

Introduction: Making Sense of Ourselves

What follows is a re-examination of the centrality of the designation “Christian” in the doing of what we call early Christian history, and a set of proposals for how to understand New Testament and affiliated literature without it. The story of Christian identity is usually told as one of a private and provisional identity that is shaped and made public in confrontation with empire, or of a movement that finds its legs (and maybe loses its soul) in the larger Greco-Roman culture, or a new constituency that must reckon with its multiplying size and differences. In contrast, this book contends that the texts under discussion, which scholarship has largely assumed are fully ensconced in a Christian construction of belonging or identity, are not particularly invested in or reflective of any kind of distinct Christian self-understanding or sociality.

Re-reading a cluster of texts from the late first and early second centuries (the letters of Ignatius, 1 Peter, the Acts of the Apostles, the Secret Revelation of John, the Letter to the Hebrews, the Gospel of John, and the Gospel of Truth) through affect and diaspora theoretical lenses, I suggest that rather than negotiating or generating a distinctly Christian self-understanding, belief system, or set of practices, these texts are thick with the dynamics of national haunting and ongoing and transgenerational trauma; they mark the strange

and unpredictable turns of social life.¹ These re-readings of ancient texts come, however, in the context of a set of proposals about the mutual involvements and unexpected collusions between ancient texts and contemporary readers, and, more broadly, the ways our historical narrations speak our collective emotional lives. What does

1. I present these ancient texts as roughly contemporaneous. Although I do not propose a particular decade or locale for any of the texts under discussion, scholarship before me warrants placing these texts in some basic temporal proximity to one another (i.e., after the Roman-Jewish war, before the mid-second century). I use the close-enough temporal relationship of these texts, supported by what I find to be strong thematic, imagistic, and gestural similarities between them, to propose these texts as significant moments of diasporic responsiveness, and to suggest connective tissue between them that is not some kind of Christian phenomenon, identity, or theology. The precursors, inspirations, and list of enabling models for this project are many. First among them is Karen King's deconstruction of the category of "Gnosticism," in which she finds Gnosticism to be a modern fascination with no apparent historical referents, as well as her efforts at re-writing a history of Christianity with canonical and non-canonical materials side by side. Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). The particular publications by King that have made a significant impact on this project include: "Christianity Without Canon," lecture given at the Jesus Seminar (New Orleans, La., November, 1996); *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2003); and "Which Early Christianity?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 66-84. Closely related to King's work is the work of Daniel Boyarin and Virginia Burrus with their respective creativities in historical readings of early Christian literature, and Judith Lieu who catalyzed widespread interest in the term "Christian identity"—interest that perhaps contradicted her original and provisional uses of it. While the respective work of Boyarin, Lieu, and Burrus is rather extensive and covers a range of ancient texts, themes, and subject matter, in this project I am especially interested in and influenced by the dimensions of their work that deal with heresiology, early Christian identity production, self-understanding, and subjectivity, as well as the affective and affected aspects of their writing and theorization. This primarily means the following: Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). As I will discuss in more detail over the course of the book, I assume much of Boyarin's argument in *Border Lines*, even while I feel it could be pushed further. I also respect (and find theoretically compelling) his moves towards self-disclosure. Virginia Burrus, "Heretical Woman as Symbol in Alexander, Athanasius, Epiphanius, and Jerome," *HTR* 84:3 (1993): 229-248; *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). I am generally inspired by Burrus's sharp theorizing and writing, not to mention her sometimes subtle, sometimes explicit, pressing of the matter of affect in ancient literature. Judith Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and *Neither Jew Nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (London: T & T Clark International, 2002). The sheer variety and number of ancient texts addressed in Lieu's texts is humbling—not to mention her distinct scholarly cautions and reservations about how those texts might be said to relate to one another.

the sudden popularity of Christian identity as an optic, and the historical imaginations that attend it, tell us about what those of us interpreting these texts (professionally or otherwise) need and want out of history? Thus the curiosities guiding this project are not just about history per se, but also about how the set of ancient texts associated with what we call early Christianity figure in the way we make sense of ourselves in the present.

Asking how these ancient texts figure in the way we make sense of ourselves involves a number of suppositions.² I assume, very much in the tradition of postmodern historiography, that the work of sense-making in the present is not subsidiary or tangential to presumably less subjective historical description. Consequently, I do not wish to make sharp or qualitative distinctions between the interpretive work of scholars and lay people, academic intelligentsia and popular culture. I assume that whatever the register in which one speaks about early Christian literature or its history, one is no more or less engaged in the work of contemporary significance. Most crucially, however, this question of contemporary sense-making makes an important epistemological assumption: thinking and feeling are hopelessly interwoven experiences. I hint at this in my choice of the word “sense,” a term which simultaneously implies both cognition and emotion. This dual implication flies in the face of a long history—strongly Cartesian but also pre-Cartesian—of emphatic differentiations between cognition and emotion as categories of experience. It is also a term that cues one into the primary generative force of this book: theories of affect.

2. Aside from those I list above, there is also a set of unspoken suppositions usually implied in terms like “we” and “the present.” The temporality and set of circumstances that seem to comprise “the present,” as well as who, exactly, is imagined in and among this “we,” are open and debatable issues. I don’t mean to suggest any kind of natural content to either of these terms. Indeed, part of the work of this book is to offer one kind of re-examination of how “early Christian history” and its concomitant literature is engaged to give content to and naturalize certain subjectivities and temporalities.

As a set of cross-disciplinary reflections on the bodily, social, and linguistic entanglements of that which is often more colloquially understood as “emotion,”³ much recent theorizing around affect has thoroughly frustrated any hope to preserve thinking or knowing from the rather slippery, indistinct, oceanic, and, frankly, feminized realm of emotive experience. To say we “make sense” of something, for instance, is to accord an intuitive, bodily, and non- or beyond-conscious force to knowing. Knowledge arrives as an “impression.” As Sara Ahmed writes, “*We need to remember the ‘press’ in ‘impression.’*”⁴

In other words, “affect” means being *affected*; it suggests being touched, moved. It implies less some kind of internal, personal experience than relationality, physicality, and susceptibility. Embedded in this epistemology is a reminder about the vagueness of knowing, suggested in the terms sense and impression. We cannot fully know how we know what we know. Even the baldest of facts can be undone by a notion that it just “doesn’t feel right,” and we may or may not be able to say what exactly about it doesn’t quite feel right. In those moments we are forced to encounter the contingencies of our knowing, and it is no coincidence that what *feels* right or wrong is often the kind of knowing most vigorously defended.

This impressionistic basis of knowing also suggests that the subjects and objects of knowing cannot be responsibly or reliably distinguished. What is produced as an object of knowledge is the trace of a moment of contact, one that is already freighted with affective social histories and one’s subjective disposition.⁵ The knowledge we acquire is beyond our knowing, though not in the

3. Though as I will describe in more detail below, not everyone theorizing on affect would agree that emotion and affect are so easily equated.

4. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 6. Emphasis in original.

5. *Ibid.*, 1-19.

sense that the knowledge itself is outside of us. It is rather that we are dispossessed of fully naming how it is we are so sure of something. Knowing, as embroiled in affect, is both fully subjective and deeply “impersonal.”⁶ That which we know and how we know are open to momentary contingencies, shifting relationships, and even material minutiae. As Jane Bennett recounts: “The sentences of this book also emerged from the confederate agency of many striving macro- and microactants: from ‘my’ memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or particles in the room, to name only a few of the participants.”⁷

Eve Sedgwick’s approach to affect theory, for instance, directs one’s attention to the affective forces and bases of certain kinds of intellectual analysis. In a generous but frank essay on the state of current academic theorizing, Sedgwick writes about the near-total collapse of theories into simply “Theory,” now almost synonymous with the hermeneutics of suspicion. The hermeneutics of suspicion, in its insistence on fanatically uncovering hidden violences, is, for Sedgwick, closely tied to the paranoid worldview.⁸ Sedgwick writes that the problem with the ascendancy and prestige around the hermeneutics of suspicion and the paranoid worldview that attends it is that there is “a great loss when paranoid inquiry comes to seem entirely coextensive with critical theoretical inquiry rather than being viewed as one kind of cognitive/affective theoretical practice among other, alternative kinds.”⁹ The hermeneutics of suspicion not only

6. That is, affect is not a matter of self-containment, and operates on an always-already social level. Those who view affect as non- or impersonal include Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), and Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

7. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 23.

8. Sedgwick is careful, however, not to suggest “paranoid” as a mental illness or pathologizing diagnosis.

contains an almost ironically naïve faith in the tactics of exposure, Sedgwick observes, but paranoid knowing also has a nasty habit of “disavowing its affective motive and force and masquerading as the very stuff of truth.”¹⁰ Importantly, she does not suggest abandoning paranoid knowing entirely, but since it “knows some things well and others poorly,” she suggests engaging reparative, accretive, and pleasure-seeking impulses and practices alongside of it.¹¹

Sedgwick’s scrutiny of the affectivity of certain kinds of knowing initiated this project in many ways, not only because of her critique of the hermeneutics of suspicion,¹² but also because biblical and early Christian studies as disciplines have a distinct habit of exactly “disavowing [their] affective motive and force,” usually through the highly technical and seemingly impartial apparatus of “exegesis” and the myriad criticisms and historical categories indebted to scientific methods. The collective disposition of biblical and early Christian studies, not unlike many other academic disciplines, has been to invest itself in a kind of apparently *un-affected* practice and self-presentation. This investment has a history with roots more specific to the discipline than any modernist valorization of rationalism, though. The discipline emerged unevenly from early modern moral criticism of the Bible, criticism that found itself initially less at odds with the historicity of the text than the dubious actions of its central characters, including—and especially—its god.¹³ But, as Yvonne Sherwood and Stephen Moore opine, an immoral biblical god was perhaps too thorny a theological issue:

9. Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 126.

10. *Ibid.*, 138.

11. *Ibid.*, 130.

12. In chapter 7, for example, I suggest that the hermeneutics of suspicion has been over-identified with political readings, particularly within scholarly reflections on empire.

13. Stephen D. Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 58–59.

[Q]uestions of historical possibility were easier to deal with than questions of moral possibility. Even the ‘Deists’ seemed to recoil from the audacity of charging the biblical god of immorality and declaring Holy Writ antecedently unfit, impossible, or incredible on moral grounds. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the more orthodox form of emergent biblical criticism entailed taking up the programmatic question ‘Could it have happened?’ in its historical sense while closing the question down in its moral or philosophical sense. . . . Thus the category of the historical in biblical scholarship became a surrogate not only for the ethical but also for the theological, and did not disturb either category directly . . . The historical now served as a place marker for the theological, but also, paradoxically, as a license to do biblical scholarship in a thoroughly de-theologized mode . . . one that shattered every biblical-scholarly mold that has been handed down since antiquity.¹⁴

This sublimation of ethical and theological questions into historical ones has certain affective consequences for the way business is now done in biblical studies. For one, the move described by Sherwood and Moore is acutely de-personalizing in its filtration (or avoidance) of theological crises through the dispassionate language of historical inquiry. This depersonalization has trailed the discipline ever since, primarily through the continuing predominance of scientific methods. Even more subjective interventions into the presumptions of historical-criticism tend to use the safe distance and/or cold language of social positions and identity categories.¹⁵

Very few have critically engaged the affective stakes of early Christian history and biblical interpretation. And yet one need not do more than lightly scratch the surface of off-the-record, collegial conversation to find that the affective stakes are indeed quite high

14. Ibid.

15. This self-revelation on a primarily categorical level is what Stephen Moore has dubbed “impersonal criticism,” or positional criticism, work in the vein of autobiographical criticism that seeks to be “located” but also seems to avoid confessional or personal reflection. “True Confessions and Weird Obsessions: Autobiographical Interventions in Literary and Biblical Studies,” in *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

for most people studying the Bible or early Christian history professionally. Studying this literature is not simply a strategic cultural or political intervention or an antiquarian fascination, though it certainly can be all of these things as well. It is work fraught with deep affective entanglements, threaded as the Bible is into so many other attachments and burned injuriously into so many folks' skin. In fact it seems that just as the historical serves as a place marker for the theological, often the political and ideological can do their own place-marking and substitutive work if their affective and experiential motivations aren't carefully cross-examined. Especially in the first two chapters of this book, I press (gently, I hope) on recent scholarship to ask about its various affects. This pressing is, I emphasize, not a psychological reading of individual scholars, or a set of indictments of scholars failing to be self-reflective. It is a reading of the social circuits of emotion that course through the field, and an inquiry into what collective reckonings with the felt present surface in contemporary attempts at describing ancient Christians. I suggest over the course of this book, for instance, that as scholarship tries to pinpoint the relationship of texts to imperium and Israel, it simultaneously works out its own confusing relations to and haunted histories of American and European imperialism and Christian violence.

Again, this affectivity is not a failure of scholarship to do good or proper history (although it might seem so by traditional definitions of history), but it does have implications for historical claims. So while I offer my own historical conclusions, it is not a supposedly less subjective correction to scholarship. In keeping with affect theory's emphasis on the impressionist basis of knowing, I claim the felt present, as it is expressed in and between the lines of contemporary scholarship, as one important if roundabout resource for reading and understanding ancient texts and history. The "sense" we get

from texts is not only a historical resource, but also an inevitable aspect of both their materiality and our involvement with them. Our distancing techniques (techniques, by the way, that I do not wholly disavow) only testify to the overwhelming nature of our affective involvement in texts. I theorize on this explicitly in my final chapter, turning to New Testament scholarship on the Roman Empire to make some constructive suggestions about how to understand the political and affective work of reading ancient texts.

In general, there have been only limited and quirky engagements with the affectivity of “early Christian” texts. As a case in point, much of the secondary literature on Revelation reads (only) a kind of anger or aggression bubbling up through the text, but doesn’t go much further than this observation.¹⁶ Such readings of Revelation write almost as if affectivity is a quality specific to Revelation—not something that animates or gives rise to all texts in complicated ways. Similarly, Paul’s very impassioned and turbulent tone often gets read as a side effect of his beliefs/values, a frustration with his client communities for missing the point, rather than an issue for critical consideration in and of itself.¹⁷

Theories of affect suggest that what we know is shaped by the contingencies of social-emotional forces. But it also suggests that *we* are, as subjects and collectives, shaped and reshaped by diffuse and motile forces—forces working sometimes in concert and sometimes at cross-purposes with one another. Affect offers a considerable contrast, then, to the prevailing understanding of the subject as definitively formed by Foucaultian Power with a capital “P.”

16. See my discussion in chapter 7.

17. By this I do not mean a reading that “psychologizes” Paul (or anyone else), but rather a reading that foregrounds the social life of emotion as it shapes the rhetoric and relationships in/represented by texts. I have done this affective reading of the Corinthian correspondence in “The Rhetoric of Intimate Spaces: Affect and Performance in the Corinthian Correspondence,” *USQR* 62: 3–4 (2011): 134–51.

Reframing the decades-long obsession with the subject and identity that had seized most theorizing circles—an obsession of which I have heartily partaken—affect takes the concept of the constructedness of the subject and identity performance seriously, but reimagines it with a new degree of rigor. It strips the term *identity performance* of its implications of individuality, ontology, and coherence (identity), and of its appeal to an act and an actor (performance), implications that are inimical to the very impulse for such theories in the first place. Analytics making use of identity categories, and even the term identity itself, assume a formed subject and relatively stable belonging. They are product-based analytics, bent as they are on the apparently static “effects” of power or discourse. Affect theory, on the other hand, re-orientes one towards process, queer or surprising affiliations, and futurity.

It is through affect theory’s more fluid assumptions about subjectivity and belonging, as well as scholarship on ancient associations and meals, that I begin to question the usefulness of “Christian identity” as a historical category for understanding the social gestures, assumptions, and constructions of the texts under discussion. But it is also in these reflections on the confusions and hairpin turns of social life that affect theory and diaspora theory coincide to engender attentiveness to the affective depths of colonized, displaced, and otherwise violated social contexts.¹⁸ Diaspora, in the context of diaspora theory, means not simply an exilic existence—removal from one’s place of birth—but rather the

18. Questions of affect and diaspora come together in a significant number of recent projects within cultural studies. Cf. Brian Keith Axel, “The Diasporic Imaginary,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 2 (2002): 411-28; Ann Cvetkovich *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Grace Cho, “Voices from the *Teum*: Synesthetic Trauma and Ghosts of the Korean Diaspora” in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

many and often subtle effects and circumstances of migratory movement, colonization, and resettlement.¹⁹ Overlapping with postcolonial criticism, diaspora theories in the vein of Stuart Hall, Brian Keith Axel, Rey Chow, and others have moved away from a foundational focus on origin and place in diaspora and towards the analysis of diasporic relational dynamics, imperial and colonial violence, national boundary production, negotiations of belonging, and cultural interimplication. Diaspora theory at large might be described as a thematic interest in the social and discursive dilemmas and creativities of displaced populations, an interest that, not unlike affect, has engaged a huge number of fields and disciplines. It accommodates not only analyses of what politics beget the condition of diaspora, or of the violent effects of geographical and cultural dispersion, but also the ways diaspora as a condition *enables* a sense of belonging. It addresses the *production* of place and shared origins. But as much as the focus of something like diaspora would seem to be wholly collective, the theorizing around diaspora that I have found most generative also provocatively treats the intricacies of personal experience as an index and instance of social traumas.²⁰

My reconstruction is thus a reconstruction of a social-affective landscape. By “social-affective landscape” I mean to say that I both depend on a broad context with affective implications, and lean strongly into the subjectivity of texts as a resource rather than an impediment for specifying that context. The affective resonances

19. For two treatments of Israelite diasporic (in the more traditional sense) dynamics see John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); and *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with A. Thomas Kraabel*, ed. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992).

20. To be more explicit here: in concert with the bulk of recent theorizing on affect and diaspora and more generally with postmodern and poststructuralist imaginations of the subject, I assume that what we call “the personal” is never a discrete container of experience shut off from others. It is a function of and deeply embedded in social forces and factors.

of texts are markers or symptoms of social and historical forces. Empire and postcolonial criticisms have painted especially stark and meticulous pictures of Roman rule in the first and second centuries: the enslavement and large-scale displacement of conquered peoples, as well as the sexualized violence and torture, multifaceted acculturation, and economic divestments that went hand in hand with belonging in some way to Rome. Along with these material (and often graphic) reconstructions of the severity of Roman rule, other scholars, especially those in certain strands of postcolonial biblical scholarship, have chronicled the more subtle though no less disquieting effects of imperial life: the allure of imperial prosperity, the way long-term colonial captivity changes the vectors of one's loyalties, and the ever thinning and sometimes non-existent line between resistance and accommodation. While I value and rely on many material reconstructions of the first and second centuries throughout this project, my focus is theoretical and textual, and contributes mainly to the latter task.

Some of the questions I ask here, provoked by diaspora theory and its merging with affect theory, include: How is alienation articulated, and what socio-political echo-effects do those articulations yield? What are the ways that colonial pain lives on in the social body? How can we mark the many complicated and contradictory feelings around the entities to which one (however tangentially) belongs? When can the forgetting of the past be a constructive response to diasporic trauma and loss? What does it mean when passionate imaginations of transcendence are tied to the intractability of social upheaval? Constituting the jumping off point for my constructive readings of ancient literature, these questions allow for more dynamic phenomenological descriptions and socio-political readings than the taxonomic, diagnostic, and normativizing terms on which we, as a discipline, have become so reliant: not only terms like *apocalyptic*,

Gnostic, and *supersessionist*, but even *anti-imperial*, *hybrid*, and (of course) *Jewish* and *Christian*. The laying aside of these terms and categories may raise hairs on the necks of some, no doubt, since these have been meaningful indices for trying to understand what, precisely, is at play and what is ethically and politically at stake in that which we call “early Christian literature.” I am no less interested in the question of what is at play and what is ethically and politically at stake. I do, however, go at that question through different doors: the basis for each of my constructive re-readings is wondering how these texts variously cope with the diasporic violences and traumas of their context.

While in this project I am quite indebted to postcolonial and empire-critical readings of the Bible, I try to sidestep, reframe, and fill out many of the assessments that empire and postcolonial criticisms employ. The terms *for* vs. *against*, *reproduce* vs. *resist*, and even *mimic* vs. *mock* have felt uncomfortably reductive to me because of their implicit polarities. It is a discomfort I share with or caught from a number of people working in cultural studies.²¹ One of the things diaspora and affect theories accomplish is that they engender terms for talking about power that have more texture, more qualitative oomph, and more refined assessments than the fields of New

21. Eve Sedgwick’s wariness of certain subtle binarisms in contemporary theory particularly resonates with me. She writes, “I would say that [Foucault’s] analysis of the pseudodichotomy between repression and liberation has led, in many cases, to its conceptual reimposition in the even more abstractly reified form of the hegemonic and the subversive. The seeming ethical urgency of such terms masks their gradual evacuation of substance, as a kind of Gramscian-Foucaultian contagion turns ‘hegemonic’ into another name for the status quo (i.e., everything that is) and defines ‘subversive’ in, increasingly, a purely negative relation to that (an extreme of the same ‘negative relation’ that had, in Foucault’s argument, defined the repressive hypothesis in the first place). It’s the same unhelpful structure that used to undergird historical arguments about whether a given period was one of ‘continuity’ or ‘change.’ Another problem with reifying the status quo is what it does to the middle ranges of agency. One’s relation to *what is* risks becoming reactive and bifurcated, that of a consumer: one’s choices narrow to accepting or refusing (buying, not buying) this or that manifestation of it, dramatizing only the extremes of compulsion and voluntariness. Yet it is only the middle ranges of agency that offer space for effectual creativity and change” (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 12–13).

Testament and early Christian studies currently have at hand for describing what it means to live in empire, or what it means to have one's nation in shards at one's feet. Diaspora and affect theories provide not only newly sophisticated analytical concepts, but experientially resonant ones as well. They provide language that communicates the rich, devastating complexity of living, as opposed to the terms and categories I have somewhat polemically listed above which tend, however subtly, to classify, moralize, romanticize, or systematically separate. If affect and diaspora are categories, they are categories of experience, and ones that do not eschew the subjectivity of reading and history in the same way taxonomic and diagnostic categories do.

It is affect and diaspora theories' qualitative descriptions of the rhetoric, creativity, and contradictions of social life that enable me to propose that all of the texts under discussion in this book participate in Israelite diasporic culture—a colonial milieu in which relations to Israel are largely diffuse and interrupted—and that “Christian” is not an overarching category of identity for the texts at hand. If a text shows interest in the temple, priesthood, sabbath, Israelite prophetic history, Judea, Genesis stories, or any number of other elements of Israelite tradition (which all of these texts do), that to me suggests a participation in Israelite diasporic culture. Following the assumptions of diaspora theory, I will elaborate how locating a particular “early Christian” text as more or less Jewish (which usually then implies that it is more or less Christian, or more or less Greco-Roman) is a reproduction of diasporic discourse that defines boundaries of who does, and doesn't, belong. To categorize a text on a scale of Jewishness implies that there is a clear and objective set of criteria for Jewishness. It also denies cultural hybridity (which I assume as a quality of all these texts) and the complex colonial dynamics of

crossing cultic and ethnic/national designations that were part and parcel of this period of Roman history.

Within empire and postcolonial criticisms, much energy has been poured into charting the enmeshment of early Christian literature in Israel and in imperial ideology. Yet it seems that there is not, so far at least, a thorough integration of national and imperial belongings, and diaspora theory provides a productive intervention into this problem.²² Even the ideas of “nation” or “national belonging” as analytical categories for the late first and early second centuries seem vastly underused, likely because the concept of Judaism as a religion has overshadowed scholarship on when and under what circumstances the term *Judaism* comes into existence.²³ Additionally, modern understandings of a nation as an autonomous geo-political entity (i.e., the nation-state) would seem to inhibit the usefulness of that category for the analysis of ancient texts, particularly given the broken condition of Israel and other nations under Rome in the first and second century. I do hear this problem of modern understandings

22. This could also be due, in part, to the rise of empire as an optic, which changes the focus to broader, global networks of power, even sometimes supplanting the nation as a category. Vilashini Cooppan sees this erasure of the nation as a category as problematic in the present, because of the persistence of national channels of power, which discourses of globalization sometimes hide. I see this as problematic for the ancient world for different reasons, since the politics and meanings accorded to “nation” are rather different. Because of the Roman Empire’s conquest and partial absorption and/or annexing of “nations,” it is crucial to ask about the persistence of fragments and attachments to the nation, and how they might be part and parcel of imperial politics. Cooppan, “The Ruins of Empire: The National and Global Politics of the Return to Rome,” *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, ed. Ania Loomba, et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 80–100. For more on Cooppan’s rather important and well-thought essay, see chapter 7.
23. For instance there is work such as Shaye J. D. Cohen’s, whose collected articles in *The Beginning of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) chart the complexities of Jewish identity, its ostensible distinctiveness, and its cultural hybridities in the ancient world, as well as the relativity of criteria for Jewishness. Notably, however, Cohen also presumes an early and relatively easy distinction between “Jewishness” and “Christianity.” The work in the present book is somewhat consonant with Cohen’s major thesis, but borrows from diaspora theory to further deconstruct and expansively re-imagine what it meant to belong to Israel’s traditions, texts, practices, and/or political pasts.

of nation in particular, so it is important that I clarify what I mean in my use of *nation* or *national haunting*.

In contrast to “the nation-state,” and more along the lines of the ancient term *ethnos*, I understand *nation* as a persistent imaginary with political pasts and ongoing effects, geographical referents, and cultural productivity. Although I do intend to imply “peoplehood,” I do not wish to suggest a fundamental or monolithic set of shared characteristics—a conceptualization of *nation* that has participated in modern discourses of racial purity. I mean to convey, rather, an uneven and frictive conglomerate tied together through historical, political, and affective factors—including factors that would seem to test the salience of national belonging itself (such as imperial conquest). In fact, as I shall discuss more, it is often the case that colonial and imperial conditions enable or intensify national attachments rather than destroying them. In keeping with diaspora theory, I see the nation as always already composed of strange crossings and colonial entanglements even while the category of nation itself both absorbs and deflects such crossings and entanglements. The nation not only haunts, but is itself also haunted by political conflict and the casualties of its own boundary-marking. In this project, then, I seek to surface the ways nation, empire, and other kinds of belonging inflect and mutually intensify each other, as well as the ways they oppose or chafe against one another.²⁴

24. These epistemological re-orientations that I have recounted above, including the byways into diaspora theory, are only some of the many and various insights allowed by the broad swath of thinking about affect. There is simply, and thankfully, no unified “affect theory” to pluck out from cultural studies and slap onto the Bible. In fact, it is not clear that one can even use the term “affect theory” in the singular, given the peculiar and gratifying variety of thinking it references. Some people included in this work find themselves theorizing about affects in the plural, and others find themselves theorizing a kind of substantive if mutable force simply referred to as “affect.” This difference is described by Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth in the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–28, as due to the two key essays, both published in the same year (1995), and their distinctive theoretical sources, which represent something of a catalyst for the new theorizing on affect. These two essays are Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold,”

Haunting turns out to be a recurring theme in this book, and one might very well consider this book something like a haunted history, since I repeatedly seek out lingering effects and wisps of the inconspicuous—things which are “sensed” but perhaps not readily seen. As Avery Gordon remarks, attending to haunting means “putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a counter-memory, for the future.”²⁵ This book too asks after the spectral conditions of certain representations: I conclude that the notion of a distinct Christian identity in the late first and early second centuries is only possible because of the ambivalent kinds of forgetting associated with trauma and its movement across generations. And while I lay claim to a certain level of referentiality by suggesting my own historical reconstructions as the book proceeds, this is with some irony since my primary historical referents are the thoroughly difficult to document phenomena of trauma and its associated affects.

reprinted in *Touching Feeling* which draws on Silvan Tomkins’s work in the 1960’s, and Brian Massumi’s “Autonomy of Affect,” now the first chapter in his book *Parables for the Virtual* (pp. 23–45), which depends on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Baruch Spinoza. As a generalized context for theorizing on affect, Michael Hardt has suggested that feminist theory’s emphasis on the body and queer theory’s interest in the emotions (mainly shame, melancholia, and intimacy) had set the scene for these two essays (“What Affects Are Good For,” in *The Affective Turn*, ix full publishing info). I agree that one of the bigger gifts of affect theory is an attention to felt forces that can’t be contained (by language or other symbolic systems, by our subjective boundaries, etc.) and an offer of a little bit of a reprieve from linguistic analysis. Though I would add that much of queer theory’s interest in the emotions, and much of feminist thinking at large, have drawn their inspiration from psychoanalytic theory. Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: Essays on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), for example, constitutes something like a psychoanalytic approach to the social life of disgust. Sara Ahmed indeed uses Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* in her work on disgust. Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 82–100.

25. Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 22.

Indeed, attending to ghosts and writing histories of trauma are already compatible, if not linked, enterprises. In the same vein as Gordon, Ann Cvetkovich observes that “because trauma can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all.”²⁶ Cvetkovich’s book *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* plays out the intimate and tangled connections between national traumas and familial relationships, cultural memory and subjective experience, and does so “from the unabashedly minoritarian perspective of lesbian cultures.”²⁷ Cvetkovich performs an “exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions,”²⁸ finding, among other things, how sexual lives respond creatively to traumatic wounding. She thus archives not just “feeling bad,” but other, less obvious emotions that might arise in the whirl around loss and trauma.

While I draw on Cvetkovich’s book specifically to better understand the Secret Revelation of John’s hard and utopian edges, as well as the combination of pleasure with other more apparently “negative” affects like pain in the Gospel of Truth, I borrow more broadly from her notion of an “archive of feelings” as an approach to history. Creating a lesbian archive of trauma that interrupts equally celebratory accounts of the nation and pathologizing psychoanalytic narratives, Cvetkovich insists on both the difficulties in accounting for trauma and the necessities in doing so. The notion that trauma “puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration” engenders an approach here that seeks out and dilates traces of national and colonial affectivity and reckonings with social confusion and upheaval. Again, I seek

26. Ann Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings*, 7.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

here to create a kind of alternative record, if a partial and ephemeral one, which steps to the side of Christianity's seemingly inevitable dominance or original virtue.²⁹

One of the more charming effects of the interdisciplinary interest in affect is a new collision of linguistic registers within theoretical writing. The specialized lingo of high theory has met up with more colloquial intonations, often in the same work, and first-person accounts regularly pepper and even drive abstract or speculative proposals. An apparent consequence of affect, then, perhaps due to its capaciousness as a topic of discussion, has been a renewed interest in being a subject in one's own work, or letting one's affective state(s) into the work, though some have been more tentative and others unequivocal about doing so. Those less interested in personal disclosures still often employ anecdotal narratives of *someone's* experience. What I find so appealing about this is that one can enjoy the allure of heightened theoretical language with the added gratification of closer contact between readers and writers.

This book occasionally aspires to this same idiosyncratic mix of conversational tone and elevated language, first person/anecdotal narrative and conjectural propositions. I hope that it too encourages, in both its theorizing and its style of writing, closer, more sustained contact between readers and writers. While the hope for this kind of contact has often been foreclosed in poststructuralist theory (and, in the greater history of the biblical field, preempted by so much strenuously *un-affected* writing), there has recently been more interest in the way readers and writers are touched and moved, affected, by writing, thus permitting a bit less embarrassment about the desire for this kind of contact.³⁰ Affected reading and writing in this particular

29. Ibid.

30. Sara Ahmed's work on the rhetorical dimensions of affective language and of the place of language in the social world of affects, the stated hopes of Kathleen Stewart to inspire a kind of attentiveness to the intensities and textures of the worlds her readers inhabit, and Eve

book thus invites the slip of a return to autobiographical criticism, but a return that does not find itself opposed to poststructuralist complexities, “high theory,” or even appeals to rarefied concepts and terms. It is not as much an invitation to self-reveal (though self-revelation might be happily included) as an invitation to sympathize, or “feel with” texts, and to admit that that’s part of the reason we read.

By bringing affect back into the picture of reading these texts, I hope not only to sympathetically re-imagine some of these texts, but also to open a route for conversation that does not sharply or qualitatively distinguish what a biblical scholar does from what non-specialists do when they read the Bible: both groups share similar cultural premises and desires for significance.³¹ This is not distressing news. It has been a long-running modern and postmodern mistake to think that critical thinking is best represented by hyper-rational modes of analysis; or that this thinking should (or even can) be distinguished from the deep recesses and wide resonances of affect—ever tangled, social, and subjective. What would happen if we could no longer separate knowing or the work of history from their impressionistic foundations, their affective bases? This book is one answer to that question. It is an invitation to consider new ways history, theology, “personal experience,” critical thinking, and social critique might more comfortably and more candidly reside together in readings of the strange cluster of texts we have inherited by chance and through the category of “Christianity.”

Sedgwick’s poignant question “What does it mean to fall in love with a writer?” all might be said to witness in different ways to the affective relationship between readers and writers. See Ahmed, *Cultural Politics*, Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling*, 117.

31. In this vein, Moore and Sherwood propose that the most significant kind of intersection of biblical studies with “theory” would create a disassembling of biblical studies’ disciplinary boundaries—that is, the machinery and high walls that keep the field sequestered in hyper-specialized language and practices (Moore and Sherwood, *Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 130-31).