

Some Thoughts on Defining Reception History and the Future of Biblical Studies*

The task of the biblical scholar is to read a given interpretation with a degree of empathy, a certain amount of humility, and, if appropriate, with a willingness to interact critically and/or polemically with what they find. We should accept that the biblical scholar offering an interpretation of how, say, Paul and his audience understood Romans in their context is as enmeshed as the biblical scholar attempting to account for, say, Johnny Cash's interpretation of the Bible, or the story of Jephthah's daughter's reception by the AmaNazaretha in South Africa.

See Also: [*Reception History and Biblical Studies*](#) (Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015).

By William John Lyons

University of Bristol

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1. Biblical studies and reception history

Against a backdrop of Western academia—and the humanities in particular—being threatened with loss of posts, dropping of programmes, and departmental closures, it has not been difficult in recent years to find people wondering aloud about the long-term viability of biblical studies as it has been traditionally configured.¹ At the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in San Francisco in 2012, for example, I attended a session titled ‘What Is the Future of Biblical Studies in Academia? Questions, Challenges, Visions’. To my recollection, of the six panellists (Carol Newsom, Ronald Hendel, Dale Martin, Jacques Berlinerblau, Elizabeth Castelli, Bart Ehrman), all but one openly agreed that reception history would be a significant component of a future biblical studies set within the academy. This was a far cry from the days of not so long ago when academic friends were being told that reception history was biblical studies “on holiday” or “a joke” and that they should only write a Blackwells commentary if they “wanted their work to remain unread”! To be sure, there were significant differences between the six panellists that day as to what this development would entail for the discipline. Memorably, in response to a question about alterations in pedagogical practice, Hendel replied that graduate students should perhaps do only one year of Akkadian rather than three! His uninspiring description of his previous encounter with reception history in his work on Genesis did little to demonstrate the potential worth of reception history

for biblical studies as a discipline, however. Ironically, at the same time as the storm clouds have been gathering, there has also been a deepening interest in the Bible and its reception in other areas of academia interested in the influence of biblical texts.² Unlike many other subjects today then, biblical studies has a genuine opportunity for growth and it is that topic that I wish to address. So, what is reception history and how might its presence impact on the disciplinary identity that biblical scholars currently inhabit?

2. Redefining biblical studies as reception history

Today biblical scholarship inhabits a situation in which the study of biblical texts can no longer be defined in terms of a distinction between original, first-order meanings, the study of which is the domain of biblical scholars with a specified set of technical skills, and subsequent, second-order ones, which may be used by others (e.g. theologians, historians, etc.), but which remain subject to the judgements of the former group because of some putative link between the meanings involved.³ It is my contention that a more broadly-based and hermeneutically coherent definition of the discipline of biblical studies is required, one that will be better able to thrive in the hostile future ahead.⁴ Indeed I might even suggest that without such a new discipline there is a danger that a substantive split might eventually arise within the scholarly community which currently puts the Bible at the centre of its *raison d'être*. That possibility will be considered further at the close.

In contrast to the dualistic 'traditional' discipline described above, biblical studies should in my view be re-defined as a pragmatic and contingent activity in which historically-located investigators—each acknowledged to have their own ideological make-up and background—attempt to understand empathetically the dynamics of a specific interaction (or series of interactions) between three elements:⁵

- A biblical (or closely-related) text and/or such a text echoed in some other medium or product;⁶
- A complex, irreducible context; and
- A potentially diverse audience response.

Elsewhere I have argued that this re-imagining of biblical scholarship and its collected methodologies can largely be subsumed under the heading of 'reception history',⁷ a form of critical enquiry that, I believe, is best defined by the combination of two discrete but related features:

- The shape and content of its subject-matter; and
- The inherent limitations of its evidential base.

3. Feature no. 1: The ‘subject-matter’ of reception history

The first feature of reception history is its explicit adoption of a certain conception of its subject-matter—the virtually infinite series of ‘events’ generated by the historical journeys of the biblical (or closely-related) texts and/or such texts echoed in some other medium or product down through the centuries—as the data under investigation. We do not need to be too dogmatic about what constitutes a ‘biblical (or closely-related) text’. At different times and in different places, these would have had significantly different shapes, with the *Textus Receptus*, the Latin *Vulgate*, the King James version, and the Westcott-Hort critical text all being significantly different versions of an effective New Testament. When we allow for the breaking up of such texts into smaller textual units during their hermeneutical appropriation in diverse faith communities (with, e.g., the canonical criticism of James A. Sanders)⁸ or in their use in a medieval world in which allegory was seen as a normative mode of biblical exegesis perhaps (as, e.g., Heikki Räiäsänen has outlined),⁹ that diversity increases. The addition of other texts considered by recipients to be ‘biblical’ at some point further enriches the mix. Finally, with the multiple echoes of such texts found in other mediums or products and, it should added, with a firm refusal to regard these as being in principle secondary by those of us choosing to work in this version of the discipline, there exists a large, but coherent pot from which to select ‘biblical (or closely-related) texts and/or such texts echoed in some other medium or product’ for study. In hermeneutical terms, these texts only come into being as they are read and hence what they are held to say is inextricably linked to the historical contexts in which they are found at work. What is clear is that this conception of the subject-matter—the events generated by these texts down through history—requires us to accept that the redefinition being suggested here cannot be reduced to the development of a discrete methodology—another “tool for the box”!—for tackling the Bible as it has been envisaged by biblical studies traditionally. It is rather a broad approach to a new and complex subject which will require diverse methodologies of its own.

This material has usually been hidden from view in recent academic work. The failure of biblical studies to investigate adequately the afterlives of biblical texts and the existence of disciplinary-specific pedagogies which mean that scholars working in History, English, History of Art, etc., often either lack the skills necessary for studying the impact of biblical texts or are guided by presumptions which side-line the role of the biblical texts in the context under examination, both conspire to mean that just raising relevant material to scholarly consciousness is a necessary task.¹⁰ Ultimately, however, it is not enough for us to show and tell examples of these texts in different times and locations. Scholars need to analyse critically their use, influence, and impact in these events and in

subsequent developments arising from them. Since our knowledge of the context under examination is always limited and since both the text and/or its echo and the audience response/responses offered to it are at best only partially available to us, we should admit that the explanations that we offer as we struggle to grasp the dynamics of a given interpretive event are always going to be offered as exercises in plausibility.

4. Feature no. 2: The inherent limitations of reception history

The second feature of reception history is its formal recognition of the limitations given to it as a form of enquiry because of the fact that the relevant evidence has survived with various degrees of success within the historical record. This accidental aspect to the availability of evidence means that it is possible to state unequivocally now there can be no single methodology that will work for all interpretive events and thus no standard conclusions available for all texts in all times and all places. Reception-historical methodologies, such as they exist today, do not even come close to being the diverse range of methodologies that can and should be used in the critical study of the reception of biblical texts. Such tools are still in their infancy, a small fraction of future possible methodologies, each of which may, in its different way, prove to be ground-breaking.

Sometimes we may be able to deploy methodologies which allow us to convincingly explain an interpretation that we find/stumble across. At other times, however, we may only be able to wonder at what we find and then perhaps choose, if we wish, to acknowledge an interpretation's existence in order to ensure its remembrance. If we try to trace the development of a particular biblical text, trope, theme, or character throughout its reception history, we might find it possible to do so in intricate detail (as, e.g., with Ian Boxall's study of Patmos)¹¹ or only by making significant leaps across substantial gaps of time and place (as, e.g., in the present author's own study of Joseph of Arimathea).¹² Equally, we might find it to be an impossible task.

The tensions created by the interaction of our limited evidence with the events that form our subject-matter not only demand creative ways of tackling specific questions, they also require us to work out what questions can be asked in the first place. Since it is not possible to ask identical questions of each biblical text, or of each occasion of its use, influence, or impact, asking what questions can be usefully asked is perhaps the greatest challenge we face. The specific information that enables us to ask a question of a certain text, a certain context, and a certain audience, and feel confident of having produced a satisfactory answer will simply be unavailable elsewhere. Methodologies which work exceptionally well in one situation will fail abjectly in others. While we may be able to develop common questions that apply in numerous situations, it is the

happenstance nature of the critical work produced within reception history that will mark the future development of that approach and of a discipline of biblical studies dominated by it and will also likely be the source of our greatest potential contributions to theoretical and methodological discussions taking place in other disciplines.¹³

5. The hermeneutics of reception history

Some will no doubt see this description as entailing a hermeneutical situation in which all interpretive scenarios are of equal value, a situation in which terms like ‘misunderstanding’ no longer have any real currency. This is mistaken, however. While we might be able to entertain the idea of relativity implied in this description of our situation, our social and historical located-ness means that we can never truly inhabit that idea. The mores of our own native discourses will predispose us to expressing preferences. Some readings produced by readers/audiences will be highly amenable to our sensibilities (they will be ‘right’, ‘accurate’, ‘perceptive’, ‘profound’!), others will not be (these are ‘incorrect’, ‘misconceived’, ‘plain wrong’, ‘absurd’!), and most will probably be somewhere in-between (they are ‘noteworthy’, ‘reasonable’, ‘worthy of consideration’, or perhaps just ‘dull’). Given the West’s enduring penchant for historicity, these valuations will often elide into notions of fidelity to ‘what really happened’, and interpreters might then use the concept of historicity to make decisions about the ordering of a set of interpretations. Readers from other contexts, those traditionally regarded as minority forms of criticism by a guild dominated by the elite inhabitants of former colonial powers, will perhaps be guided by rather different criteria as they order their interpretive categories; in an ideal world, their choices would also helpfully challenge the West’s continued conceptual dominance of what will remain a narrow concern even in a revised biblical studies.

Crucially, however, whatever decisions are made will not mean that any of the readings involved are less worthy of critical investigation. Interpretations that are rightly regarded as low in value in historical terms may become important readings when seen from a reception-historical perspective interested in how a biblical character has been used, say, politically in a specific historical context. The task of the biblical scholar is to read a given interpretation with a degree of empathy, a certain amount of humility, and, if appropriate, with a willingness to interact critically and/or polemically with what they find. We should accept that the biblical scholar offering an interpretation of how, say, Paul and his audience understood Romans in their context¹⁴ is as enmeshed as the biblical scholar attempting to account for, say, Johnny Cash’s interpretation of the Bible,¹⁵ or the story of Jephthah’s daughter’s reception by the AmaNazaretha in South Africa.¹⁶

6. Issues to address

In order to make the most of its opportunity to grow, biblical scholarship needs to address a few important areas:

First, it should be recognised that the question of whether or not the audience under investigation is the original one is both theoretically and methodologically irrelevant. As Brennan Breed has recently pointed out, it is almost certainly the case that “the biblical text is in some sense ‘reception all the way down’”, with “no clear starting point” for many of the texts under discussion here.¹⁷ Since even the most pristine ‘original meaning’ is susceptible to the challenge that meaning only arises in interaction with a contextualised audience, there really is no escape from biblical studies in a reception-history mode.¹⁸

Second, the rejection of the distinction between ‘original’ and ‘reception’ means that we should openly acknowledge, without prejudice, that what we are all working on is reception history in some form. It should be the norm for biblical scholars to be able to refer to their work on, say, the appropriation of Paul’s epistle to the Romans by Giorgio Agamben and Alain Badiou¹⁹ without such work being considered a different, and all too often also lesser, task.

Third, there needs to be more ‘entry-level’ and reflective texts to make it easier for those who are attracted to the idea of studying the reception history of the Bible, but who currently shy away from it, not knowing where to start.²⁰ Progress on developing critical outlets for research in this area has been encouraging in recent years. With the advent of journals such as *Relegere: Studies in Religion and Reception*, *Biblical Reception*, and the *Journal of the Bible and Its Reception*, with new book series like T&T Clark International’s *Scriptural Traces: Critical Perspectives on the Reception and Influence of the Bible*, and De Gruyter’s *Studies of the Bible and Its Reception* (SBR), and with edited volumes like John Sawyer’s *Blackwell’s Companion to the Bible and Culture* (2006), Michael Lieb, Emma Mason, and Jonathan Robert’s *Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (2010), and De Gruyter’s monumental thirty-volume *Encyclopaedia of the Bible and Its Reception* (EBR; 2009-), and with numerous exemplary single volumes now being published in reception history every year, a strong impetus for change is definitely building.

Fourth, the current pedagogical model of biblical studies needs reassessment. It is true that the material and questions that scholars working in reception are forced to consider often lie in areas where the expertise required is not part of the biblical scholar’s traditional training: art, politics, the media, popular culture, philosophy, economics, cultural studies, digital humanities, etc.²¹ Since expertise in multiple fields, sub-disciplines and disciplines is beyond the capacity of most individuals to acquire, other options are required. This may

include replacing methods currently studied as part of the biblical scholar's training (e.g. diverse language skills, archaeology, ancient history) with other interdisciplinary skills, and introducing skills related to cross-disciplinary collaborative 'team' working.

Fifth, a necessary course of action for the new discipline in future will be to study the history and development of 'reception history' itself. This will doubtless involve the many attempts to classify and clarify what the subject is and already we have some recent works which may help us on the way with this critical task.²² However, I wish to be very clear that such a task is secondary to the urgent task of developing the discipline as described in the early sections of this article. To my mind, reception history as a title is important because of its ubiquity, not because of its long term suitability or its explanatory power.²³

Finally, there is a need to be realistic about the unwillingness of many in the current SBL guild to embrace the vision of biblical scholarship envisaged here. Many will leave for retirement, with their reluctance to change sometimes meaning that they effectively take their post and its future possibilities with them.²⁴ On the plus side, we can hope to find more biblical scholars who will be willing to leave their academic comfort zones behind them, even if for only a while. It is these wanderers who might eventually help us to embrace expansion, to value diversity, and to swiften change within biblical scholarship. Working with those already committed to reception history, they are, I suggest, the best hope that biblical studies has for a bright future within the wider study of the Humanities.

7. Who are to be the exponents of a reception-historical biblical studies?

For the last five years, I have tended to think of those venturing out into other disciplines as 'dilettantes', as the relatively unskilled sojourning in a series of strange lands. On reflection, however, I think that I would like to nuance my use of that word.²⁵ It can certainly be a helpful rhetorical device to counter the constant refrain from biblical scholars about their lack of specialist training and/or subject familiarity and their ensuing refusal to even entertain the idea of working outside their area. It is encouraging for them to find that similarly 'untrained' others have produced worthwhile work after crossing disciplinary boundaries; biblical scholars can become good enough to get the job done.²⁶

The idea of dilettancy can be taken too far, however. As Brennan Breed has argued, there are aspects of the reception history of the Bible that are unlikely to ever be undertaken by scholars in other disciplines. His description of the "nomadologist" as the biblical scholar who studies "the text wherever it goes, from the ancient Near East to the present day, as it moves through a myriad of contexts, both at home everywhere and ultimately at home nowhere, with this

question always in mind: What can these texts do?”, is a helpful one.²⁷ In Jeremy Schippers’ response to Breed, however, the idea of the nomadologist is questioned. If their ancient setting is eventually unimportant in the afterlives of biblical texts (a point with which I agree), and if someone from another discipline is best suited to studying the text in their area (Schipper, and Breed in response, both name excellent examples of such, as could I), then surely biblical scholars should be asking who they want to work with, rather than where they want to go on their own.²⁸ (It might be added that the hundreds of scholars from other disciplines who are currently working on De Gruyter’s *EBR* are a very substantial resource if we decide to develop our work collaboratively.) Breed acknowledges Schipper’s point, but suggests that extravagant boundary-crossing is not something that we are going to find scholars working in other areas attempting: “No one working in medieval studies or Islamic studies or Brazilian studies will decide to produce synthetic, broad histories of biblical texts that span many different historical contexts, religions, and cultural mediums reaching from the ancient world to the modern.”²⁹

This helpful discussion warrants an uncharitable footnote, however. It is fine to offer the likes of Robert Alter, Mary Douglas, Hans Frei, and Camilla Adang as excellent exponents of the reception history of the Bible; most of us could offer other names, and a perusal of the front-pages of *EBR* would throw up many more. But it would be a mistake to think that such capable scholars are the norm in other disciplines. My experience in fields as diverse as English and Politics, Geography and History of Art is that all too often that the scholars involved do not have a good understanding of the biblical texts under examination. *Pace* Schipper, I would also suggest that biblical scholars possess more skills than just those relevant to ancient settings which quickly lose their efficacy. Instead, they are deeply familiar with this sacred literature and, at best, have considerable experience of its impact in numerous forms and contexts. This is the expertise that they bring to the party, even when not engaged in the exclusive kind of chronological tracing described by Breed.

There is a point beyond which their expertise may become moot, however. Two recent essays by Ibrahim Abraham on the Bible’s reception in popular music and in advertising from the perspective of the social sciences actively push biblical scholars to adopt the investigative methods of that discipline, to look empirically at the consumption of Bible-laden products rather than at their production.³⁰ This kind of analysis may eventually leave the biblical scholar behind as the biblical texts effectively disappear under the weight of a medium- or context-induced indifference to their contents, origins, purposes, or even existence;³¹ if so, our new discipline of biblical studies will have found its boundary.

8. Conclusion

What if the division between traditional biblical scholars and the biblical studies envisaged here becomes deeply entrenched, leading to the disintegration of the scholarly guild—defined, say, by attendance at the SBL Annual meeting—which currently works together, albeit uneasily, on the Bible? What if those working in reception history find themselves effectively cut adrift from their roots in the traditional version of (a shrinking!) biblical studies?

It would be at such a point that strong networks between biblical scholars working on reception history and developing connections with sympathetic scholars in other disciplines—e.g., the *EBR* scholars?—would be needed to enable the creation of biblical studies as an independent interdisciplinary entity, the embedded nature of which would draw its strength almost wholly from the widespread cultural impact of its subject-matter. It would need to be flexible and adaptable and its proponents may find themselves employed in departments well beyond the traditional THRS/BibStuds/Divinity groupings. This non-disciplinary specific nature would both be its strength and its weakness. In the case of the latter, this would be especially so in terms of employment opportunities for researchers working in this area. Without a strong subject base in the humanities, it would find itself existing outside the regular funding streams of the institutions in which it would continue to dwell. On the other hand, it would also be encouraged (forced?) to make itself as indispensable as possible to colleagues in the many disciplines in which it found itself working. Would it sink or swim? I am not keen to find out. I hope that biblical studies will realise its peril and change. If it does not, however, the subject-matter of a biblical studies in a reception history mode is great in scope and importance and fully deserves its own scholarship. I will aim to contribute to that project whichever way things eventually go.

* I am grateful to Emma England, my recent co-worker on the introduction to an edited volume touching on the relationship between biblical studies and reception history (details below); our discussions helped frame many of the thoughts reproduced here. Thanks are also offered to Brennan Breed, James Crossley, Jonathan Downing, Deane Galbraith, Chris Meredith, Lloyd Pietersen, and Chris Rowland, for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

¹ E.g., Roland Boer, *Rescuing the Bible* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Hector Avalos, *The End of Biblical Studies* (Amhurst: Prometheus Books, 2007); Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011); and William John Lyons, 'Hope for a Troubled Discipline? Contributions to New Testament Studies from Reception History', *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 (2010), 207-220.

² E.g., Piero Boitani, *The Bible and its Rewritings* (Oxford: OUP, 1999); Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); and Mieke Bal, *Loving Yusuf: Conceptual Travels from Present to Past* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008).

³ I have in mind here the kind of argument put forward by John Barton in his *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

⁴ This is not to say that such specialists will not be needed. Losing their posts will certainly not lead to their replacement with reception history posts automatically. To ensure that biblical studies continues to exist at something like its present size, the conversion of such scholars towards a new orientation would be the ideal.

⁵ Reading empathetically means that the scholar should make every effort to be fair to the example that they are studying. It is all too easy for modern scholars to create caricatures and destroy them. Such examples will not advance the cause of a discipline based on reception history, however.

⁶ My thanks to Deane Galbraith for the suggestion of ‘product’ as a suitable term here.

⁷ ‘Hope for a Troubled Discipline?’. The exception to this equation of current biblical studies with reception history is what I have become accustomed to calling ‘exposition’. From a wide variety of perspectives people offer explanatory accounts of the biblical texts without any consideration of the hermeneutical situation in which their work is being done. Whatever one makes of the validity of this kind of usage, it seems to me not to form part of a critical discipline under the heading of biblical studies.

⁸ James A. Sanders, ‘Canonical Hermeneutics: True and False Prophecy’, in his *From Sacred Story to Sacred text* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 87-105.

⁹ Heikki Räisänen, *Challenges to Biblical Interpretation: Collected Essays 1991-2001* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 263-82 (270).

¹⁰ I am grateful to Jonathan Downing for stressing this point.

¹¹ Ian Boxall, *Patmos in the Reception History of the Apocalypse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹² William John Lyons, *Joseph of Arimathea: A Study in Reception History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹³ My thanks to Jonathan Downing for raising the prospect of theory once again being a contribution from biblical studies to the wider humanities.

¹⁴ My favourite description of this is when A.J.M Wedderburn likens interpreting Romans to over-hearing a telephone conversation, with the interpreter having “to guess...all that is being said or done at the other end of the line” (*The Reasons for Romans* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988], 5).

¹⁵ E.g., Jay Twomey, ‘The Biblical Man in Black: Johnny Cash’s Pauline Exegesis,’ *Biblical Interpretation* 19 (2011), 223-252.

¹⁶ Gerald O. West, ‘Layers of reception of Jephthah’s daughter (Judges 11) among the AmNazaretha’, in Emma England and William John Lyons (eds), *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: T&T Clark International, 2015), 185-198.

¹⁷ Brennan W. Breed, ‘Nomadology of the Bible’, *Biblical Reception* 1 (2012), 299-320 (304); see also his *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014). and his ‘What can a text do? Reception history as ethology of the biblical text’, in England and Lyons (eds), *Reception History and Biblical Studies*, 95-109.

¹⁸ E.g., Peter Oakes. *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul’s Letter at Ground Level* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009). Whatever one thinks about Oakes’s methodology, his basic move of invoking a specified audience with their discrete contextualised responses is going to be virtually impossible to avoid in future.

¹⁹ E.g., Ward Blanton, and Hent de Vries (eds), *Paul and the Philosophers* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

²⁰ E.g., Ian Boxall, ‘Reception History of the Bible’, *The New Cambridge History of the Bible: Vol. 4, From 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 172-183; Brennan Breed, *Nomadic Text: A Theory of Biblical Reception History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014); James Crossley, *Reading the New Testament: Contemporary Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2010), 115-64; Emma England and William John Lyons (eds), *Reception History and Biblical Studies: Theory and Practice* (London: T&T Clark International, 2015); and Jonathan Roberts, ‘Introduction’, in Michael Lieb, et al, *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-8.

²¹ I suggest that an excellent example of the benefits of crossing such boundaries is Emma England’s essay reflecting on her PhD work at the University of Amsterdam, ‘Digital Humanities and Reception History; or the Joys and Horrors of Databases’, in England and Lyons (eds), *Reception History and Biblical Studies*, 169-84. Despite her playful essay title, her thesis involving the study—both quantifiably and qualitatively—of two

hundred and sixty-three retellings of the Noah story in childrens Bibles from 1837-2006 and held by the British Library undertakes an assessment of the reception history of Genesis 6-9 in that genre that is far beyond the typical consideration of a single example or the anecdotal ‘whole’ which was previously thought to be the norm in reception history. Soon to be published in T&T Clark International’s Scriptural Traces series, this utilisation of Digital Humanities will provide an extraordinary powerful exemplar for those who wish to do similar work.

²² E.g., Timothy Beal, ‘Reception History and Beyond: Toward the Cultural History of Scriptures’, *Biblical Interpretation* 19 (2011), 357-72; Nancy Klancher, ‘A Genealogy for Reception History’, *Biblical Interpretation* 21 (2013), 99-129; Robert Evans, *Reception History, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation: Gadamer and Jaus in Current Practice* (London: T&T Clark International, 2014); Emma England and William John Lyons (eds), *Reception History and Biblical Studies*; and David Paul Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008).

²³ England and Lyons, ‘Explorations in Reception History’, in Lyons and England, *Reception History and Biblical Studies*, 1-13 (4, fn. 3).

²⁴ In Jon Morgan’s ‘Visions, Gatekeepers, and Receptionists: Reflections on the shape of Biblical Studies and the Role of Reception History (in England and Lyons [eds], *Reception History and Biblical Studies*, 61-76), he also argues that persuading traditional scholars to broaden their horizons is an existentially important task for the discipline (74-75). The use of the term “gatekeepers” in his chapter title, however, points towards the possibility that the gates might remain firmly closed. Morgan notes that the sense he gets from reading those traditional critics with whom he is interacting is that “as they pause from gazing proudly down the long and noble history of biblical studies and swivel around, they see a similarly long and glorious future rolling out ahead” (74). Until they relinquish this notion, very little will change in their areas of influence, and the risk of disciplinary loss will remain high.

²⁵ I am grateful to James Crossley for his characteristically brutal assessments, which have encouraged me to own up to my own internalised reactions.

²⁶ My thanks to Brennan Breed for his upbeat appraisals of our needs and capabilities.

²⁷ Brennan Breed, ‘What Can Texts Do?: A Proposal for Biblical Studies’ (<http://www.atthispoint.net/articles/what-can-texts-do-a-proposal-for-biblical-studies/262/>, accessed on 10th June 2015).

²⁸ Jeremy Schipper, ‘Do Biblical Scholars Make Ideal Nomadologists?’ (<http://www.atthispoint.net/professional-responses/do-biblical-scholars-make-ideal-nomadologists/263/>, accessed on 10th June 2015).

²⁹ Brennan Breed, ‘The Many-Sided Nature of the Text’ (<http://www.atthispoint.net/authors-response/the-many-sided-nature-of-the-text/266/>, accessed on 10th June 2015).

³⁰ Ibrahim Abraham, High, Low and In-between: Reception History and the Sociology of Religion and popular Music’, in England and Lyons (eds), *Reception History and Biblical Studies*, 241-253; and his ‘Would you Adam and Eve it? Social Scientific Contributions to the Study of the Reception of Scripture in Consumer Society’ (<http://novaajs.newcastle.edu.au/ojsbct/index.php/bct/article/view/602>, accessed on 10th June 2015). A response to Abraham’s ‘High, Low and In-between’ chapter has been formulated by James Crossley under the title, ‘On Reception History, Audiences and Disciplinary Assumptions: A Response to Ibrahim Abraham’, and will appear in *Relegere: Religion and Reception*.

³¹ I am grateful to Deane Galbraith for this point.