myself, a child of Polish Jews who came to Canada after the Holocaust, this book was spellbinding. It is relevant also to our field, in at least two ways. The first has to do with Polish Catholicism. The book's title vividly describes the process it traces: the resurrection of Poland's Jews – or, to be more precise – the revival of the memory of Poland's Jews – from the ashes of the Holocaust. It also, however, evokes the resurrection of Jesus, and in doing so highlights one of the book's main arguments: that the revival of interest in, and even a romantic nostalgia for, Jewish life in Poland emerges, at least in part, from a desire to challenge the dominant role of the Polish Catholic church. Catholicism is seen as a source of antisemitism, which, in turn, is grounded in the pre-Vatican II teaching of contempt, which saw Jews as eternally responsible for the death of Jesus (cf. Matthew 27:25).

Second, the book addresses the complex interrelationships between ethnicity and national identity. Though it is about contemporary Poland, the book raises questions that are very much at the center of the biblical studies field right now: how do we understand the complex relationship between

identity and ethnicity? And how do the processes by which we negotiate and redraw our own identities affect how we interpret ancient cultures, texts, and peoples?

Adele Reinhartz, University of Ottawa

Oliver Davis and Tim Dean, *Hatred of Sex*. Nebraska University Press, 2022.

"There is a big secret about sex: most people don't like it." Leo Bersani's witty remark, placed at the outset of his programmatic *Is the Rectum a Grave?* inspires Tim Dean and Oliver Davis to offer a searing critique of queer theory's historical deviation from a relatively simple psychoanalytic notion: sex has a destructive synergy; it contains an irreducible component, a core at odds with identity formations and ego configurations. This thesis, hardly new, offers a springboard for a searing critique of psychoanalysis' entanglements with the forces of neoliberal capitalism. One of the book's most exciting features lies in a sustained comparative study between the hatred of sex and the hatred of democracy. In the wake of Jean Ranciere's *Hatred of Democracy*, Dean and Davis suggest that very much like disorder is constitutive to democracy—Trump's "basket of deplorables" is not a bug but essential to the political ethos—inappropriateness is constitutive of sex.

Let me mention a couple of insights with enduring value for biblical interpretation. At the disciplinary level, Dean and Davis's analytical decoupling of sex from sexuality, gender, and any other identitarian feature (nationality, race, and their respective intersectional accounts) reminds biblical scholars, especially those invested in gender and sexuality, that queer hermeneutics is an unrealized project. Sex, as this queer presentation valiantly argues, is essentially anti-identarian, and thus, identitarian accounts of biblical texts are consequently anti-queer. This insight is a hard pill to swallow for many of us invested in contextual hermeneutics but one coated with fruitful exegetical promise. At the textual level, on this front, *Hatred of Sex* promises a reconsideration of Paul's ethics of sex. There has been a considerable amount of biblical scholarship, especially in liberal and progressive circles, trying to redeem Paul's vision of sex through the historicist gap—as the story goes, ancient notions of sexuality are far too removed from contemporary taxonomies. *Hatred of Sex* reminds us that Paul's negativity around sex sits closer to us than we were prepared to acknowledge.

Luis Menéndez-Antuña, Boston University

Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories*. Duke University Press, 2021.

Insurgent scholars occupy uncomfortable spaces in academia. The decision to remain in academia brings with it other decisions regarding difference

to traditional academic practices and methodologies. In *Dear Science and Other Stories*, Katherine McKittrick describes what remaining means for the insurgent Black scholar. The careful reader should immediately recognize how McKittrick subverts several verities of academic writing. Footnotes are not simply the space to display voluminous knowledge and reading that would otherwise be a distraction in the main text. Instead, particularly in the chapter on citational practices, McKittrick presents a counter discourse to normative citational practices. Her writing style resists the verbose expressions of dense academic prose. She writes in fragments when necessary. She uses texts in graphic ways. Poetry overtakes prose. Chapter numbers don't exist. The personal becomes scholarly. And Black consciousness marks a suitable foundation for knowledge rather than positivist data. To even believe the slogan that "Black lives matter" means that scholarship by and for Black folk would be more than darker shades of what currently passes for scholarship. McKittrick's insistence on interdisciplinarity as a defining feature of Black scholarship serves as the foundation for her to both critique academia and suggest pathways for meaningful Black scholarship.

Though not apparent, this is a geography textbook. McKittrick's argument takes on the science of geography and therefore aligns with similar ongoing discussions related to the divide between art and science in other fields in the humanities. By leaning in with vibrant discussions of possibilities around "a black sense of place" and Sylvia Wynter's groundbreaking philosophical thought, among many other sources, she shows how to ethically engage the wealth of Black knowledges both written and innate. In these conversations McKittrick wants more than simply inclusion. She imagines transformation: "sharing ideas about how to struggle against oppression."

Methodological debates in Biblical Studies escalated in formal ways with the incursion of the influence of the Frankfurt School. However, pockets of resistance and the call for greater emancipatory work existed through different forms of refusal. The accommodation of what has come to be seen as "contextual hermeneutics" allow for a relaxation of methodological strictures in biblical interpretation. At best, contextual methodologies exist in communal spaces that acknowledge diversity as a desirable goal. *Dear Science* raises what a frontal engagement of methodologies in Biblical Studies will yield when "black livingness" serves as a goal alongside of the task to "reinvent the terms and stakes of knowledge."

Steed Davidson, Society of Biblical Literature

Renee K. Harrison, *Black Hands, White House: Slave Labor and the Making of America*. Fortress Press, 2021.

In biblical and early Christian studies, we have begun to experience what might be characterized as a “slavery turn” initiated in large part by Jennifer Glancy’s *Slavery in Early Christianity*: namely, a recognition of the ubiquity and influence of systems of enslavement and enslaved people upon the textual production, narratives, and interpretation. While much of the very recent focus has fallen upon how enslaved people physically produced texts or are treated within ancient Mediterranean literature (e.g., Candida Moss’s *God’s Ghostwriters*; Jeremiah Coogan et al.’s *Writing, Enslavement, and Power in the Roman Mediterranean*), our field might also benefit from more time spent considering how enslaved people contributed to the built environment of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, such as has recently been done in Sandra Joshel and Lauren Hackworth Petersen’s *The Material Life of Roman Slaves*. Harrison’s *Black Hands, White House* offers scholars of antiquity an opportunity to interrogate our own presuppositions about whose labor created the world(s) that we study and within which biblical and early Christian literature was produced. As a professor at Howard University, Harrison wrestles in this book with the lack of national recognition of the coerced physical and intellectual labor that enslaved Africans and those of African descent put into the construction of the United States – particularly in Washington D.C., a capital city that has failed to erect a stand-alone monument that publicly recognizes the economic role of slavery (6–8).

Through case studies on specific sites such as Monticello, Mount Vernon, the White House, and the US Capitol, Harrison demonstrates how Black people contributed physically and economically to the built environment of the early United States, as well as argues that there is a deep need for a national memorial in D.C. for enslaved Africans who quite literally built the country in which they were enslaved. By engaging with *Black Hands, White House*, biblical and early Christian scholars might more robustly explore the role of enslaved people in the material and built environment of what is often deemed the cultural and historical “background” of our texts: the roles of *dēmosioi* and *servi publici* in Greek and Roman construction projects, as well as the house churches and basilicas maintained by enslaved labor. Harrison’s work might urge us to explore in more depth how slavery not only made the writing of the New Testament and much early Christian literature possible, but also served as an underexplored material and economic foundation for early Christian gatherings and community-building.

Chance Bonar, Harvard University