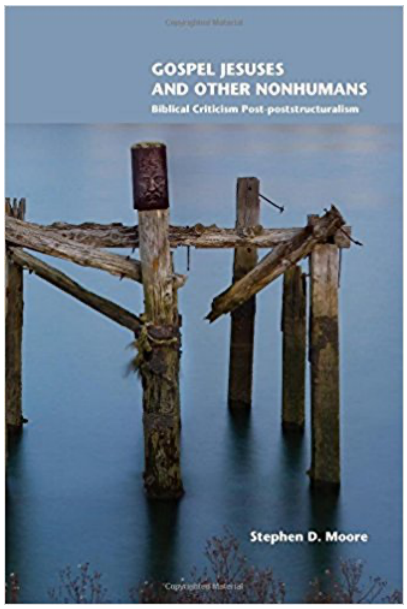
*RBL 05/2022*




**Stephen D. Moore**

***Gospel Jesuses and Other Nonhumans: Biblical Criticism Post-poststructuralism***

Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017. Pp. xii + 151. Paper. $27.00. ISBN 9781628371901. Hardcover. $42.00. ISBN 9780884142522.

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Stephen D. Moore has been a key contributor to (post-)poststructuralist biblical scholarship for several decades, and this book reflects his and others' turn toward affect and animality. It is a collection of essays that perform close readings of the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. His goal, he explains in "Introduction (and Conclusion): Posts Passed, Turns Taken" (1–14), is to defamiliarize these early Christian texts by rereading their Jesuses, and their Holy Ghost, through the lens of what he terms *nonhuman theory*, which challenges post-Enlightenment reflection on the human, and in light of our ecological crises.

"Why the Risen Body Weeps" (15–39) applies affect theory to explain why John's Jesus weeps outside the tomb of Lazarus (John 11). Moore first narrates the development of affect theory, including the contribution of Deleuze, for whom affect is an encounter with materiality prior to cognition, emotion, or language. From this perspective, Jesus's tears are not an outward expression of a deep inward emotion but an impersonal force acting across the surface of the text: tears → Lazarus living → Jesus dying → believers living. But the reason *why* Jesus weeps is the central, if subtle, affect throughout the book: not love but disgust. The ultimate object of disgust is rot or decay, and outside the tomb what disgusts Jesus is the stench of rotting flesh. Paradoxically, Jesus resists his own decay, leaving no rotten flesh in the tomb, but also retains his wounds: he is "rotting flesh and rot-resistant flesh at one and the same time" (35). Even more paradoxically, repulsion toward the flesh is complemented by attraction to it: his followers must not only embrace the flesh

but even put it into their mouths (John 6), a shock not shared privately to initiates (as in the Synoptics) but announced brazenly in public. As prepared decomposing food yet never-decaying bread (John 6), as risen yet retaining the marks of decomposition to which animals no less than humans are heir (John 20), John's Jesus blurs the human-nonhuman distinction. The ultimate answer, Moore concludes, is that Jesus weeps because he always retains the slight stench of death.

Moore next turns to the Gospel of Mark, whose Jesus lets out a death shriek from the cross. "The Messiah Who Screamed" (41–59) asks what Deleuze would make of Mark's cross as an *assemblage*: a collection of heterogeneous elements, "textual and nontextual, organic and inorganic, discursive and nondiscursive, human and nonhuman" (44), united by a shared function of producing affects. Mark's cross is an assemblage: "the denuded, impaled man; the wood-and-metal torture device; the divine being peeking improbably from the bowels of the bloody carcass" (45). Rome, itself a mega-assemblage, employs crosses to stabilize the empire, while the Gospel of Mark retools Jesus's cross to mobilize against the empire by means of affects. Jesus is willingly fastened into this assemblage from the beginning (Mark 1:14), hidden at first (though not to demons, Mark 3:11), but eventually exposed (Mark 8:31), and this is what makes Jesus divine, nonhuman. When the assemblage is fully uncovered, Roman, demonic, and divine forces converge upon it in cosmic battle and produce Jesus's horrified scream. Yet those same forces lured him to the holy city in the first place and enticed him into envisioning the cross folding into an imperial throne (Mark 13–14)—a second assemblage, in conflict with the first, that later will be co-opted by Christian empire. But affectively speaking, the other has been more effective: one does not find Christians wearing throne necklaces or tracing the sign of the throne. The glorious body of Jesus is missing from Mark 16 because it is found on the cross (Mark 15:39), but Jesus's crucified body is also abject meat. The execution of John the Baptist, which anticipates Jesus's own, ends with John's head on a serving plate (Mark 6:24–28). Butchered meat, the zone where one cannot decipher the difference between human and animal, "is the sacred place in which the human encounters the divine in Mark" (59). Jesus's scream from the cross "is an animal shriek" (58).

In "The Dog-Woman of Canaan and Other Animal Tales" (61–83), Moore argues that the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21–28) stands in for the idolatrous and abominable people incompletely erased under Joshua (Josh 13:1). Jesus's exchange with her "symbolically enacts the completion of Yahweh's genocidal commission" (63), by means of temporal distortion rather than the sword: "a Christian mission from the future … invades the woman's present and rewrites the mythic past" (64). The dog image attributed to the woman fits a human-animal framework present elsewhere in Matthew's Gospel that goes back to Daniel. In Dan 7, the Son of Man is distinguished from beasts, which represent humanity gone wrong. But the figure is only *like* a Son of Man, and the lion-eagle becomes a human: "human-animal hybridity runs rampant in this vision" (69). In Matthew, the Son of Man appears sovereign over slave, animal, and woman, a "Man among un-men" (74). However, he is more unhomed than fox or bird (Matt 8:20). In his death, he is treated like a slave or a woman and sacrificed like an animal (Matt 26:27–28; cf. Exod 24:5, 8). That is, he

is unhumaned and turns his disciples around the table into inhuman cannibals. Going back to our scene, Jesus tells the woman she ought to be a sheep, but she replies that he must become a sheep in order to provide the meal for his canine disciples. That meal involves more temporal distortion. Queer temporality fractures socially constructed time such that one might imagine a future unregulated by family conventions. Jesus, who lives unscripted by Mediterranean conventions, hosts the meal before the food is prepared, and fictive kin have replaced his family.

"The Inhuman Acts of the Holy Ghost" (85–106) examines temporality in Luke-Acts to reflect on historiography. The antianachronistic history common to biblical studies requires hetero-temporality, acknowledging distance and otherness without projecting sameness—though hiding an affective obsession with objectivity and a longing to hear from precisely those voices held at a distance. Homohistory, or unhistoricism, still engages with history but blurs the distinction between present and past. Such historiography involves making affective contact with ancient figures, the dead, who in turn make demands on us, haunt us. Luke-Acts is an unhistory of Jesus and the early church that flattens difference into sameness: the Jesus of Luke's present is projected onto historical Nazareth, where an illiterate peasant plays lector at the synagogue (Luke 4), and Luke puts his own speeches in the apostles' mouths throughout Acts. This unhistory is haunted by the character of the Holy Ghost, a human-nonhuman assemblage that both is and is not the ghost of Jesus (Luke 3:22; Acts 2; 16:7). Ghosts make past traumas known by means of affective materiality. The Holy Ghost summons and inhabits the apostles as witnesses to the two traumas of the crucifixion of Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem, who then summon others to receive the trauma and pass it on (Luke 24; Acts 2). Yet Luke flattens the two traumas into one (Luke 13:33–35; 19:41–44), and the Ghost goes back in time to descend on Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3) and even in the womb (Luke 1); the story "scrambles" Roman, messianic, ecclesial, and apocalyptic time (104–5). Through the vehicle of Luke-Acts and the haunting of the Holy Ghost, the buried yet living Jesus welcomes affective touch and possesses humans to create affects in the social world. Luke's two-volume work is thus a "ghost story" (105) and a "precritical model for a postcritical history" (106).

"What a (Sometimes Inanimate) Divine Animal and Plant Has to Teach Us about Being Human" (107–26) returns to the Gospel of John, moving beyond the human-nonhuman distinction to address the plant-animal and organic-inorganic distinctions (giving surprisingly limited attention to allusions to Genesis). John's Jesus is a "god-man-animal-plant-thing" (111): "incarnated *as human*" (John 1:14) "to die *as animal*" (John 1:29) "and to live on *as vegetable*" (John 15) "and *as vegetable byproducts*" (John 6–7, 10) (112). John's Jesus challenges the inclination to define the human by denying animal, vegetal, or inorganic attributes. As lamb and snake, as vine, bread, wine, and door, and as water and light, he or it is a human-nonhuman assemblage; utilizing one of Deleuze and Guattari's four aspects, he is a *machinic* assemblage, an intermingling of bodies, which is taken into other bodies as food and drink, as animal and plant and thing, being destroyed and dehumanized in the process, as intestines and crosses are wont to do. Yet the corpse of Jesus—the

ultimate lifeless *thing*—overturns the Western biopolitical "animacy hierarchy, that is, the world-structuring human ranking of inorganic matter, plant life, disabled life, 'fully human' life … [and] divine life" (120), by animating culture and history in ways that things "can't." After a short period of anthropomorphic appearances, the crucified and buried Jesus lives on mainly as vegetable and its byproducts, as vine and bread, papyrus and paper (John 6; 15; 21), that nonetheless manifest the divine and continue to speak today. John's Gospel is thus our "most conspicuous resource" in the New Testament for a theology that can foster ethical intermingling with the nonhuman in the face of catastrophic ecological crisis (126).

A consistent virtue of this book is its creative analysis of the ancient texts. To some that trait may instead be its consistent vice. At times I wondered whether Moore exercises more agency than his ghostly companions in the time-flattening erotic touch through which the long-dead supposedly make demands on readers (perhaps entertaining precisely the assumptions Moore wants to unsettle). But here I focus on the contribution of this book's style of reading, from three perspectives.

Moore's concerns and goals will certainly be welcomed by theory-driven interpreters, but in circles where textual analysis has become unfashionable, his reading strategy, which I like to think of as a post-poststructuralist form of linkword exegesis, cuts against the grain. Moore puts into mutually informing dialogue, not two ancient texts, but an ancient text and an element of affect or nonhuman theory at the intersection of shared terms—an inter(non)textuality across the heterogenous layers of Moore's reading assemblage, activated to produce world-creating affects. For example, Moore juxtaposes *flesh* in affect-theoretical reflections on disgust with *flesh* in John's Gospel (31–38) and *ghost* in Frecceros's queer spectrality with the Acts of the Holy *Ghost* (92–105); Moore's phrase "(Robin)Son-of-Man" tangles the Gospel of Matthew, *Robinson Crusoe*, and Derrida into a postcolonial machine (67–79); and bold and bracketed language from Deleuze, Guattari, and Mark visibly interrupts and interweaves Moore's telling of the crucifixion (45–59). This book demonstrates how first-hand engagement with cultural studies can lead critics deeper into, rather than away from, detailed textual analysis.

For the negotiation between theory and traditional criticism, this book performs a clarifying function. Moore's readings do not ignore the historical context or even the answers to questions traditionally asked about it: for example, Matthew's changes to Mark (62), the Christology of Matthew's community (64–65), or Galilean sociocultural conditions (88–89). The disparity is not about engaging history versus avoiding it but about different *modes* of engaging history, all of which developed relatively recently to meet the needs of particular communities. That does not mean neither mode is better than the other, but both interpretive traditions need to put their communal norms, values, and goals on the table.

Theological interpreters of the New Testament, too, might learn from this book's perspective on temporality. Resisting modernism's disenchantment of time, facilitating fellowship with the ancients, allowing for the long-dead (or should we say *risen*) to make claims on contemporary communities through sacred texts—doesn't that sound like the communion of saints? Some theological interpreters may see here a shared set of goals, others nothing more than a parody, but both groups might benefit from critical reflection on the analogy.