Witnessing the Text: A Critical Empathetic Approach to Ecclesiastes with Affect, Trauma and Bystander Perspectives

Wing Yan Ng

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds, School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science

March 2025

Intellectual Property and Publication Statements

I confirm that the work submitted is my own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

The thesis was proof-read before submission by a third-party proof-reader. I confirm that the third-party proof-reading undertaken was in accordance with the Postgraduate Researcher Proof-reading Policy.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to my primary supervisor, Johanna Stiebert, who generously provided advice and support throughout my entire research journey. From the earliest stages of my project to its completion, she has offered guidance, encouragement, and emotional support in all aspects of my work and beyond. She is exceptionally generous, selfless and kind, especially towards international students, understanding our difficulties and treating us with great hospitality. I deeply thank her for guiding and cheering me on throughout these years.

I am deeply grateful to my second supervisor, Al McFadyen, who offered guidance and encouragement throughout my research journey. I am truly grateful for his kindness, patience, and dedication in helping me navigate this challenging process.

I am also grateful to my examiners, Katherine Southwood and Stefan Skrimshire, for agreeing to assess my thesis and for their willingness to contribute their expertise to my work. In particular, I would like to thank Katherine for generously sharing her forthcoming chapter with me. Her support in providing such valuable resources has been immensely helpful in shaping my research and has enriched my understanding of the topic.

My sincere thanks also go to teachers and fellow in the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). It is with deep gratitude to the institution that I was nourished and initiated into my research project. I am grateful to Leo Li, who provided encouragement, enthusiasm and inspiration throughout my Hebrew Bible studies. I am grateful to Nancy Tan, who invited me to pursue my PhD and encouraged me throughout my research journey. She has taught me how to integrate my faith with reflections on justice and social responsibility, and to link biblical interpretations with speaking up for the marginalised minorities in our contexts. I am also grateful to my dear friend and fellow researcher at CUHK, Auby Au, whose support and encouragement have been a constant source of motivation. Her persistence and dedication in running have also been a source of inspiration, reminding me of the power of resilience and perseverance. I am truly thankful for the bond we share and the mutual support we have offered each other throughout our doctoral journeys.

I must also acknowledge the teaching staff, administrative staff, and postgraduate researcher in the School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science, University of Leeds for their warmth and support. Special thanks to the Centre for Religion and Public Life community, where I was able to enjoy academic freedom in the fortnightly seminars and be inspired in my research on the Hebrew Bible, particularly on issues related to social justice and participation.

Beyond the academic institutions, I am also grateful to the local people and newly arrived Hong Kong people I met in Leeds. Their acceptance and familiarity made my adapting to life in Leeds much easier.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the people and friends in my hometown for their support and encouragement. Your spirits of perseverance and your striving for righteousness have been a constant source of strength through this journey.

I am profoundly grateful to my family for their constant support throughout my entire research journey. My deepest gratitude goes to my parents, who provided me with care, resources and opportunities throughout my life; and to my sister, who bore the responsibility of caring for our parents particularly during critical and difficult times. Special thanks to my husband, Daniel, for his love, support and dedication. I am deeply thankful for all the ways in which he has enriched both my academic and personal life.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who have deeply influenced my journey, especially in helping me navigate the complexities of loss and bereavement. Though these beloved individuals are no longer with us, the lessons they imparted about grief, love, and healing have shaped both my research and my personal life in profound ways. The experience of losing them has been traumatic, yet it is through their wisdom and dedication that I have come to understand the deep and complex emotions of love and loss. I will forever be grateful for the lessons learned and the guidance offered by these remarkable people.

Hong Kong people, ADD OIL! *hēung góng yàhn, gā yáu*!

Abstract

This thesis explores the significance and effectiveness of a three-pronged reading strategy that is aimed at facilitating critical empathy and focuses particularly on the biblical wisdom book of Ecclesiastes. The three components of this strategy draw on affect studies, trauma studies, and the bystander approach, with the latter adapted from Holocaust studies. Following examination of biblical Hebrew affect vocabulary as a means to better understand the emotional force and multiple impacts of the phenomenon of trauma, the bystander approach extends analysis of the trauma response beyond its usual focus on the direct victim to consider bystanders of traumatic situations or events. This method focuses both on Qoheleth, the narrator of Ecclesiastes, as a bystander and on the reader of Ecclesiastes as a participatory and affected reader. As such, this research examines how readers' experiences and emotional engagements with the text can illuminate and deepen biblical interpretation. The study also argues that the three approaches foster critical empathy—that is, the co-emphasis on emotional engagement alongside intellectual analysis. This, in turn, it is proposed, brings relevance, meaning, and transformation to both text and reader. Critical empathy is relatively new in terms of its explicit inclusion in biblical criticism. Also innovative is the application of the bystander approach to the book of Ecclesiastes. The thesis, therefore, contributes in original ways to a deepened encounter with the ancient book of Ecclesiastes; the proposed reading method also offers opportunities beyond this text.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BDB	*The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
DCH	*The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*
HOL	*A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
KJV	King James Version
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NRSVue	New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition
RCUV	Revised Chinese Union Version (Traditional Script)

INTRODUCTION

It is ironic that, while the book of Ecclesiastes[1] itself reminds its reader that 'of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh' (Eccl 12:12b NRSVue), a tremendous amount of scholarly work has been done on Ecclesiastes over hundreds of years, resulting in countless publications. This thesis adds pages and spilled ink to the scholarly debate on the book.

The interpretive literature on the book of Ecclesiastes spans centuries and is already formidable; but, in my defence, I seek here not only to reflect anew on existing scholarship that brings both affect studies and trauma studies into conversation with biblical texts, and with Ecclesiastes in particular, but also to develop and present a new tripartite lens. Our understanding of Ecclesiastes is dynamic and changing, even though the fixed, canonised text does not change. This explains and accounts for the many books about Ecclesiastes. What is new about my critical empathetic reading strategy is that it combines three approaches, namely, affect studies, trauma studies, and the bystander approach.[2]

Ecclesiastes may not be an obvious choice, or the first choice, for a trauma-informed reading of biblical texts. A more obvious choice might be the book of Job, given that, arguably, this book centres traumatic events in the life of its eponymous protagonist.[3] My reason for choosing Ecclesiastes is that, when I look at this text, it has a lot to say about the helplessness of the human condition. For all the power Qoheleth may have (and he describes his privilege at some length in Eccl 2:4–9), there is, ultimately, a limit to what he can do or control. In Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth is a *witness* of

[1] This study uses the term 'Ecclesiastes' in reference to the book and 'Qoheleth' in reference to the character in the book. In my study, I read Ecclesiastes as literature. Qoheleth refers to the narrator/character in the book. I do not claim Qoheleth is a historical figure.

[2] The meaning of the term 'bystander' varies, ranging from neutral to negative connotations and denotations. I will discuss this fully in Chapter 3. For the moment, 'bystander' refers to a person watching something that is going on but who has not yet decided whether to take any action.

[3] The book of Job is rather more popular than the book of Ecclesiastes when it comes to examinations of suffering or trauma. The reason for this may seem obvious: at the centre of the book of Job, after all, is the eponymous protagonist who is righteous but suffers a series of awful calamities. I am not drawn to Job for my trauma-informed reading because I find the restoration at the end of Job unrealistic and unsatisfying. This is why I am directing my trauma study to Ecclesiastes, another wisdom text in the Hebrew Bible. My reasons will be expounded more fully in Chapter 2.

trauma, unlike Job who is primarily a *victim*[4] of trauma; witnessing trauma, I argue, is also traumatising, and this will be central to the bystander approach I develop. There are also many terms relating to emotion in the text of Ecclesiastes, indicating that Qoheleth is *affect*-ed by what he sees. Consequently, I shall put forward that affect studies and trauma studies are both highly relevant for reading Ecclesiastes.

Qoheleth is a witness in Ecclesiastes, and there are also witnesses in the book of Job, such as Job's friends, who accuse Job of suffering because of his sin. Qoheleth, however, *feels with* sufferers. The book of Ecclesiastes, I will argue, through the perspective of the bystander, facilitates empathy. This empathy, moreover, is enhanced by Qoheleth's thought and critical commentary. My case is that Ecclesiastes includes affect, evidence of trauma, bystander witness accounts, empathy for sufferers, and critical reflection. Furthermore, the book can engage readers in complex ways and facilitate critical empathy and active bystanding. For this reason, I argue, affect and trauma studies alone are not enough to navigate the complicated content in Ecclesiastes or to nurture its capacity to guide readers towards empathy. Therefore, I develop a three-pronged approach—combining affect studies, trauma studies, and the bystander approach—which I connect with critical empathy to read Ecclesiastes with positive

[4] There is an ongoing debate about how to refer to people who have experienced trauma, especially women who have experienced sexual violence. The term 'victim' usually suggests that the person is weak, passive, still trapped in the traumatic experience, whereas the term 'survivor' presents that the person is strong, active, has overcome the trauma through their resilience and agency. See Jennifer L. Dunn, '"Victims" and "Survivors": Emerging Vocabularies of Motive for "Battered Women Who Stay",' *Sociological Inquiry* 75, no. 1 (2005): 1–30, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2005.00110.x; Shalini Mittal and Tushar Singh, 'Victim or Survivor: Perceived Identity,' *Psyber News* 9, no. 1 (2018): 48–52; Sandra Schwark and Gerd Bohner, 'Sexual Violence—"Victim" or "Survivor": News Images Affect Explicit and Implicit Judgments of Blame,' *Violence Against Women* 25, no. 12 (2019): 1491–1509, https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218820202.
Although the term 'survivor' can acknowledge their strength, resilience and agency, it may place all the responsibilities of recovery on them and downplay the lasting impacts of trauma. In their studies, Michael Papendick and Gerd Bohner argue that the term 'survivor' cannot be regarded as universally advantageous. See detailed discussion in Michael Papendick and Gerd Bohner, '"Passive Victim—Strong Survivor"? Perceived Meaning of Labels Applied to Women Who Were Raped', *PLoS One* 12, no. 5 (2017): e0177550, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177550.
In this essay, I use the term 'victim' rather than 'survivor,' not to suggest weakness or passivity of the person, nor to diminish individual's bravery and resilience. I use the term to highlight the enduring and incurable nature of trauma. I do not regard trauma as a post-event status; rather, it is an incurable wound embedded. In English, there is no other term that present this as precisely as 'victim.' I also emphasise the traumatic experience itself—particularly the period during which bystanders are present, witnessing the suffering of individual before victim's resilience takes place.

intentionality. I will, in places, illustrate the effectiveness of this with comparisons to the book of Job.

Review of Studies on Ecclesiastes

Before I turn to recent developments in biblical studies that incorporate affect and trauma, let me review some of the milestones in Ecclesiastes scholarship. Amid the multitude of scholarly works that have been done on Ecclesiastes, numerous interpreters have attempted to distil and characterise the key theme (or themes) of this text, but such attempts also acknowledge the difficulty of the task.[5]

Alongside identifying and investigating the central theme of Ecclesiastes, numerous interpreters have attempted to defend the coherence and internal integrity of the text; but such attempts likewise tend to accentuate the existence of contradictions and complexities.[6] In his book, Jimyung Kim deals with contradictions in Ecclesiastes by drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory and providing a reading that does not seek to harmonise these contradictions.[7] In sum, most of the effort in Ecclesiastes studies focuses on looking for coherence and integrity. This effort reflects that any agreement on these topics is elusive. Instead, scholarship centred on unifying themes, or on coherence and internal integrity, illustrates above all that Ecclesiastes is *not* orderly, neat, or easy to categorise.

---

[5] Three examples of key themes in major works of Ecclesiastes scholarship are 1) the absurdity of life: see, for example, Michael V. Fox, 'The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 3 (1986): 409–27, https://doi.org/10.2307/3260510; Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 18C (New York: Doubleday, 1997); 2) aging and death: see, for example, James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987); Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998); and 3) the quest for meaning: see, for example, Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 71 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989); Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012).

[6] While I am focusing here on Kim, other examples of studies that accentuate contradiction and complexity in Ecclesiastes include Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*; Katharine J. Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New*, Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013).

[7] Jimyung Kim, *Reanimating Qohelet's Contradictory Voices: Studies of Open-Ended Discourse on Wisdom in Ecclesiastes*, Biblical Interpretation Series 166 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

Though there are difficulties in terms of identifying a key theme or overarching coherence and internal integrity in Ecclesiastes, this does not mean the text cannot be interpreted as a whole, or synchronically.[8] Michael V. Fox, for example, argues that Ecclesiastes can indeed be read 'as a single, well-integrated composition.'[9] He, too, acknowledges disruptive features, like the shift from first to third person (see 1:2; 7:27; 12:8, and in the epilogue). Fox rejects the assumption that such disruptions are written or edited by a different hand, and he reads them with deliberation in connection with the rest of Qoheleth's words.[10] Fox identifies the third-person portions as being narrated by the one whom he calls the frame-narrator; he reads Qoheleth and the frame-narrator as literary personas. Their voices and the interplay of their voices are used deliberately, Fox argues, as literary devices.

Fox attributes the multiple personas and voices to an implied author. As he defines it, 'An implied author is the voice behind the voices that speak in a work of literature, the person whose feelings, ideas and values are ultimately to be conveyed.'[11] This concept of implied author allows us to perceive not so much Qoheleth's voice—after all, we cannot know *who* he was, or even *if* he was—but a glimpse of the world in which the text came into being.

This reminds us to listen to the interplay of voices (including their contradictions); to observe how the implied author portrays these personas' feelings, ideas, and values; and to understand why they might be presented in such a way. I will go on to read Ecclesiastes as a whole and to treat Qoheleth as the implied author, who may possibly be an individual but more probably a collective of people. As Fox illustrates, the voice of the frame-narrator is also part of the implied author, so the implied author would not include a single individual's voice but rather the feelings, ideas, and values of a people who share a common experience. I will therefore analyse the feelings, ideas, and values in Ecclesiastes as those of a collective of people. In

[8] Russell Meek and David Beldman's book provides a list of publications that interpret Ecclesiastes using different methodological and hermeneutical approaches. See Russell L. Meek and David J. H. Beldman, *A Classified Bibliography on Ecclesiastes* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 95–98.
[9] Michael V Fox, 'Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet,' *Hebrew Union College Annual* 48 (1977): 83, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23506912.
[10] Fox, 'Frame-Narrative and Composition,' 90–91.
[11] Fox, 'Frame-Narrative and Composition,' 104.

Chapter 1, I will introduce the methodology that I will apply when analysing these feelings and ideas.

Approaching Ecclesiastes from Readers' Contexts

Ecclesiastes, alongside the books of Proverbs and Job, is generally regarded by biblical scholars as Hebrew Bible wisdom literature. Katharine Dell aptly describes wisdom literature as a long-standing and distinctive tradition.[12] But in this thesis, classifying the genre of Ecclesiastes is not my focus. In addition, scholars generally agree that Ecclesiastes does not conform to a single genre.[13] Even Tremper Longman III, who firmly connects Ecclesiastes with fictional Akkadian autobiographies, acknowledges that assigning Ecclesiastes to any ancient Near Eastern genre only adds unhelpfully to reconstructing its reception.[14] Stuart Weeks, too, reminds us that genres are modern constructs developed through the interpretation of ancient texts.[15] I read Ecclesiastes synchronically (as a whole) and consciously from my context; I am not going to investigate issues of chronology, such as provenance, authorship, source and redaction history, or date and circumstances of canonisation. The question I am asking as I read Ecclesiastes is 'How does the Bible speak about trauma and what does it say?' One precedent for this approach comes from Dell, who offers a new interpretation of Ecclesiastes by exploring readers' contexts rather than focusing primarily on early debates that focus more on why and how Ecclesiastes was canonised, or on issues such as authorship, possibilities of Hellenistic influence, or the internal contradictions of the book.[16] The interpretations Dell introduces in her book include an ecological reading, a liberationist or postcolonial reading, and a feminist reading. These readings each arise from readers' motivations to search in the Bible for what interests or concerns them, and

[12] Katharine J. Dell, 'Wisdom Literature', in *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Leo G. Perdue (John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 429, https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405166560.ch25.
[13] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 28; Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 153–55.
[14] Tremper Longman III, 'Israelite Genres in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context', in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 193.
[15] Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020), 91.
[16] Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes*.

this is determined by their context. Hence, as we live in a time of eco-crisis, ecological readings come to the fore.[17]

These varied contextual readings do not necessarily imply that the book is all things to all people. I do, however, concede that who we are and what shapes us and the world we live in has bearing on how we read and draw meaning from texts. Given the Bible's standing, particularly in faith communities, as well as its canonicity, seeking guidance and meaning from its words remains an ongoing practice. There are an increasing number of perspectives used by biblical interpreters: postcolonial criticism develops readers' awareness of colonialism and its ongoing impact on those colonised; womanist criticism develops readers' awareness of the positionality of Black women, often in contradistinction to white feminist criticism; and queer interpretation raises awareness of unfixed gender and diverse sexuality. I come to the Bible, particularly Ecclesiastes, from the perspective of both scholarship and faith, and I read the biblical text with mindfulness to my situational context. As such, I am constructing a new interpretational perspective motivated by my interest as a reader and by trauma.

I have experienced firsthand one of the conventional Christian pastoral practices that attempts to explain away trauma by endorsing that a traumatic experience or event is 'God's plan.' Such a practice expects me to 'leave traumatic memories behind' as soon as possible, or to cease mentioning past traumatic experiences and return to the grateful life model of Christians that foregrounds grace. But I have found that traumatic memory lingers, leaves a scar, and shapes identity on both individual and community levels. On account of the risk of exacerbating trauma and pain, this scar cannot and should not be denied or suppressed. As knowledge expands, change and adaptation are

[17] Scholars reflect on different appeals to the readings of the Bible that have been made in light of environmental ethics and ecological theology. See David G. Horrell et al., eds., *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark, 2010); Hilary Marlow and Mark Harris, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*, Oxford Handbooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022). Marie Turner examines Ecclesiastes and provides an ecological reading of it that suggests insights into how biblical wisdom literature can be used to respond to the environmental challenges in the present day. See Marie Turner, *Ecclesiastes: An Earth Bible Commentary; Qoheleth's Eternal Earth*, Earth Bible Commentary Series (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017). On the other hand, Kivatsi J. Kavusa critically evaluates the application of ecological hermeneutics to biblical texts. He reminds readers that the biblical texts were formulated in a world without modern ecological concerns. The modern hermeneutic therefore builds up an enriching dialogue with the ancient texts, rather than delivering a dictative interpretation of the texts. See Kivatsi J. Kavusa, 'Ecological Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Biblical Texts Yesterday, Today and Onwards: Critical Reflection and Assessment,' *Old Testament Essays* 32, no. 1 (2019), 229–55, https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2019/v32n1a13.

necessary and restorative. While my investigation of the Bible centres trauma, it does not seek from the text a clinical or therapeutic solution, either for traumatised individuals or communities, or for people with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who are hoping to disentangle traumatic memory from a traumatising event.[18]

Among the vast amount of literature on interpretations of Ecclesiastes, trauma readings of the text are still relatively rare, but some have begun to emerge.[19] I will be addressing this gap, demonstrating how trauma studies can be effectively and meaningfully incorporated into reading Ecclesiastes and to show how this kind of reading can shed light on the text. In the next section, I will first discuss how trauma studies has been widely applied to biblical prophetic books in particular; and then I will summarise how trauma studies has, albeit less commonly, been incorporated into readings of Ecclesiastes.

Review of Trauma Studies Applied in Biblical Studies

Application of Trauma Theory/Trauma Studies in the Study of the Hebrew Bible

The entry on trauma theory in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* (2013) indicates the growing influence of trauma theory on biblical studies in the early twenty-first century.[20] The use of trauma theory in biblical studies often focuses on reading biblical books, particularly those relating to the exile. Prominent examples are

[18] As PTSD is classified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illnesses* (*DSM*), traumatised persons are often assumed to be suffering from PTSD and have to go through medical and/or psychological treatment as a cure for their trauma. For a critique of PTSD and the *DSM*, see Bonnie Burstow, 'A Critique of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the DSM,' *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 45, no. 4 (2005): 429–45, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167805280265.

[19] There are various publications about Ecclesiastes and suffering. See Meek and Beldman, *Classified Bibliography on Ecclesiastes*, 161–62; Arthur Jan Keefer, *Ecclesiastes and the Meaning of Life in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). For Ecclesiastes and trauma, see Jennie Barbour, *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Philip Browning Helsel, 'Shared Pleasure to Soothe the Broken Spirit: Collective Trauma and Qoheleth,' in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 85–104; Alexiana Fry, 'Rationalizing the Irrational: Trauma and Ecclesiastes 7:1–14,' paper presented at the SBL Midwest Regional Meeting, Notre Dame, Indiana, 7–9 February 2020.

[20] David G. Garber, 'Trauma Theory,' in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/acref:obso/9780199832262.001.0001.

Lamentations,[21] the book of Ezekiel,[22] and the book of Jeremiah.[23] These biblical books, which are the products of the exilic period, are read as trauma literature, or as literature reflecting the experience of trauma. For example, L. Juliana M. Claassens identifies the Bible as trauma literature based on 'the fact that ancient Israel found themselves repeatedly invaded and occupied by one empire after another.' Biblical literature, she continues, emerged from and reflects and responds to such traumatic events; it is therefore a kind of trauma literature.[24]

Before trauma studies was applied to biblical studies, psychological approaches had already left their mark. David G. Garber summarises the background of trauma theory and locates its emergence in biblical studies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; he also points to affinities with the development of modern psychology.[25] Psychology is the study on the human mind and feelings, while psychoanalysis, founded by Sigmund Freud, focuses on examining one's unconscious mental processes, which may lead to mental disorders. Garber points out that the burgeoning development of psychoanalysis led to a form of biblical criticism that focused on psychoanalytic and diagnostic approaches to biblical texts, specifically to explain the anomalous behaviour of the prophets. Some of the more notable (albeit unconventional) examples include Edwin C. Broome's suggestion that Ezekiel displays behaviours consistent with paranoid schizophrenia and David J. Halperin's subsequent revisiting of these earlier attempts to 'diagnose' Ezekiel with symptoms indicative of unresolved trauma resulting from sexual abuse in childhood.[26]

---

[21] Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Linafelt considers Lamentations as 'survival literature'—a work written by survivors and giving voice to suffering.

[22] For example, David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993) uses a psychoanalytic approach to read the book of Ezekiel as an account of the trauma of an abused individual; see also D. M. Daschke, 'Desolate Among Them: Loss, Fantasy, and Recovery in the Book of Ezekiel,' *American Imago* 56, no. 2 (1999): 105–32, https://www.jstor.org/stable/26304318; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 75–104.

[23] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011).

[24] L. Juliana Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive: Biblical and Contemporary Trauma in Conversation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020), 3.

[25] David G. Garber, 'Trauma Theory and Biblical Studies,' *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 1 (2015): 24–44, https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X14561176.

[26] Edwin C. Broome, 'Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65, no. 3 (1946): 277–92, https://doi.org/10.2307/3262666; Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*.

Garber also observes that there was a shift away from those psychoanalytic diagnoses (and Halperin's sexual approach), and some scholars turned to studying post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the psychology of sufferers after their traumatic experiences. He suggests that one possible push factor for this change was that some biblical scholars were reluctant to diagnose historical figures using modern-day psychoanalytical criteria.[27] Subsequently, trauma theory was applied to biblical accounts with a focus on the experience of exile because scholars influenced by psychological biblical criticism began to read the literature created by the exilic community as survival or trauma literature. Hence, we have trauma readings of Lamentations, the book of Ezekiel, the book of Jeremiah, and certain psalms. Since the trauma theory applied to biblical accounts began alongside the development of modern psychology, it has been in the shadow of psychoanalysis and diagnostic approaches. The discussion of trauma in biblical literature may therefore not have been fully and comprehensively explored outside of these two approaches.

How Trauma Studies Enhances Interpretation of Biblical Texts

In recent decades, the rise of trauma studies contributions to biblical studies is evident in both academic conference proceedings and publications, particularly since the second decade of the twenty-first century. The international conference 'Trauma and Traumatization in and Beyond Biblical Literature,' held at Aarhus University, Denmark, in June 2012, is one example. An important book about trauma and biblical studies, titled *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond* (2014), is a compilation of papers from the conference. Furthermore, papers engaging with trauma have been presented as part of several programme units at the annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL).[28] There is also a programme unit titled 'Biblical Literature and the Hermeneutics

[27] I infer a pull-factor from the fact that the many wars in the mid-twentieth century brought academic attention to trauma. We know that understandings of PTSD originated from veterans' 'shell shock' experiences after returning from the Vietnam War. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) added PTSD to the third edition of its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-III*) in 1980. See American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-III*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1980).

[28] There is a table in the appendix of *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, which lists the SBL programme units whose session listings included the keyword 'trauma.' There has been a total of forty-nine cumulative units over a period of four years. See Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, eds.,

of Trauma' included at the SBL annual meeting. Again, (some of) these presentations have resulted in publications, such as the multiauthor volume *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (2016). After these significant early volumes, other works have been published, such as *Writing and Reading to Survive* by Claassens (2020), *Discovering the Religious Dimension of Trauma* by Caralie Cooke (2022), and *Trauma Talks in the Hebrew Bible* by Alexiana Fry (2023), but the earlier two volumes represent particularly formative and interdisciplinary discussions among international scholars.[29] *Trauma and Traumatization* reviews trauma epidemiology as evidenced in a range of disciplines, including psychology, psychiatry, the history of medicine, the history of Christianity, Classics, literary studies, cultural studies, and sociology. *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma* is another wide-ranging collection, this time directed more squarely at the impact of trauma studies on biblical studies.

In the next paragraphs, I will illustrate how trauma studies enhances interpretation of biblical texts, with particular emphasis on the contributions in Boase and Frechette's book.

Boase and Frechette's edited collection of essays on trauma readings of the Bible is arranged in three sections: 1) between individual and collective dimensions of trauma; 2) new insights into old questions; and 3) survival, recovery, and resilience in and through text.[30] Before going over these contributions, let me emphasise the bridging of ancient and present contexts that trauma studies provides for the (traumatised) reader of past and contemporary worlds. Boase and Frechette find that trauma studies can bring sharp focus to the 'relationship between traumatic experience and both the

---

Bible Through the Lens of Trauma, Semeia Studies 86 (Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 249–50, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd. According to the programme book available online, during the 2023 Annual Meeting, there were fifteen papers with the keyword 'trauma' in their title, which were presented across ten sessions. See 'SBL Meetings and Events: 2023 Annual Meeting On-Line Program Book,' Society of Biblical Literature, accessed 13 April 2024, https://www.sbl-site.org/meetings/Congresses_ProgramBook.aspx?MeetingId=43. I have put together a table listing the programme units, speakers, and titles of these papers in Appendix I.

[29] Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive*; Caralie Cooke, ed., *Discovering the Religious Dimension of Trauma: Trauma Literature and the Joseph Story*, Biblical Interpretation Series 202 (Leiden: Brill, 2022); Alexiana Fry, *Trauma Talks in the Hebrew Bible: Speech Act Theory and Trauma Hermeneutics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2023).

[30] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*.

production and appropriation of texts.'[31] Throughout their edited book, they attempt to illustrate that trauma studies illuminates understanding of both the production of biblical texts in their ancient contexts and the appropriation of the texts in present readers' contexts.[32] Claassens is one commentator who recognises how trauma reading can outline 'various aspects of text production and text reception in the context of trauma.'[33] In her recent monograph, *Writing and Reading to Survive*, she continues to pursue this technique by reading biblical narratives synoptically with contemporary trauma narratives, thereby showing how textual reception in the context of trauma unlocks new insights for reading the Hebrew Bible, which inspire ethical reflection on the present world.

This affective connection between the contexts of ancient authors and present readers establishes a firm platform for trauma studies and functions on multiple levels. First, through the imagery of trauma, trauma studies brings vivid and emotionally engaging new insights into historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation. Kathleen O'Connor describes this as a shift from investigating the history of composition to exploring relationships with readers.[34] This shift does not trivialise or reject the importance of the texts' compositional history but moves a step forward from it. Such a trauma-informed reading approach travels across the bridge that connects the contexts of ancient authors and present readers, with the emphasis moving past the text's production (the author) and towards the text's reception (reader). This shift is helpful for reinterpreting previous problematic readings and for gaining a fuller sense of the text's implications for readers. For example, in her essay, Margaret S. Odell attempts to resolve the incoherence generated by conventional interpretations of Ezekiel

[31] Christopher G. Frechette and Elizabeth Boase, 'Defining "Trauma" as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation,' in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, Semeia Studies 86 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 13.
[32] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*.
[33] Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive*, 3.
[34] Kathleen M. O'Connor, 'How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies,' in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else K. Holt, Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 2:219.

16:20–21 as a text about child sacrifice.[35] Such an example shows how trauma studies enriches the existing critical method by bringing new meaning to some difficult texts.

Second, the nature of individual and collective trauma provides multi-dimensionality for reading biblical texts in the contexts of trauma, both ancient and contemporary. For example, Claassens's reading of the story of Rachel alongside contemporary literature, *The Light Between Oceans* by M. L. Stedman, enriches the biblical interpretation and sheds light on women's reproductive loss in present contexts.[36] Though the book of Genesis tells us of Rachel's infertility (Gen 29:31–30:24), a trauma-informed interpretation can foster theological, ethical, and pastoral discussions about people suffering infertility and reproductive loss, including both women and men. Besides the traumas experienced by the individuals depicted in the text (e.g., Rachel and her trauma of experiencing infertility; Leah and her trauma of experiencing spousal rejection), collective trauma is also connoted, such as the story of infertility associated with the quest for children to secure continuation of the Israelites in the historical context of the exile.[37]

Third, a trauma-informed connection between the contexts of ancient authors and present readers allows the texts to function as accounts of survival, resilience, and recovery in response to trauma. The appropriation of the texts allows readers to reflect on traumatic experience without engaging solely, or primarily, within the confines of their own experience. Gerald O. West demonstrates this through his contextual Bible study (CBS) of Job 3 in collaboration with people living with HIV, and he shows how both the texts and the reading process can facilitate healing.[38] The main benefits raised by West about the value of a CBS on Job 3 that focuses on trauma, are: 1) it brings readers together who have a shared source of trauma (HIV); 2) it gives them imagery and vocabulary (from the biblical text) to express their trauma; and 3) it equips them

---

[35] Margaret S. Odell, 'Fragments of Traumatic Memory: Ṣalmê Zākār and Child Sacrifice in Ezekiel 16:15–22,' in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, Semeia Studies 86 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 107–24.

[36] Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive*, 47–71; M. L. Stedman, *The Light Between Oceans* (New York: Scribner, 2012).

[37] Claassens presumes that the story of Rachel and Leah was finalised during the exilic or post-exilic period. See Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive*, 91–92.

[38] Gerald O. West, 'Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV,' in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, Semeia Studies 86 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 209–30.

with the capacity to engage in biblical interpretation. So, bringing in trauma studies to biblical studies in the context of the CBS offers multiple benefits to readers. In a nutshell, it draws attention to biblical voices that resonate with traumatised individuals, and it promotes the psychosocial application of biblical texts in current contexts. The collective nature of the CBS reading process establishes connections between readers who have a shared experience of trauma—in this case, their HIV status—and reminds them that they are not alone.

Review of Trauma Studies Applied in the Study of Ecclesiastes

Among the various applications of trauma studies presented in Boase and Frechette's volume, Ecclesiastes does not receive much attention. Perhaps this is because Ecclesiastes is different from the biblical books that tend to be the focus of trauma studies, namely, biblical narratives about traumatic events and suffering victims. Ecclesiastes does not include any description of traumatic events, such as the fall of Jerusalem or the exile to Babylon; nor does it contain explicit depiction of personal suffering, ill health, or loss. In contrast, the book of Job provides a full account of Job's ordeals and suffering (Job 1–2). Traumatic events happen to Job from the moment that the satan orchestrates the killing of Job's children, destroys his property, and inflicts loathsome sores on his body. Another example of a traumatic event takes place in 2 Samuel 13, where Tamar is raped. In the case of both Job and 2 Samuel 13, it is easy to identify the existence of trauma. But describing Ecclesiastes as trauma literature is, arguably, more questionable, as the book gives no details of any identifiable traumatic event. Although the theme of suffering is raised in Ecclesiastes, it is inadequately developed to qualify as trauma. And this is reflected in scholarly studies, which tend not to use the language of trauma when exploring how suffering is depicted in Ecclesiastes. Arthur Jan Keefer, for example, studies the meaning of life in Ecclesiastes and explores the causal relationship between suffering in life and the meaning of life.[39] He situates Ecclesiastes within ancient Mediterranean and Hebrew canons, citing psychological explanations of meaning, coherence, significance, and the purpose or meaning of life. Keefer reads Ecclesiastes alongside Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Greek texts; he then proceeds to find the concepts of suffering and meaning of life in other books of the

[39] Keefer, *Ecclesiastes and the Meaning of Life*.

Hebrew Bible. He recognises the suffering of Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes, but he does not classify this suffering as trauma. The absence of any description of traumatic events in Ecclesiastes might make the connection between trauma and Ecclesiastes more doubtful.

In addition, the uncertain and disputed dating of Ecclesiastes makes it difficult to correlate the text with the historical trauma recorded in other biblical books. Prominent examples of historical traumatic events are the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile.[40] David Janzen applies trauma theory to the Deuteronomistic History,[41] and he further applies it to examine how the books of Kings and Lamentations, which were composed in the wake of the same traumatic events of 587 BCE, react to these events in very different ways.[42] These works demonstrate that the dating and background of the books can provide information about a traumatic event and establish an entry point for the application of trauma theory to the interpretation of biblical texts. However, the uncertain date of the composition of Ecclesiastes, which is unlikely to have been written by Solomon (whose reign was c. 975–926 BCE), and the unclear references to any historical events in the book provide little evidence for identifying the context or for linking it with specific traumatic events. This might be said to hinder trauma-informed approaches to Ecclesiastes; nevertheless, I will demonstrate the value and yield of applying trauma studies to this wisdom book.

Addressing the Gap in Collective Trauma Readings of Ecclesiastes

As already stated, Ecclesiastes, unlike the book of Job, lacks a narrative and details of traumatic experiences or events that befall Qoheleth or anyone else. This could be one reason why it has received less attention from trauma studies scholars, or from those applying psychoanalytic approaches to study the individual trauma of characters in

[40] For example, in the book of Jeremiah, the imprisonment of Jeremiah (20:1–2), the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (52:12–23), and the people exiled to Babylon (52:24–30) might cause trauma. O'Connor (*Jeremiah*) has interpreted the texts in a trauma-informed way. See also Elizabeth Boase, *Trauma Theories: Refractions in the Book of Jeremiah*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 110 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2024).
[41] David Janzen, *The Violent Gift: Trauma's Subversion of the Deuteronomistic History's Narrative*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 561 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2012).
[42] David Janzen, *Trauma and the Failure of History: Kings, Lamentations, and the Destruction of Jerusalem*, Semeia Studies 94 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvkwnn9p.

biblical texts. The book's unconfirmed historical context and its disputable dating also conspire to exclude Ecclesiastes from collective trauma studies, which, again, tend to focus on historical traumas, predominantly the exile. However, isolated exceptions exist: Jennifer Barbour studies Ecclesiastes from the perspective of cultural memory, and Philip Browning Helsel examines collective trauma and Qoheleth;[43] both studies suggest there is some potential and precedent for the study of Ecclesiastes and trauma. Helsel agrees with Barbour (now Grillo) that Ecclesiastes was written in a situation of 'colonial oppression' and collective trauma. He emphasises a stage of 'broken-spiritedness' in the book, rather than a 'resolution of trauma.'[44] He also attempts to demonstrate that a disruption of interpersonal relationships is one of the themes of Ecclesiastes, and he suggests that Qoheleth's repeated appeals to shared pleasures are his attempt to redeem these disrupted relationships. Helsel's contribution not only associates collective trauma with Ecclesiastes but also explains shared pleasure as a means of responding to trauma. Although he does not explain in detail how the concepts of collective trauma are influenced by postcolonial thought, he highlights a main difference between individual trauma and collective trauma: collective trauma is more chronic and has no fixed starting and end points. In this light, other themes in Ecclesiastes, such as the responses of traumatised individuals within the community facing chronic trauma, can be examined under the lens of collective trauma. Encouraged by this, I, too, am going to study Ecclesiastes using the lens of collective trauma rather than individual trauma.

Although I share Helsel's view that Ecclesiastes raises themes relating to collective trauma, I do not agree with his assumptions about the dating and context of the book. Helsel acknowledges the scholarly disagreement concerning the dating of Ecclesiastes, but he argues that the book is written 'long after the Babylonian exile in a situation of ongoing subjugation to empire as the Israelite people sought to understand their relationships to God, to one another, and to the land.'[45] Helsel follows Barbour's idea that Ecclesiastes is written as a reflection on and response to colonial oppression. While this may be so, I see value in the point of caution raised by Martin Shields that

[43] Barbour, *Story of Israel*; Helsel, 'Shared Pleasure.'
[44] Helsel borrows the term 'broken-spiritedness,' which was coined by psychologist John P. Wilson and refers to 'massive disruption that interferes with sources of meaning and the sacred, challenging the power of religion' ('Shared Pleasure,' 85).
[45] Helsel, 'Shared Pleasure,' 91.

such an insistence on historical setting 'presents a significant difficulty for any analysis of cultural memory which necessarily depends on the ability to sort texts chronologically ... As a result there is a danger that, by placing [the figure of] Qohelet in a specific historical context, one will tend to find links to that context and overlook links to other possible contexts.'[46] In other words, rigorous focus on rootedness in and reflection on specific historical circumstances is liable to lock interpretation into a (disputable) past, rather than focusing on multiple reading possibilities, including now and in future. It restricts the multiple layers of the text's meaning, including its meaning in present settings. In this thesis, I apply affect theory and bystander theory in an effort to amplify the application of trauma studies to the interpretation of Ecclesiastes and also to make the book powerfully relevant and meaningful, as well as affectively compelling, right up to and in the present.

Although, in this thesis, I do not strictly follow contextual Bible study (CBS), I adopt its essence of reading consciously from one's positionality. My approach develops from a strong awareness of who I am and how my positionality shapes my reading—what some might call a reader-response approach. Others might refer to this by different terms, such as eisegesis. While biblical studies can give me lots of background information about an ancient text, its historical context, and its implied readers, I put more effort and priority on a contemporary reader's response to biblical passages. Let me add that, as a public text, the Bible is often encountered by a general audience who may not have much knowledge of Christianity and its historical roots. I am interested in how readers perceive a biblical passage before or even without knowing such historical and contextual information. In this thesis, I will include some reference to traditional interpretations in the footnotes to acknowledge established readings, while maintaining my primary focus on a reader-centred interpretation.

[46] Martin A. Shields critiques Barbour's decision to opt for a late post-exilic date for Ecclesiastes with emphasis on the impact of Greek thought. Shields queries the existence of the Royal Autobiography genre in Greek literature and the existence of the royal court in Jerusalem during the post-exilic period. See Martin A. Shields, "Review of *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory*, by Jennie Barbour," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 13 (2013), https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2013.v13.r25.

The Journey of My Shifts of Perspective When Reading Ecclesiastes

When I am asked why I chose to study Ecclesiastes, trauma, and bystandership, my answer, inevitably, takes a retrospective view, which may distort my memory and my experience of some of the decision-making processes. My research began with my interest in both the book of Ecclesiastes and trauma. At first, I read Ecclesiastes as an unfinished self-dialogue of whiny self-pity. The speaker, Qoheleth, implies there is no one who understands him—but this sure does not silence him!

The phrase 'better than' appears constantly in the book. The sense of things being better (or worse) than—that is, of comparison and deficiency—is prominent. This appears concentratedly in Ecclesiastes 7, which includes thirteen out of forty-five occurrences of the phrase. Some of these 'better than' statements seem odd and counterintuitive. For example, Qoheleth states that 'it is better going to a house of mourning than going to a house of feasting' (7:2a). A house of feasting seems better than/preferable to a house of mourning—it is joyful, rather than sad. But from a trauma-informed perspective, the house of mourning is 'better' because it acknowledges pain, sadness, and trauma, rather than repressing it. Ecclesiastes 7:3 also states that sorrow/anger (כעס) is better than laughter. The verse expresses acceptance of and even legitimates the presence of sorrow or anger, rather than treating them as less welcome emotions compared to laughter. Ecclesiastes 7:8 encourages hope and patience by saying that the end of a thing is better than its beginning, and that being patient in spirit is better than being proud in spirit. These examples illustrate how a trauma-informed reading can make sense of some of these apparently inverse statements; put differently, they reflect a traumatised perspective (because trauma responses also often 'do not make sense'). These types of consolation and observations in trauma studies also align with my own experience of being a family in mourning. I find that the 'better than' statements console me with their acknowledgement of unfortunate incidents and the need for companionship. Such acknowledgement is better than spiritual 'bypassing' responses like 'it is what God wills' or 'it is time to let it go' or 'you'll be smiling again soon.' This kind of response is damaging to traumatised individuals, because it denies and diverts what they are feeling.

My interest in trauma started in 2010. Many relatives and friends passed away, one after another, in that same year. Some of them died suddenly, without warning. The

haze of this has lingered. I experienced for myself how the pain of bereavement and calamity attaches itself to a person. The wound takes a long time to heal and occasionally becomes inflamed, leaving newer scars even after time passes and well after the event that initiated the trauma. Then, a few years later, after I had begun to deal with my personal pain a little better, the community in my city collectively faced painful incidents and loss of freedom. Many people were physically injured, and there were also those who witnessed what happened and were confronted with a reversal of what they had previously considered right and wrong. As a member of the community, I had to face trauma again, but this time it was a collective trauma, and I was in the position of bystander.

Whether facing trauma individually or in a community, I felt powerless either to make a change or to revert back to how things had been in the past, before the trauma occurred. I felt affinity with Qoheleth, who was chattering incessantly in Ecclesiastes and in a state of powerlessness. Qoheleth's attitude of insisting on the righteous cause brought me a little affirmation and empathy. Therefore, it was from this position of personal trauma and collective trauma that I turned towards researching Ecclesiastes and trauma by asking whether and how people might feel consoled and accompanied by reading this text. With its inconclusive ending that does not offer a neat way of tying up all loose ends, as we see in Job's fairytale-like ending, Ecclesiastes strikes me as more in line with my experience of reality. Reality poses dilemmas and puzzles to be solved or just lived with in the knowledge that they are intractable. When I read Ecclesiastes, I find that I am like Qoheleth: seeing injustice happen, not just once but over and over again. Although the situation does not change, Qoheleth does not become numb because of it, and he still points out persistently that circumstances are unfair. He chatters and attempts to give a record of what he sees and how things could be better, rather than explaining why it happens. He is not like an onlooker who looks away or becomes indifferent.

Reading the Bible with trauma or using the tools of trauma theory is not an innovative methodology. Readings exist that identify biblical personae as sufferers of PTSD, or as otherwise responding to the traumatic historical background of the Bible. I am unsatisfied with the concept of PTSD because my own bereavement experience teaches me that being labelled, whether as a PTSD sufferer or as a bereaved family,

leads to isolation from those considered ‘normal’ and an expectation that mandatory recovery will occur sooner rather than later. Labelling relies excessively on a person’s diagnosis after they experience a traumatic event; meanwhile, it reinforces a pathologising mechanism. Identifying biblical personas as sufferers of PTSD builds up a gap between these personas and ‘normal’ readers. The reader is encouraged to read the text as though it were a medical report, diagnose the biblical persona, and express amazement at their differences from the norm. With regard to reading biblical texts in light of their traumatic historical context, this approach is difficult to apply to Ecclesiastes, given the book’s uncertain dating and its absence of concrete details about specific traumatic events. However, the uncertain historical background of Ecclesiastes does not mean it is distanced from a traumatic situation. The book suggests there are emotions embedded therein. Rather than studying whether the literary figure Qoheleth is a sufferer of PTSD or analysing the text’s historical background, I focus on the emotions entrenched in the texts.

I started my research on trauma in Ecclesiastes by analysing the book’s terminology of emotion, paying particular attention to affect theory. Through affect theory, I located Hebrew vocabulary related to emotions. I examined words pertaining to pain, fear, anger, and sadness, as well as the notion of ‘evil,’ to understand the emotions of Qoheleth. But understanding these emotions did not help me to move forwards, because it just affirmed Qoheleth’s suffering and depicted him as a victim. Both Qoheleth and I are victims, but I could see no way out in terms of relieving the pain and moving towards empowerment. However, my study of Ecclesiastes did not lead to a dead end, even though the book does not finish with a happily-ever-after ending. I realised that Qoheleth keeps seeking solutions or a better way of living. Each time he uses the term ‘vanity,’ he empowers himself with agency to face the difficulties and his emotions. So, having understood the emotions of Qoheleth, I wanted to know more about how he could find a way to relieve his pain and empower himself. I hoped to understand what he means when he repeats some words like ‘I see,’ ‘better than,’ and ‘vanity.’ I hoped that it would help me understand how he responds to his situations and what wisdom is in this book.

However, things changed after I relocated to the United Kingdom. Before I left my home city, I saw myself as one of the victims in the community. Upon relocation, I

had some distance from this wounded community and felt less like a victim. This does not mean I no longer suffered; but I realised I was not directly at risk of state oppression, including surveillance and unwarranted arrest. Still, I suffered from the pain of knowing that others were being tortured, from the guilt of being unable to resist or mitigate their pain, and from anger at the ongoing injustice. I still remember that, when I read Hebrews 11:36–38, what stood out for me was not so much the image and the pain of being mocked and scourged but the feeling of powerlessness at *witnessing someone else* suffering in this way. More and more since my relocation, I have come to consider my identity as having changed from that of an insider to that of an outsider—from a victim to a bystander. Then, I realised that I was asking the wrong question when I attempted to read Ecclesiastes from a trauma perspective. I had made the incorrect assumption that Qoheleth was a victim of trauma, and I had searched for how he responded to his situation as a victim of trauma. Having reflected on my own identity as a bystander rather than a victim, I re-read Ecclesiastes and considered Qoheleth as a bystander as well to see how he might serve as a witness to other victims.

Later on, I audited a module on Jewish Museums and the display of cultural difference, and I joined the nationwide memorial activities on Holocaust Memorial Day. Once more, this allowed me to learn more about bystander studies, deriving as it does from Holocaust studies. There are lots of testimonies of heroic active bystanders during the Holocaust, such as Raoul Wallenberg, Sir Nicholas George Winton, and numerous unnamed ordinary people who rescued victims of the Third Reich. These exemplary active bystanders remind me of what a bystander can do and how a bystander can be transformed, by happenstance, from an ordinary person going about their life to someone who transforms someone else's life. I was also led to think about why some people do *not* intervene or act but instead are passive or indifferent. What are the reasons for different actions and non-actions? Do those who do not act go on to struggle with their decision?

Moreover, in a training workshop for tutoring and teaching at the University of Leeds, I was taught how to deal with those students who are shy and quiet and who do not participate in seminar discussion. They are in some ways the equivalent of inactive bystanders. However, their silence does not necessarily indicate indifference or ignorance. As a quiet student myself, I also have thoughts and opinions, and it may be

self-criticism that makes me hesitant to express them. But my silence does not mean I have no answer or that I intentionally isolate myself from the class. My teaching experience has taught me that some students are thoughtful but need more time to think, reflect, articulate their responses, or overcome their anxiety before speaking out. After the workshop, the unfair implications about quiet students aggrieved me and drove me to think even further about why some bystanders are passive and whether we should assume that their witness of a traumatic happening affects them any less than it does a more active bystander.

Having developed my research interests in Ecclesiastes, affect, trauma, and bystanders, I developed the idea of reading Ecclesiastes alongside trauma studies and from a bystander perspective. In this re-reading of the text, I regard Qoheleth as both an active bystander and a passive bystander, and I suggest a reading that considers Qoheleth as a traumatised bystander. Having an awareness of traumatised bystanders, I also apply critical empathy to this re-reading. By being critically empathetic to Qoheleth's passivity, I regard him as a bystander under the influence of traumatisation and explore whether his reaction as a bystander may have been affected by traumatisation. Having said that, I am not excusing Qoheleth or other passive bystanders, and nor am I legitimating any fault or indifference on their part. Instead, my study sets out to understand their response. Next, I look at what Qoheleth attempts to do and what he fails to do. A passive bystander is not simply equivalent to an onlooker who refuses to engage. Just as a quiet student is not the same as an unprepared student or a student who deliberately disrupts classroom order, a passive bystander may not act as expected, but this does not mean they are indifferent to the situation or to the people who are suffering. And although quiet students do not participate as actively in class discussions as model students, their performance—like the performance of bystanders—may be affected by different factors, such as their emotions and their trauma.

The direction of my research has changed over time in the light of my personal experience of having empathy for victims, my exploration of witnesses and active and passive bystanders, and my reflection on quiet students. I am no longer reading Ecclesiastes as trauma literature; rather, I read this book in the light of trauma studies and a bystander approach. Given the critical empathy for Qoheleth's passivity

embedded in my analysis, the re-reading may sensitise others to the impacts of traumatisation and to the bystander effect on an ordinary person who comes across people in need. Therefore, I would advocate that, whether we are referring to Qoheleth, a passive bystander, or a 'non-participating' student, we cannot simply criticise them for their inaction while ignoring their trauma and pain and being inconsiderate of the impact that other factors may have on them.

Furthermore, I propose two strategies for reading with a bystander approach. First, I understand Qoheleth as a bystander in the book of Ecclesiastes: he both acknowledges and is sometimes oddly detached from the trauma he witnesses, but we cannot assume from this that he does not care. Instead, he is possibly rendered passive by trauma. Second, I regard myself as a bystander-reader when reading the text. Reading the text as a bystander involves making decisions about how to respond throughout the reading process. Reading a biblical text as a canonical text is different from reading another form of literature, such as a novel, for instance. Reading a sacred text can (and sometimes should) motivate the reader to action. I will discuss this approach further in Chapter 3.

In the following chapters in this thesis, I argue that trauma studies may not be enough to provide a full understanding of Ecclesiastes. I therefore propose a three-pronged approach—combining affect studies, trauma studies, and the bystander approach—culminating in critical empathy to yield another reading of Ecclesiastes.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the theory of affect and present an approach to reading biblical texts that identifies trauma through the affects portrayed in the texts. First, I will briefly discuss affect and affect theory. I will also review the application of affect theory to biblical studies. Finally, I will list the affective items of vocabulary in Ecclesiastes.

In Chapter 2, I first briefly discuss trauma and trauma studies, highlighting the elusive meanings and connotations of trauma. I introduce trauma studies literature on the treatment of and recovery from trauma and its insights into the involvement of the public in trauma responses. This develops trauma readings beyond the personal level and the victim's position to include witnesses' perspectives. Then, I will also review the application of trauma studies to biblical studies. Finally, I read Ecclesiastes 4 through

the lens of trauma, regarding Qoheleth as a witness who reacts after seeing others' suffering.

In Chapter 3, I will introduce the bystander approach through its development from Holocaust studies. Then, I will review the application of the bystander approach. Finally, I will interpret Ecclesiastes from this perspective. I not only recognise Qoheleth as a bystander; I also recognise my own role as a bystander who is attempting to find meaning in Ecclesiastes. This chapter then discusses how the bystandership of a reader relates to biblical studies.

After introducing the method of identifying trauma through affect in Chapters 1 and 2 and illustrating my reading of Ecclesiastes with the bystander approach in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 introduces critical empathy from three scholarly perspectives and applies it to reading Ecclesiastes.

In my Conclusion, I summarise how my proposed reading strategy brings new insights into Ecclesiastes and what these insights are. I then explain how such a reading method also offers scope for reading other texts that have long been identified as trauma texts. This reading strategy brings depth and meaning to the ancient texts and equips readers with the skills necessary to cultivate an empathetic approach to interpreting biblical texts.

CHAPTER 1: AFFECT, AFFECT THEORY AND ECCLESIASTES

Having reviewed some of the key literature on Ecclesiastes and on trauma studies applied to Ecclesiastes, I will now look more closely at affect and trauma studies. I will explain affect and trauma in order to make the case that they are important categories for investigating Ecclesiastes. Affect and trauma are closely related to each other since a traumatic event is psychologically affective to individuals; trauma is also associated with the transmission of affect. I will first explain affect and affect theory, which will form one analytical tool for my trauma reading of Ecclesiastes. Then, I will discuss affect studies and its impact on biblical studies. Lastly, I will discuss my application of the affect approach on the study of Ecclesiastes.

What Are Affect and Affect Theory?

'Affect,' broadly speaking, is an umbrella term that covers a range of concepts, such as 'emotions, feelings, moods, passions, [and] sentiments.'[47] Hence, 'affect' can be used to describe a person's feelings in a moment in time: for example, I can say 'I am happy now' to define my affect. In a narrower sense, different affect theorists each provide definitions that have subtle distinctions. Their definitions and distinctions add up to increase the density and complexity of the theory, and this can make the matter more than a little confusing. I mainly use the concept of affect, especially with reference to Sarah Ahmed (whose work I introduce later), to trace trauma in Ecclesiastes. It is beyond the remit of this thesis to analyse the definitions of each theorist in detail. However, I will mention some of them in order to give a sense of the semantic range of 'affect' and also the range of theoretical contributions that make the abstract concept of 'affect' applicable to multiple disciplines, including biblical studies.

The four volumes of *Affect Imagery Consciousness* (1961, 1962, 1991, 1992) by Silvan S. Tomkins have undoubtedly been the foundation of affect theory.[48] It is hard to summarise the content of these four volumes, especially because 'affect,' 'imagery,' and 'consciousness' are so intertwined. In the prologue to the edition published in 2008,

[47] Andreea Deciu Ritivoi, 'Affect,' in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, ed. Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja, Routledge Companions to Literature Series (London: Routledge, 2020), 141, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351025225.
[48] Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, 4 vols. (New York: Springer, 1962–1992).

Donald L. Nathanson, the Executive Director of the Silvan S. Tomkins Institute, explains why there are no commas in the title.[49] Tomkins explained to him that this is because 'there isn't any way to separate the three interlocked concepts.' But there are two points that can be noted from Tomkins's account of affect theory. First, Tomkins argues that affects are the 'primary motivators of human behaviour'; they are emotions occurring after stimulation and followed by a response.[50] Second, Tomkins classifies nine categories of innate affects: surprise–startle, distress–anguish, anger–rage, enjoyment–joy, interest–excitement, fear–terror, shame–humiliation, dissmell, and disgust. Dissmell, a word coined by Tomkins, evolved from the inborn mechanism of rejecting and refusing to taste food that carries an unexpected and/or unacceptable odour. It represents 'the physiological mechanism underlying prejudice, in which we reject a person or a concept before trying or testing it personally.' [51]

Another dominant approach in affect theory is the philosophical theory of affect established by Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995). Deleuze's theory is first established in his work on 'sensibility,' which he outlines in *Difference and Repetition*. [52] He understands affect as the 'pre-processed sensory encounter with the world prior to ordered audible, visual, or tactile perception.'[53] Here, affect is not generated in response to a stimulation within a body but is a pre-contextual mood. One particularly notable characteristic of this approach is that affect exists prior to 'linguistic representation.' Nevertheless, known human languages have terminology that is descriptive of affect—including biblical Hebrew.

While Tomkins suggests that affect has its drives and catalysts, Deleuze locates affect prior to perception and conscious thoughts. It cannot be empirically established which of these theories is correct. Maybe it does not matter, but it is of significance that affect engages empathy and empathetic imagination. Empathy or empathetic

---

[49] Donald L. Nathanson, 'Prologue,' in *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition (Book 1)*, by Silvan Solomon Tomkins (New York: Springer, 2008), xi.
[50] Adam J. Frank and Elizabeth A. Wilson, *A Silvan Tomkins Handbook: Foundations for Affect Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 14.
[51] Nathanson, 'Prologue,' xx. See also the descriptions of the affects on pp. xv–xx.
[52] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone, 1994). The French edition of this book (*Différence et repetition*) was first published in 1968 by Presses universitaires de France.
[53] Jennifer L. Koosed and Stephen D. Moore, 'Introduction: From Affect to Exegesis,' *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 384, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02245p01.

imagination can inform one's affective state. Empathy refers to the ability to read and indeed also be affected by the feelings or situations of others. Tomkins's approach requires the 'empathiser' to be aware of what is causing their feelings of empathy. When the empathiser encounters someone who appears unhappy, they might ask that person 'What is wrong?' Deleuze's approach does not require such pre-understanding, as in the case of a counsellor who asks their client 'How do you feel?' without knowing what has happened. Deleuze's approach allows empathy or empathetic imagination to take place without the empathiser knowing the causes of their empathy. Such a pre-contextual definition of affect helps when reading a text that depicts affect because it does not require readers to have experienced the same events that are depicted in the text. It also provides space for imagining how one might experience such affect when reading the text.

Given this space for imagination, I find Deleuze's approach to affect very helpful for analysing affective terms in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in Ecclesiastes. It helps me to have a sense of these affective terms even they do not explain the underlying details, such as the stimulating event and behavioural response mentioned in Tomkins's account of affect theory. So in a way, I am taking what I got from exposure to the theory to the study of the language of affect in relation to feelings of trauma.

Affect and Affect Studies

I attempt to study affective terms in Ecclesiastes using an affect approach, rather than applying affect theory directly to my reading of the text. Such an application of the affect approach can be found in recent affect studies. As introduced in the previous section, affect theory focuses more on philosophical discussion of what affect is and how it develops. Before I discuss the application of the affect approach in biblical studies and to the reading of Ecclesiastes, I will briefly introduce Sara Ahmed's work on affect studies. Her scholarship has become widely used in biblical studies in recent years, alongside the above mentioned work on affect theory by Deleuze and Tomkins. In the edited volume *Reading with Feeling: Affect Theory and the Bible* (2019), she is cited in the introduction and all ten chapters. Ahmed's works *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (originally published in 2004) and *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) draw on

various examples to illustrate what affect is and how it works. It may be less theoretically defined compared to the works of Tomkins and Deleuze.

Ahmed's book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* is about emotions, but it does not focus on the nature of emotions in the way that Tomkins and Deleuze do. Instead, Ahmed asks a rather practical question: 'What do emotions *do*?'[54] For example, she illustrates how fear is signified through the statement 'Look, a Negro! I'm frightened!'[55] that is spoken by a white child.[56] Ahmed describes that the fear then continues working through and on the bodies of both the white child and the black person that the child is referring to. This is one of her practical illustrations in the book, which demonstrate that affect can be studied through discourse and is not limited to philosophical discussions. This extends to the possibility of applying affect studies to biblical texts, and I will introduce some examples in the next section.

I do not only choose Ahmed's approach because of its practical illustrations but also because she discusses the 'circularity' of emotion among objects in texts and its delivery through the use of language. The circularity she describes includes the characteristics of both the drives-and-impacts and the pre-contextual. Continuing with the previous example of fear, I share Ahmed's explanation of chained reactions on black and white bodies:

> The black body is drawn tighter; it is not just the smile that becomes tighter, and is eventually impossible, but the black body itself becomes enclosed by the fear, and comes to feel that fear as its own, such that it is felt as an impossible or inhabitable body. In this way, fear does not simply come from within and then move outwards towards objects and others (the white child who feels afraid of the black man); rather, fear works to secure the relationship between those bodies; it brings them together and moves them apart through the shudders that are felt on the skin, on the surface that surfaces through the encounter.[57]

This description highlights the consecutive reactions of bodies. Indeed, Ahmed's illustration of fear does not finish here. The development of fear then continues within

---

[54] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 4.
[55] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 111–12, cited in Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 62.
[56] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 62–64.
[57] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 62–63.

the black body, which responds to fear in terms of feeling cold, shivering, moving the coldness inwards, and containing the coldness.[58] Ahmed also includes the (mis)reading of signs of affect that pass between bodies. The shivering of the black body may be misread as a form of rage, which then becomes the grounds for further fear in the non-black body. Her illustrations of affect in terms of chain reactions and circularity offer a way to understand how emotions work among people. I take this notion of circularity, including the possibility of misreadings, into consideration because, through the process of reading a biblical passage, affect circulates between the bodies of readers and the characters portrayed in the text. Misreading may happen in such a reading process because the reader cannot identify with the people in the texts. Misreading may also be due to the historical, cultural, and linguistic differences between them. Later, I will discuss different translations of affective terms in Ecclesiastes to illuminate the possible reading response and the possible (mis)reading of affect during the reading process. By combining the recognition of the 'circularity' of emotions between texts and their readers during the reading process, affect studies can illuminate a level of meaning that lies beyond the plain sense of the text's language.

Ahmed's study characterises the circularity of affect, but her studies do not halt at the question 'What do emotions *do*?' The ultimate questions that the book attempts to answer are 'Why is social transformation so difficult to achieve? Why are relations of power so intractable and enduring, even in the face of collective forms of resistance?'[59] To answer these questions, Ahmed offers an account of how people are attracted to following social norms. Drawing on the works of feminist and queer scholars Judith Butler, Lauren Berlant, and Wendy Brown, she highlights that social norms are established through the works of repetition and their effects. As Butler suggests, 'boundary, fixity and surface' function in social forms (such as family roles/status and heterosexuality) and are created in materialised worlds through repetition of social norms.[60] Ahmed explains that feminist and queer scholars' attention to the connection between emotions and conditions of subordination under social forms have inspired her to conclude that emotions play an important role in politics, and emotions can reveal the

[58] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 63.
[59] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 11–12.
[60] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 9, cited in Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 12.

involvement of power in shaping the surfaces of subjects or objects.[61] Based on the works of these feminist and queer scholars, which focus on social norms and emotions, she argues that emotion should be viewed as a form of cultural politics, and she critiques the psychologising and privatisation of emotions and the social structures that are formed without concern for emotions.

Regarding emotions, Ahmed argues that emotionality should not be focused on as an intrinsic characteristic of people but rather as a shaping process that operates on *some* people. In order to make this argument, she analyses how emotions 'align subjects with collectives by attributing "others" as the "source" of our feelings.'[62] She argues that emotions settle in neither subjects nor objects but are created through the 'effects of circulation,' which in turn suggests the 'sociality' of emotion—a model based on the recognition of emotion as a social form.[63] First, she challenges presumptions about the interiority of emotion through her discussion of 'inside out' and 'outside in' models of emotions. The 'inside out' model of emotions is the logic that 'I have feelings, which then move outwards towards objects and others, and which might then return to me.'[64] She critiques this model because she considers emotions to be social and cultural practices rather than psychological states.[65] Instead, she draws on Emile Durkheim's account of sociology and emotions in his book *The Rules of Sociological Method*: 'Most of our ideas and our tendencies are not developed by ourselves but come to us from without. How can they become a part of us except by imposing themselves upon us?'[66] With the support of Durkheim's argument, Ahmed shows that the sociological realm is different from the individual subject because of the 'without.' Feelings come from without; they do not come from within the individual subject. I agree with Ahmed's rejection of the 'inside out' model, because the emotion of an individual is subject to the external environment and factors such as social value or past experiences. If I were to say, 'I am angry with you!' it is something about *you* that makes me angry. Even if my

[61] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 12.
[62] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 1.
[63] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 8–12.
[64] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 9.
[65] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 9.
[66] Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. S. A. Solovay and J. H. Mueller (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 4, cited in Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 9.

anger is just personal pride or prejudice, it is also based on a hierarchy derived from social values.

The concept of the sociality of emotion suggests the direction of emotions is 'outside in' rather than 'inside out.' In the 'outside in' model, emotion 'comes from without and moves inward.'[67] However, Ahmed is not satisfied with the 'outside in' model either, because it draws on the ownership of emotions by the crowd.[68] She explains the idea of ownership of emotions using the example of Princess Diana's death. According to the 'outside in' model, there were feelings of grief in the crowd of mourners. Then, individuals took on these feelings of grief from the crowd. Such ownership of emotions, in fact, originates in the crowd and is then brought into individuals. However, Ahmed thinks that emotions are situated in neither the individual nor social space. Therefore, directions of emotions, be they 'inside out' or 'outside in,' cannot fully manifest the sociality of emotion. Ahmed's crucial concern involves the surfaces and boundaries between the individual and the social; the individual and the social make contact on the surfaces and boundaries as if they were objects.[69] Ahmed describes this as 'a process which suggests that the "objectivity" of the psychic and social is an effect rather than a cause.'[70]

I find it is useful to not treat emotion as an 'outside in' process, because individuals can respond differently according to their positionality and past experiences. It is not necessary, and is even dangerous, to expect individuals to share the same feelings and when reading a biblical text, there are many possible interpretations of the same text or book.[71] Ahmed treats the sociality of emotion as an effect rather than a cause, and I take this into considerations in two areas: translations and interpretation approaches. There are various biblical translations available to faith communities as well as to the wider public. The number of readers reading the Hebrew Bible in translated versions outweighs the number of readers reading it in biblical Hebrew. The emotions of the texts may be understood in different ways in different languages. So I

[67] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 9.
[68] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 9–10.
[69] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 10.
[70] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 10.
[71] Gale A. Yee, ed., *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, 2nd ed., New Approaches in Biblical Studies (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007). The book introduces various methods of biblical interpretations, using the book of Judges as illustration.

find it helpful to study the affective terms in Ecclesiastes in Hebrew, as well as in English and Traditional Chinese—three languages that I can navigate. The variations between the translations may offer new insights when interpreting the text. I will study the affective terms in Ecclesiastes at the end of this chapter.

It is not only translations that are shaped by the sociality of emotion, but various interpretative approaches also impact how the emotions in the biblical texts are interpreted. There are various interpretative approaches available. They develop from different interests and concerns and provide different interpretations of the same texts. For example, feminist criticism in its polyvocality demonstrates how different readers who share some political ideologies have different feelings about and interpretations of the same biblical passages.[72] And womanist hermeneutics further demonstrates how women of colour can also have distinctively and differently nuanced feelings and interpretations, both in comparison to other feminists and between each other.[73] The concept of the sociality of emotion shifts my focus from what happens to Qoheleth to what happens in my reading process of Ecclesiastes. By focusing on the reading process, I can therefore take an interpretative approach as a bystander-reader to read Ecclesiastes; I will discuss this approach further in Chapter 3.

Ahmed's notion of the 'stickiness' of emotion also inspires my analysis of affect in Ecclesiastes. She uses the idea of 'stickiness' to present the relationship and contact between 'objects of feeling' without implying a causal relationship between emotions and objects.[74] She also uses the words 'move' and 'slide' to describe the circulation of 'objects of feeling' and their effects on objects. [75] Rather than locating the feelings *in* an object, she looks for the effects of the contact *between* the personal and the public, the

---

[72] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology 13 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). Tribe reinterprets the stories of Hagar, Tamar, the unnamed concubine, and the daughter of Jephthah using literary criticism and feminist hermeneutics. She highlights the silence and absence of the deity in response to these women, and she challenges the misogyny of the biblical texts and their use in religious and academic communities.

[73] The term 'womanist' began to appear in religious studies after the publication of *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* by Alice Walker (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983). Further introductions and demonstrations of womanist hermeneutics can be found in Gay L. Byron and Vanessa Lovelace, eds., *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*, Semeia Studies 85 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htgx.

[74] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 5–16. Rhiannon Graybill has adopted Ahmed's work, including the notion of stickiness, in her book, *Texts After Terror: Rape, Sexual Violence, and the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[75] Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 14.

individual and the social, and herself and others. Therefore, the objects associated with feelings are not limited to the personal and individual. Ahmed herself is also an object that sticks, moves, and slides with others. In my study, I regard the reader as an object to 'stick, move and slide with' biblical texts. Reading the biblical texts also facilitates such contact—the contact between a personal individual and the Bible as a public text (object). The reading process is the constant contact and 'stickiness' between the reader and the text itself. The text sticks to the reader, leaving lasting feelings (and continuous circulation) even after the reading is over. This lingering emotion continues to disturb or disrupt the reader's understanding of the text; it is therefore necessary to confirm and recognise the existence of the sticky feelings and their influence on and interference with the reader's reading (or not reading).

I have now introduced affect theory as an analytical tool to investigate the relationship between events and the people who experience them. In the context of the theory of affect, Ahmed's approach in the *Cultural Politics of Emotion* is the theoretical perspective that best guides my understanding and use of affect theory in reading Ecclesiastes. It is also commonly applied in biblical studies, and often focuses on the language of affect and the response to which it gives rise, especially in relation to trauma and what trauma does. In the next section, I look at some examples of the application of Ahmed's affect theory in biblical studies. After that, I will look at some selected affective vocabulary in Ecclesiastes and compare its occurrence in English and Traditional Chinese translations. Through the analysis of affective vocabulary, I can reflect on the language of affect existing in Ecclesiastes and use the array of emotions as a reading tool.

Affect Theory and Biblical Studies

Affect theory has generated much discussion and interest in biblical studies. But, instead of applying the complicated theoretical concepts of affect to the biblical texts, scholars more commonly examine the language of affect within the texts. To do so, they apply a range of affect approaches to investigate the array of emotions in biblical literature. For example, six articles on affect theory (three each on the Hebrew Bible and New Testament) are collected in a thematic issue of *Biblical Interpretation* (see Table 1

below).[76] The three Hebrew Bible articles focus on the so-called 'curse of Canaan' in Genesis 9:18–29, Moses's descent from Sinai in Exodus 34:29–35, and the characters of Ehud and Jael in Judges 3–5. The affects explored in these three articles are, respectively, terror, posthuman emotionality, and fear and disgust.[77] The three New Testament articles focus on Jesus's responses to violence in Mark 14:61–65, image of the enthroned lamb in Revelation 4–5, and loathing and disgust in Revelation. The affects explored in these three articles are, respectively, pain and violence, conflicted feelings about imperial life, and hatred and disgust.

Among these articles, Jennifer Koosed's discussion of Moses's descent from Sinai (Exod 34:29–35) explores both emotions and the concept of posthuman, allowing her to create space for discussing those horrifying biblical texts.[78] Due to different translations of the Hebrew word קרן to Greek and Latin, the status of Moses when he descends from Mount Sinai might be understood as posthuman. In Greek, קרן becomes 'he is glorified' (δεδόξασται), suggesting rays of light are shining from Moses; in Latin, it becomes 'horns' (*cornuta*). Other biblical scholars regard Moses as having the converged status of human, animal, and the divine, which is captured by the term 'posthuman.'

Koosed's study on posthuman emotionality in Moses's descent from Sinai goes beyond the general understanding and boundary of the circularity of emotions between humans. This demonstrates the emotions associated with a character's unnatural or even inhuman status, which is not uncommon in the Hebrew Bible; for example, Enoch walks with God (Gen 5:24), Jonah is swallowed by a fish (Jonah 1:17), and Elijah ascends in a whirlwind (2 Kgs 2:11). These examples are unnatural but not horrifically unimaginable. Other than characters having an unnatural status, there are also those who act inhumanly—with extreme cruelty or barbarity—in the Hebrew Bible; for example, when a Levite is threatened with gang rape by a gang of men, he saves himself by handing over his concubine to them (Judg 19:22–30). The gang of men rape her all through the night until the morning then let her go when the dawn begins to break. The

[76] Jennifer L. Koosed and Stephen D. Moore, eds., *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 381–531, https://brill.com/view/journals/bi/22/4-5/bi.22.issue-4-5.xml.
[77] The term 'posthuman' represents the status of crossing the 'boundaries between the human, the animal, and the divine' (Koosed and Moore, 'Introduction,' 386).
[78] Jennifer L. Koosed, 'Moses: The Face of Fear,' *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 414–29, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02245p03.

Levite then cuts her into twelve pieces and sends her throughout all the territory of Israel. This chapter in Judges is full of horrific and unbelievable events. It is hard to imagine any human being behaving in such a way, and the victim is not treated as a human being. All these human characters behave beyond our understanding of what it means to be human.

These inhuman characters and those suffering people in such texts of horror require readers to read with critical empathy to recognise such wickedness towards other people (I will discuss critical empathy in detail in Chapter 4.) The status of posthuman creates a space for thinking about horrific characters who transcend their human status, rather than dehumanising them, and for exploring their behaviours that go beyond an acceptable level of humanity. This created space can accommodate reading, analysis, and discussion of those horrifying biblical texts until the reader wishes to leave in order to escape from the intolerable 'human' behaviours being depicted. These horrifying and intolerable behaviours and treatments are a source of trauma (as I will discuss in the next chapter). While Ecclesiastes does not appear to contain descriptions of horrific, inhumane scenes like the example from Judges, the space created through a posthuman perspective provides a buffer for me to encounter any extraordinary traumatic reflections. This prevents me from associating the horrific human behaviour depicted in the text with the behaviour of human beings around me, and from becoming overcommitted and overwhelmed when researching traumatic issues.

There are other examples of horrific inhumane behaviour depicted in the Hebrew Bible, including war, animal or human sacrifice, murder, rape, genocide, and capital punishment.[79] As well as considering the circularity of emotions with posthuman objects—a status that goes beyond the boundaries between human, animal, and divine—studying the circularity of emotion with an abiotic object would also be helpful. Abiotic objects are other-than-human characters, and they also play a role in the circularity of emotions; for example, the flood of waters associated with God's judgement (Gen 6:17), the silver cup that Joseph used to test his brother (Gen 44:1–3), the rod that Moses used to strike the rock to bring forth water (Num 20:7–11), and the Ark that was captured and returned (1 Sam 4–7). Studying the circularity of emotion with an abiotic

[79] Other examples of horrific behaviours depicted in the Hebrew Bible include Lot offering his daughters to the men of Sodom (Gen 19); the rape of Dinah (Gen 34); Samuel's command to Saul to destroy the Amalekites utterly (1 Sam 15:1–9); and Cain's murder of Abel (Gen 4).

object could also shed light on the study of women who are objectified in ancient contexts, and sadly also in contemporary contexts. My previous study on Lot's wife (Gen 19) also engages with my own circularity of emotion towards an objectified woman who later becomes an abiotic object—a salt pillar.[80]

Table 1. Articles on Affect Theory Included in the Thematic Issue of Biblical Interpretation

Biblical texts	Emotions	Approaches	Authors
Curse of Canaan in Genesis 9:18–29	Terror	Affect theory (Sedgwick)	Jennifer Knust
Moses's descent from Mt. Sinai in Exodus 34:29–35	Emotions in posthuman status	Affect theory (Ahmed) and theories of the posthuman	Jennifer L. Koosed
Ehud and Jael in Judges 3–5	Disgust and fear	Affect theory (Ahmed)	Amy C. Cottrill
Gospel of Mark	Pain and violence	Affect theory (Sedgwick) and queer theory	Alexis G. Waller
Enthroned Lamb in Revelation 4–5	Conflicted feelings about imperial life	Affect theory (Sedgwick)	Maia Kotrosits
Apocalypse of John	Hatred and disgust	Affect theory (Ahmed)	Stephen D. Moore

Among the other articles in this special issue of *Biblical Interpretation*, Amy Cottrill's reading of Ehud and Jael through the lens of affect theory has the most relevance to my investigation.[81] Cottrill analyses the affective potential of the book of Judges by focusing on the experiences of modern readers. She demonstrates that, in contrast to traditional historical criticism, affect theory is concerned with readers as well as texts. Instead of studying the affective experience of the ancient reader of Judges, she focuses on the reader's repeated encounter with and experience of the violence and terror depicted in the texts. However, the reader is not simply dominated by the reading experience but can actively participate in the reading process. She puts this as follows:

[80] I will briefly introduce that study and explain how my study of Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes is also evoked by the circularity of emotion with Qoheleth.
[81] Amy C. Cottrill, 'A Reading of Ehud and Jael Through the Lens of Affect Theory,' *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 430–49, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02245p04.

'Affect theory affords biblical exegetes a means to examine the role of the reader's embodiment as a tool for textual interpretation.'[82] The embodied affect is not primarily focused on characters in texts, which readers can read with empathy; it belongs instead in the *context* where readers themselves engage with the reading process. By reading Ehud and Jael through the lens of affect theory, Cottrill illustrates the contributions of affect theory to interpretations of Judges, one of which is to bring the reader's experience into the discussion of a story's role and importance in political and theological perspectives.

My research interest is similar to Cottrill's reading of Ehud and Jael through the lens of affect theory. I am not aiming to demonstrate the relevant historicity of the biblical text; rather, I wish to focus on the relevance of the reader in the interpretative process and to evoke possibly overlooked minorities. In my recent publication on reading Lot's wife with critical empathy, I draw on the awareness of affect to engage with and imagine the context of Lot's wife.[83] In Genesis 19, I explore the feelings and bodily sensations of Lot's wife as, together with her husband and daughters, she escapes the destruction of her home in Sodom and flees into the unknown. Her emotions are not explicitly recorded in the text. But when I read the story of Lot's wife, I am profoundly reminded of fleeing from my own homeland. Through this recognition, I find the pain of separation from my family and friends, as well as the sense of loss and detached cultural identity on leaving my homeland. My affects shed new light on my reading of the situation of Lot's wife. When her situation becomes the focus of my reading, it raises questions for me about marital norms; the status of women, immigrants, and refugees; and the circulation of power. This illustration of reading Lot's wife with affect shows what Ahmed called 'stickiness'—how readers' affect helps to echo the affects of biblical characters and to envisage the situation of the ancient context in light of a contemporary context.[84] This kind of affective reading can blend into a more humane and personally engaged reading of biblical texts, where things and feelings that are unspeakable or unspoken have opportunities and avenues for discovery. From the above

[82] Cottrill, 'Reading of Ehud and Jael,' 430.
[83] Yannis Wing Yan Ng, 'Reading Lot's Wife with Marginalised Migrants: Promoting Critical Empathy in the Biblical Studies Classroom,' in *Activism, Bible, and Research-Based Teaching: Practical Approaches for the Global Biblical Studies Classroom*, ed. Johanna Stiebert, Bible in the Modern World 85 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2024), 53–66.
[84] Ng, 'Reading Lot's Wife with Marginalised Migrants.'

example, we can see this is also helpful for being more inclusive when reading the Bible in contemporary contexts. Besides feminist, womanist, queer, and postcolonial interpretations that give voice to those muted in the Bible due to their gender, sexual identity, race, or socioeconomic status, reading with affect can liberate those who are muted, or who do not speak, on account of psychological reasons, barriers of language and culture, or minoritised identity—for example, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

My research interest in evoking possibly overlooked minorities in the text and in society continues in my reading of Ecclesiastes, although Qoheleth—portrayed as a king in Ecclesiastes—is rarely recognised as a minority when compared to other characters in the Hebrew Bible. I have similar stickiness when I engage with and imagine the context of Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes. When I read the story of Qoheleth, who sees the oppression and the oppressed under the sun, I find the grievance and helplessness of seeing oppression and the oppressed. I remember those who suffered in the brutal violence and who are treated with injustice in my homeland in broad daylight. As in the reading of Lot's wife, I find it is difficult for me to let go of Qoheleth's monologue. His testimony draws me in to study Ecclesiastes with affect and empathy. Rather than identifying his sayings as wisdom teachings, I focus on the affective vocabulary in the book. I am not going to figure out what happened to him, but I will at least attempt to accommodate his voice and feelings and to position myself alongside him as an empathetic reader/listener.

This section does not present an affect theory; rather, it emphasises linguistic awareness and the reader's affect created through their exposure to the images depicted in biblical texts. My use of affect in biblical studies is not to focus on what event(s) stimulated the affect; instead, I use it as a tool for reading the texts as the language of trauma. It is a helpful tool for recognising any trace of trauma within the text. It is also a tool for sensitising the reader's affect that circulates or evolves from the reading process, particularly when that reader has experienced trauma and may not be able to express their feelings and talk about exactly what happened. Affects, then, serve as a means of connecting and engaging with the context of those feelings.

Affect and Ecclesiastes

Throughout my research, having established affect as a useful tool for analysing biblical texts from the perspective of trauma studies, I looked at the way in which texts name and perform different emotions. I started by applying affect studies to conduct a word study on vocabularies of emotions/affects in Ecclesiastes. I have identified twenty-nine items of affective vocabulary contained in this biblical book (see Appendix II). Focusing on pain, fear, anger, and sadness—which are particularly relevant to the topic of trauma—I planned to do a comprehensive word study, analysing the denotations and connotations of the vocabulary. I also included a word study on the term 'evil' in Ecclesiastes.[85] After commencing the word studies on pain, sadness, and evil, I found that it was not a satisfying and workable method for my study because the interchanging use of those selected words in Ecclesiastes and their ambiguous meanings over a broad range of biblical texts complicated the word studies (see Table 2). I also found other words that were closely related to the five categories (or clusters) I had selected. Instead of focusing on those selected vocabularies of emotion, I decided to study Qoheleth's repeated use of the phrase 'I saw' and his repeated encouragement to seek out enjoyment (discussed in Chapters 3 and 2, respectively).

Nevertheless, I have preserved the word studies on pain, sadness, and evil in Appendix II. Various translations of the same affective vocabulary in English (NRSVue) and Traditional Chinese (RCUV) demonstrate the complexity of the meanings and understandings of the affective vocabulary. For example, כעס (noun) is rendered as four different words in English and three in Chinese. From the lexicon, its meaning is given as 'irritation, anger, provocation,' but it is rendered as 'vexation' (1:18; 2:23), 'sorrow' (7:3), 'anger' (7:9b), and 'anxiety' (11:10).[86] On the one hand, the word's meaning spans from anger to sorrow and anxiety, making the word study complicated. On the other hand, it presents the blurred boundaries between emotions expressed by individual affective vocabulary. The word study also includes the terms רע (adjective) and רעה (noun), demonstrating how a word does not appear to be an affective word, but in some cases, it is indeed associated with emotion and/or is interpreted as an

[85] One of the apparent meanings of רַע and רָעָה is 'evil.' In Ecclesiastes, these words are often translated as 'evil' as well as 'unhappy,' 'grievous,' 'bad,' 'unpleasant,' 'harm,' and 'hurt.' So these terms also present emotions, and I consider them as affective terms.
[86] *HOL*, 162.

affective word (1:13; 2:17; 4:8; 6:2; 8:3 in NRSVue). I have also conducted a fuller study of three selected affects (pain, sadness, and evil) found in Ecclesiastes (see Appendix III). A detailed explanation can be found in Appendix III to demonstrate the fullness of emotional expressions in Ecclesiastes.

Table 2. Selected Affective Terms in Ecclesiastes (Categorised in Clusters)

Clusters	**Related words**			
Pain	מכאב			
Fear	ירא			
Anger	כעס	קצף	שׂנא	קלל
Sadness	רֹעַ	בכה	ספד	
Evil	רַע	רעה		

Summary: Why Is Reading with Affect in Mind a Helpful Strategy in Reading Biblical Texts?

In this chapter, I explained affect and affect theory and discussed the application of affect theory on biblical studies. I also established reading with affect in mind as a tool for analysing biblical texts from the perspective of trauma studies, and I looked at the way in which texts name and represent different emotions.

I looked for affective terms in Ecclesiastes, and categorised them in clusters: pain, fear, anger, sadness, and evil. Having found these affective terms in the text, I demonstrated that using affect theory helps bring out the fullness of emotional expressions in the text. I suggested that the emotions in the text are consistent with those who have suffered trauma. Using affect theory also helps draw out aspects of the text in a way that is conducive to a trauma-informed reading. As I will go on to discuss, being or becoming attuned to affect and trauma is necessary for developing critical empathy.

CHAPTER 2: TRAUMA, TRAUMA STUDIES, AND ECCLESIASTES

What Is Trauma?

The precise meaning of the word 'trauma' is elusive. The English word derives from the Greek τραῦμα, which refers in both classical and medical contexts to a wound or *external* injury.[87] It originally referred to a physical 'sign' and later to a non-physical mark of injury; but more frequently nowadays, it is used to denote an *internal* psychological and emotional injury or harm. 'Stigma' (στίγμα) is another word that originated from Greek, and it carries a similar meaning to trauma. It is derived from the verb form στίζω ('I mark'). 'Stigma' referred to a visible marking or sign marked on a person's skin that identified them as having a flawed identity, such as a criminal record or an enslaved status. It is a mark of disgrace, intended to distinguish or even discriminate against and devalue an individual or group from others based on certain characteristics or circumstances. In the present day, 'stigma' usually refers to a social stigma rather than a physical one. Individuals or groups are 'marked' based on certain characteristics or circumstances, including but not limited to gender, class, age, race, religion, illness, disability, sexual orientation, and experience (e.g., abortion, imprisonment, migration, and homelessness). Many traumatic events—abuse, sexual assault, relocation, or amputation due to accident or illness—are also common causes of social stigmatisation. So it is complicated, in that a traumatised person not only carries a trauma like a wound but also sometimes sticks to stigma. In this thesis, I will not differentiate between trauma and stigma. When I refer to traumatised people, I include both the wound and the stigma that they may have borne.

This variance in the definition and denotation of trauma is reflected by the terms used in the history of interpretation. In the past, there was no distinction between somatic and psychological diseases. Before trauma came to be classified as a psychological and emotional phenomenon, it mainly denoted physical or psychiatric injuries: spinal concussion, railway spine, nostalgia, mind wounds, nerve prostration, shell shock, and war neurosis, to name a few.[88] Following the development of

[87] *OED Online*, s.v. 'Trauma, n.,' accessed 14 June 2021, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/205242.
[88] For more relevant terms, see Paul Frederick Lerner and Mark S. Micale, 'Trauma, Psychiatry, and History: A Conceptual and Historiographical Introduction,' in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930*, ed. Mark S. Micale and Paul Frederick Lerner, Cambridge Studies in the History of Medicine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 24.

psychoanalysis in the second half of the nineteenth century, trauma came to be viewed as psychological trauma, thus sharpening the distinction between the somatic and the psychological. This distinction has made later medical historians look back at conditions such as railway spine and shell shock and identify the cultural context of such conditions. However, they do not view these conditions as psychological in nature. Rather, they suggest that the involvement of compensation for the conditions complicated whether they were viewed as physical impairments or merely the result of hysteria.[89]

What Is Trauma Studies?

Trauma became increasingly understood as a form of internal harm rather than a mark of physical injury, and this definition was firmly established after the introduction of the designation 'post-traumatic stress disorder' (PTSD) in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*) published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980.[90]

Based on the findings of clinical psychiatry, the diagnostic symptoms of PTSD listed in the *DSM* offer a better understanding of how trauma affects people. Reactions to trauma include intense fear, helplessness, or horror; having nightmares, flashbacks,

[89] Railway spine was described by surgeon John Erichsen in a series of lectures delivered in 1866 then subsequently in his publication *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System* (Philadelphia: Henry C. Lea, 1867), https://name.umdl.umich.edu/aec8134.0001.001. In the early nineteenth century, railway accidents frequently happened. Some of the resulting symptoms of railway spine could be explained by the physiology of the nervous system, but others were not so easily explicable. Diagnosis of railway spine involved compensation from the railway companies. Doctors representing the victims emphasised the physical damage to the spine, whereas doctors representing railway companies suggested the condition was psychological and the result of hysteria. At that time, Erichsen began to explore both the physical and psychological causes of railway spine. For further details, see Thomas Keller, 'Railway Spine Revisited: Traumatic Neurosis or Neurotrauma?' *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50, no. 4 (1995): 507–24, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/50.4.507; Ralph Harrington, 'On the Tracks of Trauma: Railway Spine Reconsidered,' *Social History of Medicine: The Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine* 16, no. 2 (2003): 209–23, https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/16.2.209. For discussions on shell shock, see Tracey Loughran, 'Shell Shock, Trauma, and the First World War: The Making of a Diagnosis and Its Histories,' *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 67, no. 1 (2012): 94–119, https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/jrq052; Ryan Ross, 'Between Shell Shock and PTSD? "Accident Neurosis" and Its Sequelae in Post-War Britain,' *Social History of Medicine: The Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine* 32, no. 3 (2019): 565–85, https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkx118.

[90] American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-III*. The inclusion of PTSD was the result of American veterans' reports of a new 'mental disorder' after the Vietnam War.

vivid memories, or recurring dreams; being unable to recall some important aspects of the period of exposure to the stressor; and having trouble concentrating and sleeping.[91] The diagnostic criteria also offer a better understanding of the ongoing and enduring effects of PTSD following a traumatising event.[92]

However, there are some drawbacks to having the diagnostic symptoms of PTSD listed in the *DSM*. First, the definition and usage of the term 'trauma' in contexts beyond psychiatry became more confused after the inclusion of 'traumatic' in the name PTSD, which refers to a mental or emotional, rather than primarily physical, disorder. In the case of PTSD, 'trauma' is understood to signify the event that leads to a subsequent injury instead of to the resulting injury itself.[93] This raises the question of whether trauma can be seen as 'post' (after) with regard to an event or injury, and it establishes the term's complexity and relationship with both pain and time.[94]

Second, as long as trauma refers to a mental or emotional disorder, as suggested by the *DSM*'s definition of PTSD, trauma studies must likewise focus on personal suffering, PTSD, or other impacts of a traumatic event on an individual. The clinical treatment of PTSD targets healing the *individual* but excludes those non-patients or yet-to-be-diagnosed people who have shared the same experiences as the diagnosed individual. Clinically proven responses to trauma are not limited to those traditionally known as victims.[95] A later edition of *DSM* (*DSM-IV-TR*) stipulated that PTSD could

---

[91] American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-III*; World Health Organization, *The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders: Diagnostic Criteria for Research* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1993), §F43.1, https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241544554.

[92] The *ICD-10* states that, to make a diagnosis of PTSD, the diagnostic criteria must all be met within six months of the event or after a period of stress (World Health Organization, *ICD-10*, §F43.1). The fifth edition of *DSM* stipulates that the diagnosis of PTSD requires the duration of the disturbance to be more than a month. See American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5* (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), §309.81.

[93] In their study of the history of trauma, Lerner and Micale, also demonstrate that trauma is not just an event per se. Though trauma, at first glance, may refer to a 'tangible, physical occurrence'—for example, a railway accident or shell explosion—there are a great range of sites, sources, and events considered to be traumatic and which clearly resonate well beyond the occurrence that initiated them. Lerner and Micale argue that such events and the clinical observations of responses to these events suggest trauma is 'not an event per se but rather the *experiencing* or *remembering* of an event in the mind of an individual or the life of a community.' Therefore, the definition and denotation of the term 'trauma' may vary in different disciplines and different contexts of its application (Lerner and Micale, 'Trauma, Psychiatry, and History,' 20).

[94] I am not going to discuss this topic further in this section, but the possibility of trauma completion, as well as the ambiguity of the designation 'trauma,' will come up in my discussion later.

[95] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000), §309.81.

occur among people who witnessed and/or were confronted with an event or events (secondary trauma).[96] Generally speaking, more attention is still paid to those directly impacted by or involved in the event(s), that is, the victims of primary trauma. In addition, there have been studies focusing on the impact of secondary trauma from various professional sectors—healthcare, childcare, education, and legal sectors—but there are not many studies on the impact of secondary trauma on ordinary people who witness events of primary trauma.[97] This gap in the literature excludes people from another category: the bystander of direct victimisation, which I will discuss in my next chapter.

Third, a diagnosis of PTSD has legal implications because it is a 'compensable entity.'[98] As a mental injury, its potential to garner compensation derives from a historical understanding of injuries in which conditions we now think of as mental illness were understood as physical injuries, such as railway spine and shell shock, and were considered 'compensable entities.' The compensation process involves legal procedures, diagnostic evidence, and forensic evaluation; scholars therefore argue that definitions of PTSD have 'influenced, and been influenced by, the law.'[99] Meanwhile, stringent criteria for assessing the severity of persisting symptoms and the repeated use of psychological testing also cast doubt on the traumatised person. Moreover, the emphasis in legal proceedings related to compensation claims is on a decisive either-or judgement. Under the shadow of this legal discourse, the focus may be on a decisive diagnosis when discussing trauma within the framework of PTSD. However, discussing trauma in biblical texts does not require us to make a diagnosis, let alone a claim for

---

[96] American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-IV-TR*, §309.81.
[97] Lesly Kelly, 'Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, and Secondary Trauma in Nurses: Recognizing the Occupational Phenomenon and Personal Consequences of Caregiving,' *Critical Care Nursing Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2020): 73–80, https://doi.org/10.1097/CNQ.0000000000000293; Shauna L. Rienks, 'An Exploration of Child Welfare Caseworkers' Experience of Secondary Trauma and Strategies for Coping,' *Child Abuse & Neglect* 110, no. 3 (2020): 104355, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104355; Allison S. Christian-Brandt, Diana E. Santacrose, and Miya L. Barnett, 'In the Trauma-Informed Care Trenches: Teacher Compassion Satisfaction, Secondary Traumatic Stress, Burnout, and Intent to Leave Education Within Underserved Elementary Schools,' *Child Abuse & Neglect* 110, no. 3 (2020): 104437, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104437; Stine Iversen and Noelle Robertson, 'Prevalence and Predictors of Secondary Trauma in the Legal Profession: A Systematic Review,' *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 28, no. 6 (2021): 802–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/13218719.2020.1855270.
[98] Roger K. Pitman et al., 'Legal Issues in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,' in *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, ed. Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisæth (New York: Guilford, 1996), 379.
[99] Pitman et al., 'Legal Issues in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,' 378.

compensation. I recognise that the PTSD diagnosis has made a significant contribution to trauma studies, but I will not rely on the diagnostic criteria associated with PTSD when searching for trauma in the biblical texts.

The elusive meaning of trauma, its transition from a physical mark to an internal harm, and the role of PTSD in shaping its definition have occupied a dominant position in trauma studies. Nevertheless, studies on the treatment of and recovery from trauma contribute another perspective to trauma studies that takes into account both individual and public involvement. Psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman's seminal work *Trauma and Recovery* has offered an authoritative view on treatment and recovery after trauma since the book's first publication in 1992.[100] Her book is heavily based on her clinical casework. She focuses her discussion of traumatic disorders by analysing sexual and domestic abuse cases and then outlines the stages of recovery. Though her book is based on her clinical casework, her suggested stages of recovery are not unique to her own clients. She concludes that healing from trauma involves the integration of body, brain, and mind. The healing processes include the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection.[101] In Herman's suggested healing processes, she does not limit the understanding of trauma and recovery to the personal level. Instead, she argues that trauma and recovery cannot be separated from the social and political context. Healing is not accomplished in counselling sessions on a chaise longue; rather, the recovery stages take place with the involvement of the community.

As her book is based on her clinical casework, Herman refers to numerous people who have told her their stories of surviving trauma. The expressions of trauma stories are different to the everyday, casual storytelling we might share with friends or colleagues. Trauma stories do not typically involve flowing, logical, and continuous narration. From her experience and expertise, Herman's description of trauma provides us with hints for understanding how traumatised people tell their experiences in words:

> The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.

---

[100] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2022). The fourth edition adds a new epilogue to review what has and has not changed in terms of understandings and treatments of trauma during the thirty years after the first edition was released in 1992.

[101] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 223. Instead of examining each of these stages of recovery, I will focus on the community aspects of the healing processes.

> People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy.[102]

This description points out that a survivor's efforts to talk about their experience of trauma is closely related to emotions (as I discussed in Chapter 1). Their narrative is also characterised by contradictions, fragmentations, struggles between denial and proclamation, and dissociation.[103] (I will follow these indicators later when analysing the biblical texts.)

After the storytelling in the second stage of recovery, which helps with remembering and grieving, the third stage involves reconnection. As already mentioned, Herman does not separate recovery from trauma from the social context. Reconnection means restoring connection between the public and private sectors and between the community and individuals.[104] It involves reconnection to *others* in the public sector and the community.[105] These others are not primarily traumatised, but they do play a role in the recovery from trauma.

Herman's approach therefore emphasises that the healing process is not a personal process; rather, others are involved in the traumatised person's reconnection to a community. Although she does not state so explicitly, Herman herself demonstrates how a person can contribute to the healing process of a traumatised person. Her book speaks about terrible events that few people would want to hear about; but through her balanced use of language, she illustrates the balance between her professional position (carrying her 'dispassionate, reasoned traditions') and her 'passionate claims' on behalf of traumatised people.[106] Such passionate claims may seem contrary to her profession

---

[102] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.
[103] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1–2.
[104] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 3, 286–312. The first and second stages of recovery are establishing safety and revisiting the past for remembrance and mourning. See chapters eight and nine in Herman's book.
[105] The pronoun 'other(s)' is often rendered as 他者 (*tā jé*; literal translation: he person) in Chinese. The first character 他 can be split into two characters: 人 (*yàhn*; literal translation: human) and 也 (*yáh*; literal translation: also). It refers to human beings rather than a broader sense of 'other.' With the awareness of LGBTQ+ communities, some people prefer rendering 他者 as 'TA'—which has the identical pronunciation as male and female third person pronouns—to create a wider sense of gender inclusiveness. Throughout the thesis, I used Traditional Chinese characters and the Yale romanisation system (with tone marks) to represent the Cantonese pronunciation.
[106] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 5.

role; but as a member of both the public sector and the community, living and working among traumatised people, she does not abandon her commitment to them. Herman's balanced inclusion of 'passion' and 'dispassion' will be my focus in Chapter 4 on critical empathy.

Though Herman's clinical work focuses on people, I find that her studies shed light on studying biblical texts with trauma studies in three ways. First, her description of how victims/survivors tell their stories provides a reference for the expression of trauma. This can be used as a reference for reading trauma narratives in biblical texts. Herman explains that the storytelling of survivors is often characterised by its 'highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner.'[107] The biblical text also contains these characteristics. With reference to the table of affective vocabularies in Ecclesiastes (Appendix II) and the discussion in the previous chapter, we can see Ecclesiastes is characterised by emotional language. The scholarship on Ecclesiastes has also highlighted internal contradictions in Ecclesiastes. The lack of an agreed-upon, unified theme associated with the book reflects its fragmented manner. So I would say Ecclesiastes shares some characteristics that are common in trauma narratives. I am not going to use those characteristics of victims/survivors' expressions as diagnostic criteria to check whether Qoheleth has survived some form of atrocity. Instead, I use those characteristics to recognise and make room for any emotions, contradictions, and fragmentation in the texts without reducing the credibility of either Qoheleth or the text itself. Such recognition and accommodation can develop readers' acceptance of the contradictions and fragmentation in the biblical text, as well as the storytelling of victims/survivors in their own community. The following paragraph will explain the importance of this, and later, I will offer further discussion about reading through a lens of trauma using the work of Boase and Frechette.[108]

Second, Herman's suggestion that recovery from trauma should emphasise the reconnection between the public and private sectors connects the discussion of trauma with the public, whether the trauma is personal, collective, or communal. This connection supports the need for a trauma-informed reading of the Bible. As the Bible is both a public text and a text containing scenes of violence and terror, reading the Bible

[107] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.
[108] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*.

becomes two sides of the same coin: 1) recalling memories of terrible traumas and retraumatising readers; and 2) allowing the articulation of grief and reconnecting with a community through shared grief. Herman's stages of recovery—the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection—provide a path of guidance that helps heal (or at least does not further harm) people when they interpret the biblical text in faith communities and the wider community.

Third, Herman's approach encourages the study of trauma with the involvement of others who are not primarily traumatised. The connections between traumatised people and the public sector and community means that their healing process includes the involvement of *others*. This inclusion of others in trauma studies is what I am going to draw on. I do not limit my application of trauma studies to a specific group of traumatised people; rather, I also include others among them, particularly those who witness the traumatisation and the traumatised. In her recent publication *Truth and Repair*, Herman expands on the social aspect of understanding trauma by discussing the fourth and final stage of recovery: justice.[109] This social aspect of understanding trauma enables me to develop a trauma reading beyond the personal level and the victim's position. The recovery from trauma involves others—those who are not primarily traumatised. I call these people 'bystanders' because they can choose whether or not to participate when they learn something about traumatisation and the traumatised. Ecclesiastes describes Qoheleth as seeing traumatisation and the traumatised; for example, he sees oppressions and the oppressed (Eccl 4:1). I am interested in viewing Qoheleth as a bystander and exploring how Ecclesiastes portrays his response to what he sees. I will look into what and how he talks about anything unspeakable—something that is too terrible to speak of—and if there is anything he *refrains* from talking about. By reading Qoheleth as a bystander himself, I will explore what we can get from the text that might be put forward to aid trauma recovery. I am also interested in regarding the reader as a bystander, and I will explore the role and options of readers in terms of their responses to the telling and not telling of unspeakable events within the text, as well as in their own community. I will explain more about the term 'bystander' and explore how to read trauma with the bystander approach in my next chapter.

[109] Judith Lewis Herman, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (London: Basic Books, 2023).

Trauma studies has also been developed and applied in other fields, such as in literature. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth links Freud's achievements in psychoanalysis to literary readings. In the introduction of *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth succinctly demonstrates a plot that does not include the word 'trauma' in the text but still strongly indicates that there is a traumatic plot.[110] This further demonstrates that trauma studies is feasible in text-based studies. In the following section, I will discuss the application of trauma studies to the Bible.

Trauma and Trauma Studies in the Hebrew Bible

Trauma in the Hebrew Bible

Like the concept of shame, it is possible to talk about trauma without labelling it as such.[111] Similarly, trauma is identified in the Hebrew Bible, though the term 'trauma' is not used in the biblical texts.[112] First, trauma can be discerned by events. The biblical narratives are full of traumatic scenarios: murder (Gen 4:1–16), oppression and enslavement (Exod 1), genocide (Exod 12), rape (Gen 34; Judg 19; 2 Sam 13), dismemberment (Judg 19:29), and warfare (Josh 6–12), to name a few. There is no way we can deny that trauma is in the Hebrew Bible. Trauma theorists understand these texts as a product of trauma and traumatised people.

In her book *Writing and Reading to Survive*, Claassens argues that the Bible is trauma literature, and she states that the Bible is in and of itself a record and testimony

[110] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 1–9.
[111] Johanna Stiebert, *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 346 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002); T. M. Lemos, 'Shame and Mutilation of Enemies in the Hebrew Bible,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 2 (2006): 225–41, https://doi.org/10.2307/27638359; Lesley DiFransico, 'Distinguishing Emotions of Guilt and Shame in Psalm 51,' *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 48, no. 4 (2018): 180–87, https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107918801511.
[112] Trauma is also identified in the New Testament. The Passion is obviously the most significant trauma in the New Testament. In his book, David Tombs examines the crucifixion of Jesus as a form of torture and an opportunity for sexual abuse. Regardless of whether the crucifixion involved sexual abuse, the Passion narrative is read by Christians as a traumatic story filled with sorrow and pain. See David Tombs, *The Crucifixion of Jesus: Torture, Sexual Abuse, and the Scandal of the Cross*, Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible (Abingdon: Routledge, 2023).

of the ongoingness of trauma.[113] This might explain why the plight in Egypt, the fall of Jerusalem, and the exile were written and read about for generations. They continue to be relived in Judaism.

As discussed in Herman's book, trauma in narratives can be discerned not only in the traumatising events described but also by other descriptors indicative of trauma, including characterisations of contradictions, fragmentations, struggles between denials and proclamations, and dissociations. To illustrate this, I will now discuss the absence of the term 'trauma' in Ruth 1—a biblical text that undeniably features trauma.

The term 'trauma' is not used in the book of Ruth—indeed, there is no Hebrew equivalent for the word that is used anywhere in the Hebrew Bible—but the text nonetheless depicts a traumatic situation and also, I would argue, Naomi's traumatised response after she loses her husband and two sons.

In the family systems of ancient West Asia, men provide women with protection and financial support. Consequently, 'widows and orphans' are the most destitute persons and most in need of protection, as they are left without male family members to take care of them.[114] Following the deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion, Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, become widows (Ruth 1:5). They are particularly vulnerable. We can imagine Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah as being acutely distressed, vulnerable, and socially marginalised.

Naomi, moreover, is in a foreign land without her extended family, so she decides to return home from the country of Moab to the land of Judah (1:7). However, she tells Orpah and Ruth to stay in Moab and return to their natal homes, and she hopes the Lord may deal kindly with them (1:8–9). It may be that Naomi's departure from Moab and her decision to leave her daughters-in-law is not solely driven by her desire to escape the famine in Moab. It might also be interpreted as symptomatic of trauma—

[113] Claassens, *Writing and Reading to Survive*.
[114] F. Charles Fensham, 'Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature,' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21, no. 2 (1962): 129–39, https://www.jstor.org/stable/543887. The two most typical examples are the stories of Tamar (Gen 38) and Ruth (Ruth). Other examples can also be found in Exod 22:22–24; Deut 10:18; 14:28–29; 24:17–22; 26:12–13; 27:19; Ps 82:3–4; Isa 1:17; Jer 7:6; 22:3; Zech 7:10.

hence, she may be avoiding the people and the place that remind her of her loss and trauma.

As widows are particularly vulnerable, a single widow may find it even harder to survive. Naomi tries hard to drive her daughters-in-law away and to return home alone (Ruth 1:8–18). She asks them not to refrain from marrying (1:13). This implies she expects men to protect her widowed daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Contradictorily, when she drives them away from her, she leaves herself exposed to danger on her solo journey to Bethlehem, as well as the possible dangers she may face when she gets there.

In addition to the characterisation of contradiction, there is also characterisation of the struggles between denials and proclamations. Naomi hesitates to proclaim the traumatising experience of the loss of her sons and husband in her conversation with Orpah and Ruth. Although the problem they have to solve at that time is a shortage of food, Naomi also expresses her intention to set out from the country of Moab (Ruth 1:6–7). However, she suddenly asks Orpah and Ruth to go back (1:8–9) and suggest that they will find new husbands but admits that she can do nothing to help them achieve this (1:11–13). She asks, 'Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?' (1:11 NRSVue). Her words express her view that she will never again bear children. The loss of her sons (and husband) hits her hard. She then tells Orpah and Ruth that she is too old to have another husband (1:12). This recalls the recent loss of her husband Elimelech and the fact that he cannot return to her side. This conversation is not only a message from Naomi to her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth; it also discloses her reluctance to let go of her painful emotions.

Naomi's hesitation to proclaim her trauma is more obvious when she arrives in Bethlehem and meets the people there. When the women of Bethlehem have trouble recognising her, she does not talk about the loss directly; neither does she introduce herself (1:19). Instead, she asks the women to call her Mara (מרא, meaning 'bitter'), not Naomi (1:20). The traumatic loss of her sons and husband has taken Naomi's inherently familiar self from her. She no longer sees herself as Naomi, who is the mother of Mahlon and Chilion and wife of Elimelech. She states that she went away full, but now she is empty (1:21).

The above reading of Ruth 1 attempts to illustrate how trauma can be discerned despite the absence of the term 'trauma.' In the presence of Naomi's contradictory expressions and her struggle to proclaim her traumatic experiences, we can also read her pain and sadness in the midst of her trauma.

Trauma Studies and the Hebrew Bible

Through the studies of scholars such as Claassens and the above discussion of Ruth 1, we can see that, even if the term 'trauma' is absent, we can still recognise trauma in the text. But what exactly is it that we recognise that make us appreciate it is trauma? First, as illustrated in my discussion of Ruth 1, we can recognise affective vocabulary and affects related to trauma despite the absence of the word 'trauma' in the text. Second, we can understand the interactive relationship between the events and people described in the text and seek the descriptors indicative of trauma.

Having discussed trauma and trauma studies and before moving on further, I would like to add a remark about my focus on trauma studies. There are distinctions made between the examination of the trauma itself and of the individual impacted, depending on the psychoanalytical and sociological perspectives adopted by trauma studies. I will be exploring how affect circulates among people rather than focusing on the emotion situated inside an individual. Although Qoheleth seems to be the only individual characterised in the book of Ecclesiastes, affect involves subject and object. There are, moreover, implied readers and contemporary readers of the book, and affect circulates among these readers and the text. I will go on to develop this idea in the form of a bystander reading. Consequently, affect and interaction, rather than emotion and the individual, will be at the forefront of my investigation.

Boase and Frechette (Bible Through the Lens of Trauma)

In their edited book *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, Boase and Frechette define 'trauma' as a useful lens for biblical interpretation. They categorise the three common insights informing biblical trauma hermeneutics: psychology, sociology, and literary trauma theology.[115] The psychological insight focuses on trauma and recovery in individuals. The sociological insight focuses on collective trauma and recovery. The

[115] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, 4–12.

literary insight is not confined to a reading through the lens of trauma to obtain the plain meaning of a text:

> Literary trauma theory is concerned with the ways that trauma may be encoded within texts, on the ways that texts may function in witnessing to trauma, and on the ways that texts may facilitate recovery and resilience.[116]

The literary approach reads the 'encoded' trauma in the forms of 'absences, gaps, and repetitions.'[117] These forms of literary expressions wander between the 'spoken' and 'unspoken,' just like Caruth's oft-quoted concept that trauma may be 'claimed' or 'unclaimed.' These expressions, in the form of gaps and repetitions, bear witness to trauma.

Out of the three insights identified by Boase and Frechette, my approach adopts a literary reading and cooperates with affect studies. I look for the ways that trauma is encoded within a text that makes no explicit mention of trauma, such as Ecclesiastes. Drawing on studies on affect terms in the text, I would suggest that those affective terms are expressions of responses to trauma. However, I do not use these affective terms to determine whether or through which incident Qoheleth or the implied author of Ecclesiastes is traumatised in their ancient context. As Boase and Frechette explain, trauma hermeneutics in biblical studies offers an approach that integrates human experience with the reading of biblical texts and complements a series of interpretative approaches, as well as offering insights about both ancient and present contexts.[118] To achieve this, Boase and Frechette introduce three methods for reading the Bible through the lens of trauma. The first method is to consider the ancient contexts of the text; the second method is to consider how traumatised people in both ancient and contemporary contexts read the texts;[119] and the third method is to apply a trauma hermeneutic to the texts with uncertain historical traumas.[120] The third approach is helpful for reading Ecclesiastes because the historical background of this text, as well as Qoheleth's background, are uncertain. Boase and Frechette endorse the possibility of researching uncertain historical traumas. With this in mind, I will demonstrate the application of

[116] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, 10.
[117] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, 11.
[118] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, 13.
[119] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, 13–14.
[120] Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, 14.

trauma studies in biblical studies through an article by Ruth Poser in Boase and Frechette's book.

Ruth Poser (Psychological and Literary)

In her chapter, 'No Words: The Book of Ezekiel as Trauma Literature and a Response to Exile,' Poser illustrates her reading of the book of Ezekiel as trauma literature and a response to the exile. She applies two approaches: psychological and literary. She first applies psychological trauma theory to explain the features of Ezekiel that reflect characteristics of traumatisation and strategies for addressing them. She then applies literary studies to identify the book of Ezekiel as a trauma narrative and to explore the book's potential to represent trauma and facilitate recovery.[121]

I find Poser's approach helpful in three ways: 1) it demonstrates literary trauma studies; 2) it combines a psychological approach with literary studies; and 3) it moves forwards from identifying the book as a trauma narrative. First, Poser's literary approach identifies the book of Ezekiel as a trauma narrative due to the repetition, gaps and symbolisation in the book, which are possible characteristics of trauma experiences. In Ecclesiastes, there are also numerous repetition and gaps; Poser's literary approach therefore sheds light on how these repetitions and gaps may be understood in Ecclesiastes. Second, Poser also demonstrates how to apply both psychological and literary approaches to the interpretation of Ezekiel. The historical context of Ezekiel provides details of Ezekiel's traumatic experiences, which makes a psychological approach fit in with the study of this text. Unlike the book of Ezekiel, there is no consensus on the historical context of Ecclesiastes; it is therefore less possible to identify the traumatic event or context in this text. This in turn suggests that a psychological approach is less apt for analysing the character of Qoheleth. Poser's combination of these two approaches demonstrates that they complement each other. Though I do not analyse Qoheleth in light of the situation he is facing, I am combining affect studies and literary studies to interpret the vocabulary, repetition, and gaps in Ecclesiastes. Third, Poser does not only identify the book of Ezekiel as a trauma narrative. After her analysis of its repetition, gaps, and symbolisation, she includes a discussion about 'imagination, fictionality and bearing witness to the truth.' Here, she

[121] Ruth Poser, 'No Words: The Book of Ezekiel as Trauma Literature and a Response to Exile,' in *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, Semeia Studies 86 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 28, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd.5.

explores how the book of Ezekiel not only represents trauma but also has the potential to facilitate recovery from trauma.

I find it helpful to explore the potential of reading Ecclesiastes as trauma literature; because Ecclesiastes is a religious text, readers may also look to it as a source of healing or guidance. I am not satisfied with only identifying patterns in Ecclesiastes. These patterns may suggest the text's capabilities to provide resonance for and solidarity with people who have experienced or witnessed trauma. I do not limit such resonance and solidarity to victims and survivors because my experience has taught me that it is not only victims/survivors who are traumatised. So I include a wider spectrum of trauma stakeholders, including those who are traumatised through what they have witnessed or heard. In the next chapter, I talk about these people who have witnessed or heard trauma, namely bystanders, and I discuss how the bystander approach helps us to understand Ecclesiastes and to explore its potential for facilitating recovery from trauma.

Reading Ecclesiastes Through the Lens of Trauma

In this section, I will discuss the repetitions and gaps in Qoheleth's performance in Ecclesiastes. I will examine how his performance informs us about the topic of trauma in terms of four response modes: fight, flight, freeze, and (be)friend.[122]

Fight

One of the trauma responses is to fight for safety. This can involve physically fighting or verbally fighting. In Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth seems to have done nothing to fight for safety. I would argue that giving witness continuously is a means of fighting for safety

[122] There are different versions of these responses, not all of which include the five categories 'fight,' 'flight,' 'freeze,' 'flop,' and '(be)friend.' They are classified as survival strategies or threat responses. Since 'flop' is similar to 'freeze,' with its focus on muscles and the body, I will skip this response. In addition, the (be)friending response is also known as the fawning response. Fawning is an attempt to please the perpetrator in order to protect ourselves from danger. The nuance of the befriending response is that fawning involves disconnection from ourselves and giving up our own emotions or needs. I choose the term '(be)friending' because it refers to both the response of seeking help from a friend or a bystander and the response of pleasing the perpetrator. See 'The 5 Fs: Fight, Flight, Freeze, Flop and Friend,' Rape Crisis England and Wales, accessed 16 June 2023, https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/tools-for-victims-and-survivors/understanding-your-response/fight-or-flight/.

because it is a way to recognise danger, face danger head on, and protect ourselves from harm. I will first illustrate where we can find Qoheleth witnessing in Ecclesiastes.

The repeated occurrence of 'I saw' in Ecclesiastes describes Qoheleth seeing something repeatedly.[123] Besides these repeated occurrences of 'I saw,' there are four occurrences of variants: 'and again, I saw' (ועוד ראיתי) and 'I turned and saw' (ושׁבתי אני וארא; see Table 3). The phrase 'I turned and saw' implies that, when Qoheleth turns, he sees something again. This phrase is rendered 'again, I saw' in the NRSVue translation. I focus on these four occurrences as they highlight not only repeated witnessing but Qoheleth's repeated statements about repeated witnesses.

Table 3. Occurrences of 'I saw' (ארא) and Its Variants

ועוד ראיתי תחת השׁמשׁ מקום המשׁפט שׁמה הרשׁע ומקום הצדק שׁמה הרשׁע:	And again, I saw under the sun: the place of justice, the wickedness is there; and the place of righteousness, the wickedness is there. (Eccl 3:16)
ושׁבתי אני וארא את־כל־העשׁקים אשׁר נעשׂים תחת השׁמשׁ והנה דמעת העשׁקים ואין להם מנחם ומיד עשׁקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם:	Then, I turned and saw all the oppressions which are done under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed and there is no one to comfort them, and from the hand of their oppressors, power, there is no one to comfort them. (Eccl 4:1)
ושׁבתי אני וארא הבל תחת השׁמשׁ:	Then I turned and saw vanity under the sun (Eccl 4:7)
שׁבתי וראה תחת־השׁמשׁ כי לא לקלים המרוץ ולא לגבורים המלחמה וגם לא לחכמים לחם וגם לא לנבנים עשׁר וגם לא לידעים חן כי־עת ופגע יקרה את־כלם:	I turned and saw under the sun that the fast ones do not own the race, nor the mighty ones the battle, nor the wise, food, nor the understanding ones, riches, nor the knowledgeable ones, favour, but time and chance happen to them all. (Eccl 9:11)

[123] ראיתי occurs in 1:14; 2:13, 24; 3:10, 16, 22; 4:4, 15; 5:12, 17 (Eng 5:13, 18); 6:1; 7:15; 8:9, 10, 17; 9:13; 10:5, 7; וארא occurs in 2:3; 4:1, 7.

Ecclesiastes begins by introducing Qoheleth (1:1). Then, Qoheleth delivers his reflections about the natural cycles (1:4–11), counting his possessions (2:3–8), and everything having its proper time (3:1–8). Through the repeated occurrence of 'I saw,' Qoheleth is showing readers what he sees. In Ecclesiastes 4:1, Qoheleth makes his first mention of concrete phenomena (oppressions and the oppressed) rather than the abstract (wickedness in 3:16). He is a witness who sees that the oppressed are in tears but have no comfort. There are different possibilities for understanding this first act of witnessing. First, it happens for the first time because something has changed in the society that causes oppressions to happen and people to be oppressed. Second, this may or may not be the first time this oppression happens, but it is the first time Qoheleth witnesses it. The tears of the oppressed may have so shocked him that he feels compelled to mention them. Third, this may not be the first time Qoheleth has witnessed such oppression, but it is the first time he speaks up. I cannot state conclusively which of these is the best possibility; nevertheless, Ecclesiastes 4:1 is the first time in Ecclesiastes readers encounter Qoheleth witnessing about oppression.

In Ecclesiastes 4:1, Qoheleth says that he sees oppressions running rampant under the sun. Though there is no mention of how these oppressions are happening and how traumatic they are, Qoheleth says he can see the oppressed are in tears and have no comfort. Because the oppressors do what they do in broad daylight, when everyone can see, nothing can be hidden. Qoheleth is helpless about the situation and seems to allow the oppressors to continue unchecked. There is nothing he can do to prevent it, even though it happens more than once. After this first witness from Qoheleth, he keeps telling the audience what he sees. It seems as though he is standing idly when he repeatedly sees something. Ecclesiastes does not tell the audience what he does. However, living in such a society with sustained social injustice is utterly disheartening, soul-destroying, and hence traumatising. The presence of structural injustice continues to diminish a populace, make them feel worthless, and leave them feeling as though there is no hope for change.

But there is another sense in which trauma is not a one-off: it can have an impact on a person's heart, or core, and they then carry that into every situation and relationship, which may no longer be seen as neutral, hopeful, or promising life. Fox ascertains Qoheleth's despair over the sustained injustice, because social injustice is not

a once-off event. Rather, it is just one of the many distortions in an 'unchanging and unchangeable world.'[124] The occurrences of 'I turned and saw' may reflect that Qoheleth has been seeing wickedness (3:16), oppressions (4:1), vanity (4:7), and unfairness (9:11) for some time. These are only some of the many injustices in Qoheleth's society. Regarding the phrase 'again I saw' in Ecclesiastes 4:1 and 4:7, James Crenshaw suggests this is 'indicating that injustice and oppression are not isolated incidents but recurring phenomena.'[125] So Ecclesiastes 9:11 concludes Qoheleth's observations that those with abilities (the speedy, the strong, the wise, the intelligent, and the skilful) are no longer guaranteed a reward for their capabilities.

Having seen Qoheleth describe that he turns and sees trauma repeatedly, and having implied that the presence of structural injustice repeatedly wears down the populace, I would argue that his giving witness continuously is a means to fight for safety. I have illustrated how there are traumatising forms of structural injustice repeatedly happening and seen by Qoheleth. His speaking up shows that he does not get used to it; nor does he accept its presence as the norm. He names the oppressions, or at least he describes what is happening. By speaking out, he can counter the oppressor and express his refusal to accept the evil that is happening. He verbally fights against this evil by saying 'no' to the normalisation and continuation of structural injustice. And he does not only do this once; each occurrence of 'I saw' and 'I turned and saw' presents his rejection of injustice and the harm it may cause and restates his resistance to evil.

Flight

Another trauma response that I would like to discuss is flight. Flight refers to escaping—either by fleeing or through escapism. People choose to escape from the environment that makes them feel endangered and to go to a safe environment because they cannot undo the traumatic event to regain a sense of security. Flight can also include distancing oneself from the danger when there is no specific safe place to go.[126] In Ecclesiastes, descriptions of Qoheleth's retreats and his search for escapism could be interpreted as a form of flight. He makes repeated claims about the importance of enjoyment, especially with regard to eating and drinking (2:24; 3:12–14, 22; 5:17–19

[124] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 200.
[125] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 106.
[126] 'The 5 Fs.'

[Eng 5:18–20]; 8:15; 9:7–10). Commentators understand this as an attitude of *carpe diem*, a Latin phrase meaning 'seize the day.'[127] Longman regards such eating and drinking as an attempt to get as much enjoyment from life as possible in the *present*—resisting the darkness of life that has no ultimate meaning. In his view, the pleasures from these acts may provide temporal relief and lighten life's burdens.[128] In my reading of Ecclesiastes with trauma studies, I find the motif of enjoyment can add distance between Qoheleth and the dangerous environment he is witnessing, as well as between the reader and the description of what Qoheleth sees. In addition, as Crenshaw observes, Qoheleth does not strongly assert the goodness of eating and drinking—by not saying 'this is good' but rather 'there is nothing better' (אין־טוב). Hence, the phrasing suggests it is advice made in the absence of better alternatives.[129] Longman also describes it as an expression of Qoheleth's 'reluctance and his lack of enthusiasm.'[130] Reading this 'enjoyment' with a trauma perspective, I liken the food and drink to a form of escapism. It acts as a rest break that takes Qoheleth away from seeing or pondering unpleasant happenings.

Freeze

The freeze trauma response involves staying still and silent.[131] In Ecclesiastes, the narrator does not describe Qoheleth as remaining still and silent, but the disruptions in his speech can be viewed as a way of moving towards silence. Commentators attempt to analyse the divisions (or units) in the book and to identify its themes and structures to facilitate interpretation, but there is no consensus about its themes. Crenshaw proposes there are twenty-five units in the twelve chapters of Ecclesiastes, while Roger Whybray has even proposed thirty-one units based on content.[132] The sheer number of units identified by these and other scholars imply that there are short passages for each thematic unit and regular shifts from one topic to the next. In his two-volume

[127] Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, Word Biblical Commentary 23A (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 92; Longman, B*ook of Ecclesiastes*, 106–10.
[128] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 106.
[129] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 89.
[130] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 107.
[131] 'The 5 Fs.'
[132] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 47–48; Roger N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, Old Testament Guides 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 46–47.

commentary on Ecclesiastes, Weeks proposes there are twenty-four units in total;[133] he suggests that 'large parts of the book are filled, however, either by much shorter, even looser series of sayings and admonitions, or by the very brief, seemingly miscellaneous materials that make up much of chs. 7 and 10.'[134] If we read Ecclesiastes as though Qoheleth is giving a speech, we have no way of seeing any silent moments between topics in the text. But these multiple and sudden shifts in topic could be interpreted as ellipses to mark a pause, or silence. It is as though Qoheleth is standing still and silent *after* he says what he sees. Such sudden changes of topic are different to situations where a politician or celebrity is asked about a sensitive topic, and they avoid it or refuse to return to it during the discussion. But in Ecclesiastes, the shifts in topic are like putting a distance between Qoheleth and the incidents he sees so that he can speak out about what he sees rather than refusing to address a topic.

Friend

The trauma response '(be)friend' is about seeking help from a friend or bystander through getting their attention and/or befriending the perpetrator through 'placating, negotiating, bribing or pleading with them.'[135] After Qoheleth sees people's oppressions (4:1), their riches being lost in a bad venture (5:13 [Eng 5:14]), and their wealth being enjoyed by a stranger (6:2), his befriending attitude is seen intermittently in chapters 8 and 10. Ecclesiastes 8 shows Qoheleth's befriending manner through his command to be obedient to the powerful ruler (8:2). He also encourages his audience not to linger before the powerful, nor to be terrified, nor to delay when the matter is unpleasant, because the powerful can do whatever they please (8:3).[136] It is not necessary to ask the ruler what he is doing (8:4). Qoheleth believes that whoever obeys a command can escape from harm, and there will be a proper time and way to leave (8:5). Harm, death, and battle are unavoidable (8:6–8), and a person with power can hurt the one over whom they have power (8:9). These claims protect those in power, not the victims.

---

[133] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*; Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 5–12: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022).
[134] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*, 10.
[135] 'The 5 Fs.'
[136] In most English translations, as well as the Chinese version (RCUV), the first part of this verse is rendered as 'do not be hasty to go,' except for the recent NRSVue translation, which renders it 'Do not be terrified; go from his presence.' This latter translation makes more sense in the context, as Seow explains that an 'immediate response to the King's command or quick departure from his presence is expected' (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 280. For a detailed discussion, see pp.279–80.)

They operate to appease the powerful people because, as Qoheleth claims, a powerful person can hurt others. Qoheleth's placating attitude continues in Ecclesiastes 10. He suggests in 10:4 that a person does not try to escape even when the ruler's anger goes up against them because gentleness will undo great sins (כי מרפא יניצח חטאים גדולים).[137] This shows that Qoheleth understands that leaving cannot avert harm and staying is the better choice. He also recommends offering obedience, submissiveness, and respect to the ruler. At the end of chapter 10, he warns his audience not to curse a king, even in thought or in private (10:20). This further demonstrates his be(friending) response—offering obedience and submission to the rulers and rejecting verbal and ideological rebellion.

Summary: Why Is Trauma Studies a Helpful Strategy in Reading Biblical Texts?

In this chapter, I started by outlining the variability in definitions and denotations of trauma to introduce the notions of wound and stigma, either or both of which traumatised people may have borne. I also introduced trauma studies, including but not limited to cases of PTSD. Trauma studies refers to personal suffering, PTSD, or other impacts of a traumatic event on an individual, including the impact of secondary trauma on people who witness events of primary trauma but are not directly affected. (This will become relevant again in my later discussion of bystander studies.)

I highlighted that discussing trauma in biblical texts does not require us to be able to make a diagnosis; rather, I emphasised the value of approaching biblical texts through a lens of trauma. Trauma is identified in the Hebrew Bible from the narratives of traumatic scenarios, even if the term 'trauma' is absent from the text. Trauma can also be discerned in the Hebrew Bible by descriptors, such as characterisations of contradictions, fragmentations, and struggles between denials and proclamations. Using the example of the book of Ruth, I demonstrated that we can recognise trauma in the text through close attention to the interactive relationship between events and people described in the text. Going back to the previous chapter and building on it, we can also

[137] מרפא means 'composure' (Prov 14:30) or 'gentleness' (Prov 15:4). See *HOL*, 216. In most English translations, it is rendered as 'calmness,' except for the JPS, which renders it as 'gentleness.'

perceive trauma in the text through affective vocabulary and descriptions of affective responses.

I have discussed trauma studies and the Hebrew Bible and explored how affect circulated among people, as well as the interactive relationship between the events and people described in the text. From my own experience of witnessing trauma, it is not only victims/survivors who are traumatised. I suggested also the inclusion of those who are traumatised through what they have witnessed or heard. (This will be developed in the next chapter with reference to the bystander approach.) In reading Ecclesiastes through the lens of trauma, I illustrated how Qoheleth's performance informs us about the topic of trauma in terms of four response modes: fight, flight, freeze, and (be)friend. I analysed how Qoheleth is affected, and I suggested that he can be regarded not as a victim but as a witness of trauma. Such a trauma-informed interpretation of Ecclesiastes draws readers' attention to witnessing—with the witness understood to be a stakeholder of trauma but in a role that is distinct from either perpetrator or victim. This significantly expands the application of trauma studies in biblical interpretation because more research can be done to investigate the very many witnesses in the biblical texts and to examine the reading response of readers as witnesses—that is, as neither perpetrators nor victims but as nonetheless actively engaged and invested in what they read.

CHAPTER 3: THE BYSTANDER APPROACH AND ECCLESIASTES

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the relationships between affect and trauma. My study of affective terms in the Bible reflects on readers' responses to traumatic situations mentioned in the text. I pointed out the absence of the term 'trauma' in biblical texts featuring trauma and explained how I have overcome this difficulty. In Ecclesiastes, where emotional responses are concerned, the focus is not so much on Qoheleth's own experience but on his role at one remove: as witness. I have demonstrated the fullness of emotional expressions in Ecclesiastes that accentuate what Qoheleth sees and feels. I have found the affects circulating in the texts; yet I have no effective agency to intervene.

It is this inability—to read, to observe, but not to have power to intervene—that draws me to reading Ecclesiastes as a bystander. A bystander *can* do something even if they did not create the situation they observe and even if they are not expected to intervene. A bystander approach therefore absolves me of responsibility for the situation I observe but also calls on me to make a choice going forward: to be an active or a passive bystander. This chapter continues my discussion of trauma but highlights bystanders' distinctive role in traumatic happenings. Bystanders, I argue, engage in decisions about responding or not during or after the act of witnessing; meanwhile, it is also important to acknowledge that bystanders, too, may be traumatised even though they are not direct or intended victims.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the nature and development of bystander studies. I will also discuss the term 'bystander' and its variants, as well as the use of different terms in my thesis. Then, I will review the bystander approach in biblical studies and how this approach can apply to and enhance the reading of Ecclesiastes. I will continue the discussion of trauma by applying the bystander approach to my reading Ecclesiastes, and I consider readers who may also have bystander roles or who experience trauma in their own situations. Readers who have agency, or who have agential possibilities, in the bystander role may interpret a text differently or at least read themselves differently into the situation depicted in the text.

The bystander approach, I contend, can further contribute to existing trauma studies approaches through its emphasis on the recognition that trauma impacts people other than victims. I am not taking away from the importance of centring victims, but I am seeking to acknowledge more explicitly than is usually the case the trauma experienced by bystanders—those at one remove. One reason this is important is that many, if not most, of us are even more likely to be bystanders of trauma than victims of trauma. Discussion about trauma is usually primarily centred on the traumatised person, that is the victim, supplemented by a focus on the perpetrator. But in traumatic events, in addition to the victims and perpetrators, there are also many non-victims, indirect victims, and non-perpetrators, whom I call bystanders. (I will explain the categorisation and definitions in more detail later.) Bystanders are involved in trauma to varying degrees and by a number of means, such as through witnessing, hearing reports, or reading news and seeing images. According to the *DSM-5*, exposure to traumatic events is not limited to directly experiencing them but also includes witnessing in person, learning that a traumatic event occurred to a close family member or friend, or experiencing repeated exposure to unpleasant details about a traumatic event.[138] But the last criterion—experiencing repeated exposure to unpleasant details—'does not apply to exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures, unless this exposure is work related.'[139]

On the one hand, the *DSM-5* acknowledges the stress of witnessing a traumatic event; but on the other hand, it seems to downplay, or ignore, the psychological impacts of witnessing through live-streaming. Moreover, it recognises the stress of repeated exposure to unpleasant details of a traumatic event, but it seems to ignore those who are exposed to traumatic event for reasons other than their professional positions. This may be because the *DSM-5* is a diagnostic manual, and it is implicated in financial compensation in the American legal context. Such a restriction on work-related exposure can control the compensation claims by large swaths of the public who experience exposure to unpleasant details of a traumatic event in the news media or on social media. Nevertheless, when studying trauma, bystanders—who are exposed to a traumatic event or to an encounter with traumatised people—and their trauma should be taken into account, too. The bystander approach can break down the binary by including

[138] American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, §309.81.
[139] American Psychiatric Association, *DSM-5*, §309.81.

those other than the victim or perpetrator, and it can provide a perspective on and discussion of trauma from the bystander's perspective. This includes how bystanders may have been traumatised and how they respond to trauma, as well as their affective responses to others being traumatised.

Since the terms 'bystander' and 'onlooker' may have different denotations and implications to different people, I find it necessary to clarify the categorisation and definition of types of bystanders.[140] I will discuss the transformation of the understanding and use of the term 'bystander' in the development of bystander studies later. At this point, let me briefly introduce my use of the term 'bystander' and other related terms. The terms 'bystander' and 'onlooker' are often used interchangeably without clear differentiation from each other. In this thesis, I would like to keep the use of the term 'bystander' as a general description of people who learn about a traumatic event or traumatised people. They are similar to witnesses but are not limited to those who witness directly, in person. I reserve the term 'onlooker' for referring to someone who is indifferent and rejects becoming involved in intervening or responding to a traumatic event or traumatised people. I attempt to create space for accommodating the bystander who may have been traumatised and who experiences the 'freeze' or '(be)friend' response and becomes less able to respond to trauma rapidly, rationally, and responsibly. I will call them passive bystanders. In the next section, I will review the changing uses of the term 'bystander' and its connotations. I anticipate that the clearer categorisation and definition of bystanders can provide language for discussing the impact of trauma on bystanders and for evaluating their affective responses before they are held responsible for mitigating the impact of trauma on victims. I will also bring this into my discussion of Qoheleth as a traumatised bystander later in this chapter.

---

[140]A similar term referring to a bystander/onlooker in Chinese is 旁觀者 (*pòhng gūn jé*; literal translation: side watch person). Its connotation is rather neutral: it does not imply any accusation of not intervening. The Chinese proverb 當局者迷，旁觀者清 (*dōng guhk jé màih ，pòhng gūn jé chīng*; literal translation: participants [are] confused, bystanders [are] clear) can be translated as 'While those involved in a matter are getting confused, those not involved have a clear mind.' It is similar to the proverbial phrase in English 'Lookers-on see most of the game.' The saying attributes a clear mind to those who keep their distance from a difficult situation. In fact, terms that focus on responsive behaviours are more commonly used, rather than simply labelling a person as a bystander/onlooker in terms of 旁觀者. For instance, 袖手旁觀 (*jauh sáu pòhng gūn;* literal translation: sleeve hand beside watch) means 'stand by and do nothing'; 見義勇為 (*gin yih yúhng wàih*; literal translation: see justice brave to act) means 'to act bravely for a just cause'; and 見死不救 (*gin séi bāt gau*; literal translation: see death not to save) means 'to neglect a person in danger and not assist him/her.'

By drawing on bystander studies, I seek to do something analogous to the way trauma studies is used to read the Hebrew Bible. In its application to biblical studies, trauma studies connects with, acknowledges, and centres the perspective of the victim; the bystander approach provides a connection with the perspective of people other than direct victims (such as bystanders) and acknowledges their trauma, too. There are biblical narratives identified as trauma narratives, such as narratives involving forced exile or sexual violence. For instance, among the narratives involving forced exile, Ezekiel's behaviours are read as symptoms of disorder, and the exile is recognised as a traumatic event. And among the narratives involving sexual violence, the unnamed wife of the Levite in Judges 19 has been widely studied using feminist and trauma hermeneutics approaches.[141] However, studies on biblical trauma have mostly examined texts with a focus on victims—that is, those who are directly or immediately traumatised.[142] In Judges 19:29, the Levite makes the tribes active bystanders by sending them the body parts of his wife. This spreads the trauma and invokes horror, trauma, and action—the attack of the Benjaminites, as well as the rape 'marriages' between the Benjaminites and the young women of Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh (Judges 20–21). The victims—the Levite's wife and the women raped and 'married' to the Benjaminites—are widely studied, whilst the tribes members who receive the body parts and the fathers and brothers (who are mentioned) and other family members, such as mothers and sisters (who are not mentioned), of the young women of Shiloh and Jabesh-gilead are less often discussed.[143] There have not been many examinations of

---

[141] Trible, *Texts of Terror*, 65–92; Helen Paynter, *Telling Terror in Judges 19: Rape and Reparation for the Levite's Wife*, Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); Fry, *Trauma Talks in the Hebrew Bible*, 45–62.

[142] David G. Garber, '"I Went in Bitterness": Theological Implications of a Trauma Theory Reading of Ezekiel,' *Review & Expositor* 111, no. 4 (2014): 346–57, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637314557242; Kirsten Nielsen, 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Book of Job,' in *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, ed. Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else K. Holt, trans. Edward Broadbridge, Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 2:62–70; Boase and Frechette, *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*; Janzen, *Trauma and the Failure of History*; L. Juliana Claassens, 'Surfing with Jonah: Reading Jonah as a Postcolonial Trauma Narrative,' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45, no. 4 (2021): 576–87, https://doi.org/10.1177/03090892211001396; Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa, *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse* (London: SCM Press, 2021).

[143] Paynter, *Telling Terror in Judges 19*; Esther Brownsmith, '"Call Me by Your Name": Critical Fabulation and the Woman of Judges 19,' *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies* 4, no. 2 (2022): 5–27, https://jibs.hcommons.org/2022/11/02/4-2-brownsmith-call-me-by-your-name/; Katherine E. Southwood, 'Critical Empathy and Reading Judges 21: A Self-Critical Corrective,' in *The Bible and Violence*, ed. Johanna Stiebert et al. (London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming). The chapter was shared by the author prior to publication, with permission of the editors.

biblical texts from the perspective of witnesses, or bystanders—that is, those who are also traumatised, albeit less directly or indirectly. Witnesses or bystanders may be traumatised by what they have seen and/or their own action or inaction, or by their subsequent reflection. The example of Judges 19–21 is one of multiple texts in the Hebrew Bible with overlooked bystanders who appear alongside the victims and perpetrators involved in traumatic events. I will review a further work in biblical studies that recognises the presence of bystanders and various types of bystanders in the Hebrew Bible in section two of this chapter.

Besides examining characters *in the text* as witnesses or bystanders, there is also a way to read biblical narrative *as a bystander*. In her study about reading Sarah's experience as both victim and perpetrator with an awareness of her own whiteness and privilege, feminist scholar Jayme R. Reaves approaches the text like a bystander.[144] Though she does not mention bystandership, her awareness of her privilege throughout her re-examination of the Sarah//Hagar story gives insight into and agency to Hagar and the oppressed of today. Reaves chooses to watch and listen, even if she cannot intervene in the action of the story. Moreover, she resolves to act with mindfulness going forward. Reaves listens *empathetically*—which is central to what I am proposing. Her research demonstrates that the entry point for readers and scholars is not limited to making an analogy with the victim role in the text but can instead begin from another perspective, which, in Reaves's research, is the role of the perpetrator. My research will take a third perspective: the role of the bystander looking at and responding to the text. Using the same empathetic approach as Reaves to reflect on the struggles and reactions in the reading, I will, later in this chapter, read Ecclesiastes while regarding the reader as bystander. In Chapter 4, I will use Ecclesiastes to demonstrate such a three-pronged reading—that is, a combination of affect studies, trauma studies, and the bystander approach.

While Reaves focuses on a Hebrew Bible text , Tombs's related research applies to the New Testament.[145] He sensitively recognises the possibilities of sexual violence during Jesus's crucifixion. He establishes connections between the 'crucified people' and the 'crucified Christ' and argues that such connections create a demand for action

[144] Jayme R. Reaves, 'Sarah as Victim and Perpetrator: Whiteness, Power, and Memory in the Matriarchal Narrative,' *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 4 (2018): 483–99, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637318806591.
[145] Tombs, *Crucifixion of Jesus*.

among readers, who may prefer to just look at the cross/crucified Christ.[146] His study articulates how readers witness the familiar death on the cross, which calls them to reflect on witnessing violence and terror in public.[147] While mainstream views of the crucifixion have focused on its association with God's salvific grace, Tombs stresses that this approach draws attention from those who have experienced violence. Such a reading may not be accepted by mainstream churches and institutions, as is the case with discussions of sexual violence, sexual abuse, and other issues. None of these discussions are accepted by mainstream society, and they are often dominated and obscured by other popular issues and viewpoints at the public level and in the media. But this does not mean that these discussions are unimportant or unnecessary. Tomb's discussion of Jesus's crucifixion draws readers' attention to their obligations towards other 'crucified people' as they witness the 'crucified Christ.' The bystander approach has an important role in research, which is akin to the way trauma research and feminist criticism have helped reveal the harm suffered by the victims in the text. It may contribute to biblical studies by fostering readers' agency to empathise with characters/people who have experienced trauma, to promote activism, and to criticise injustice as a bystander-reader of biblical texts.

Therefore, the bystander approach can also contribute to the application of trauma studies to biblical studies from the reader's perspective. Readers reading biblical texts are bystanders to the ancient text and its historical background because they cannot alter the text or the history. The bystander approach also allows readers to find a role with which to empathise and connect, even if they do not identify themselves with the victims described in the biblical stories, such as those who are forced to work (Exod 1), those whose ethnic groups are being persecuted (Exod 12), those who have been raped (Gen 34; Judg 19; 2 Sam 13), and those who have been forced into 'marriage' (Judg 21). If readers do not understand the victims in the biblical stories, and if they do not think their victimisation has anything to do with them, the bystander approach can indeed provide a perspective to evaluate this attitude and response.

In addition to the above reasons for investigating the bystander approach in biblical studies, my positionality also drives me to apply trauma studies in biblical

[146] Tombs, *Crucifixion of Jesus*, 3.
[147] Tombs, *Crucifixion of Jesus*, 69.

studies from the bystander's perspective. When I was young, I quite often claimed or placed myself in a position of victimisation. Putting myself in the victim's position gave me certain advantages, such as extra protection and care from my parents compared to my siblings. However, I do not now condone this victimisation strategy because I know there were and are victims who suffered so much more severely than I did. I find myself now an outsider and a bystander. I even feel shame and guilt about having claimed victim status, because I see others suffer. Nevertheless, I cannot find relief from my confusion over what I have seen unexpectedly; nor can I end my struggle with flashbacks of how people suffered and what I did (not) do at those moments. Confusion and struggle often appear, not only when I read about or see films or exhibitions about historical calamities, but also when I hear news of sexual harassment, murder, or any other kind of violence and injustice.

My confusion and struggle also happen when I read the Bible, not only because violence and justice can also be found in the Bible but also because vulnerable biblical figures are sometimes, to me, unfairly interpreted. This happens when I read Ecclesiastes; although there is no such vulnerable figure being wronged (Qoheleth is depicted as a king!), there *is* a witness telling us what he sees. When I read 'I saw' in Ecclesiastes, I am being shown what another person sees. In other words, I see something wrong *through his eyes*—his eyewitness account. Again, I am not a victim. I am an ordinary reader, a bystander.[148] However, I cannot read Ecclesiastes and remain a passive bystander, who looks on and lets him tell his story without responding in any form, particularly with regard to my affect. Listening to him tell his story causes affects—pain, sadness, anger—to circulate and persist throughout the reading. Stopping my reading of Ecclesiastes does not get me out of the circulation of affects. I am looking for solutions to the doom he sees and otherwise seeking a way out for myself. When I read Ecclesiastes from the perspective of a bystander, with my background and experience of witnessing, I find that, as a bystander, I have the option to respond; I am expected to respond, but I am barred by inhibitors. Such a bystander-informed reading empowers readers' agency and also challenge their responses to the situations presented in the texts, which may be comparable to situations present in readers' own reality. Therefore, I will apply the concept of the bystander to readings from Ecclesiastes to

[148] The term 'ordinary reader' has a specific meaning in contextual Bible study (from South Africa), which also facilitates empathetic and activist reading.

increase understanding of trauma beyond the victim. This understanding of bystander trauma and taking the position of the bystander may lead to the development of trauma-informed readings of Ecclesiastes, as well as of the Hebrew Bible more widely. Furthermore, the Bible is a canon, and I am a Christian. Arguably, the purpose of the Christian canon is to guide and to inspire faith and action grounded in and motivated by faith. So, if I am a bystander-reader of a canonical text, the notion of seeking ways to read and respond actively is eminently appropriate.

What Is Bystander Studies?

Having briefly introduced the concept of the bystander and its relationship with biblical studies, in this section, I am going to stay with bystander studies and lay out my discussion of the bystander approach in biblical studies, particularly the application of this approach to reading Ecclesiastes. The section includes an introduction to the origins of bystander studies in sociology and the development of bystander studies in Holocaust studies. Such a bifurcation of bystander studies in sociological studies and Holocaust studies may seem a bit arbitrary, but I have a reason for taking this approach. My decision to focus on the concept of the bystander in Holocaust studies, rather than its development in sociology, is not only because of the close connection of the former to what we might call the Jewishness of the Hebrew Bible but also because it is based in a concrete setting, not in a hypothetical experiment or situation. I will explain more about the shortcomings of the sociological methodology later. In addition, I will argue that bystander studies in Holocaust studies can help explain some presumptions and expectations about bystanders, and it can also show the changing connotations and uses of the terms ‘onlooker’ and ‘bystander.’

The Onset of Bystander Studies

The murder of Kitty Genovese in 1964 became formative for the way we think about bystanders. Genovese was raped and stabbed to death outside her apartment building in the Kew district of New York. The *New York Times* published an article claiming that thirty-eight neighbours witnessed the attack but did nothing. It was later confirmed that the article contained inaccuracies and exaggerations, but the incident prompted discussion and analysis of why no witness did anything. The failure of action came to

inform what is now known as the *bystander effect*. Sociologists John M. Darley and Bibb Latané studied the bystander effect during that period.[149] They found that the presence of other bystanders may cause a diffusion of responsibility and pluralistic ignorance, which cause people to remain passive and delay their response. Darley and Latané's survey of bystander responses proposes that bystanders' inactions are founded not on apathy or indifference but rather on other inhibitors, such as the number of bystanders, which lead to a delay in response.[150]

Darley and Latané's studies drew lots of attention to bystander interventions at that time, but the design of their laboratory experiments based on Genovese's case led to the controversial (and overgeneralised) conclusion that no one offers help in an emergency. Frances E. Cherry has criticised Darley and Latané's studies on the Kitty Genovese murder because they eliminated the nature of behaviour (beating and rape) and also the gendered particulars of the crime (a man beats a woman).[151] In her review of the social psychology research process, Cherry accentuates the importance of analysis and assessment of individuals' own experiences, culture, and background. I agree with her emphasis on individual experience (and affects); therefore, rather than relying on the bystander studies developed in a hypothetical experiment or situation, I prefer to adopt the bystander studies used in Holocaust studies, which are largely based on individuals' experiences (I will elaborate on this in the next section). In addition, I have chosen not to study the responsibility of bystanders, as examined in Darley and Latané's studies. I apply the bystander approach to the reading of biblical texts to analyse the bystander as one of the stakeholders in (traumatic) events and also to consider how the reader might read a biblical text as a bystander. Before applying the bystander approach to the reading of the biblical text, I will introduce the bystander studies developed in Holocaust studies. Then, I will introduce the understanding of bystanders in Holocaust studies through the work two scholars: Raul Hilberg and Ervin Staub.

---

[149] John M. Darley and Bibb Latané, 'Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8, no. 4 (1968): 377–83, https://doi.org/10.1037/h0025589; Bibb Latané and John M Darley, 'Bystander "Apathy",' *American Scientist* 57, no. 2 (1969): 244–68; Bibb Latané and John M. Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't He Help?* Century Psychology Series (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970).
[150] Darley and Latané, 'Bystander Intervention in Emergencies.'
[151] Frances E. Cherry, *Stubborn Particulars of Social Psychology: Essays on the Research Process* (London: Routledge, 1995), 16–29.

Bystander Studies in Holocaust Studies

In the mid-1960s, bystander studies also developed in relation to the Holocaust. A leading scholar in bystander studies, Ervin Staub, arrived in the United States in 1959 and also began his research in the mid-1960s, around the time of the murder of Kitty Genovese.

Holocaust studies developed after the Holocaust, the systematic mass murder—narrowly, the genocide of 6 million Jews; broadly, the democide of 11 million people, namely 6 million Jews and 5 million other people (including Romani, Slavs, homosexuals, and disabled people)—perpetrated by Germany's Nazi party, which was led by Adolf Hitler, shortly before and during World War II (1939–1945). The term 'Holocaust' is derived from the Greek term ὁλόκαυστος, meaning 'burnt whole' or 'burnt offering,' and it generally refers to vast destruction caused by fire. The term 'Shoah' (or Sho'ah), a biblical Hebrew word meaning 'catastrophe' (שואה), is also used to refer to the same massacre. It is used in Claude Lanzmann's nine-and-a-half-hour film of the same name in 1985. In this thesis, I will use the term 'Holocaust' to refer to this calamity because it is the more commonly used term in Britain. In the discussion of bystander intervention, the term 'Holocaust' implies that fire and burnt offerings can better present both sides of the tragic fire—it is viewed as a devastating disaster, but also (incredibly) as a positive event by some at that time.

Holocaust studies investigates the factual questions about what happened, when and where it happened, and who was involved. Holocaust studies also includes and is driven by questions about why the events of the Holocaust happened to the victims, why the perpetrators caused these events to happen, and who else was responsible. These studies are important to prevent similar situations from happening again and to ensure we have learned from the experiences when we make decisions today.

Bystander studies builds on and contributes to work that originates in studies of the Holocaust—a concrete and quintessential case of trauma on a massive scale.[152] It

[152] Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993); Ervin Staub, *Overcoming Evil: Genocide, Violent Conflict, and Terrorism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Nancy R. Goodman and Marilyn B. Meyers, 'Bystandership—One Can Make a Difference: Interview with Ervin Staub,' in *The Power of Witnessing: Reflections, Reverberations, and Traces of the Holocaust; Trauma, Psychoanalysis, and the Living Mind*, ed. Nancy

strives for a more comprehensive study of the parties involved in the Holocaust by focusing not only on the victims but also those alongside them. It includes discussion of bystanders, but within a binarised framework that focuses on whether bystanders did or did not attempt to intervene in order to halt the Holocaust.[153]

I argue that discussions of bystanders need not be limited to questions about whether or not they helped. From studying bystanders' various reactions to learning of a trauma, bystander studies can further contribute to existing trauma studies through a better understanding of bystanders, including the categorisation and definition of terminologies and bystanders' affective responses to knowing others are being traumatised.

Bystandership is widely discussed in Holocaust studies due to the vast number of persons involved in the Holocaust who were not perpetrators or victims but bystanders. There are various arguments as to whether 'bystanders' refers to all spectators, including those who see an incident by chance, or only to indifferent or deliberately passive observers who, having seen an incident, make a decision to refrain from intervening. Within Holocaust studies scholarship, different scholars make various judgements on the extent of the passivity and agency of bystanders. For instance, historian Raul Hilberg believes that bystanders can be characterised as both passive and active; Staub views bystanders as being able to intervene in harm doing.[154] In order to clarify the use of the term 'bystander' and to introduce the types of bystanders in Holocaust studies, I will first elaborate on the two understandings of bystanders presented by Hilberg and Staub. Then, I will explain the possible reason for the ambiguous definition and categorisation of the bystander.

R. Goodman and Marilyn B. Meyers (New York: Routledge, 2012), 333–48; Robert A. Goldberg, 'The Bystander During the Holocaust,' *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017): 649–59, https://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2017/iss4/2.

[153] Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*; Victoria J. Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust*, Contributions to the Study of Religion 59 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999); Paul A. Levine, 'On-Lookers,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, ed. Peter Hayes and John K. Roth, Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 156–69.

[154] Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, 212–16; Staub, *Overcoming Evil*, 283.

Hilberg's Understanding of Bystanders

In Holocaust studies, the triangulation model—perpetrator–victim–bystander—has been widely used since Hilberg published his influential monograph *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945*.[155] Hilberg's tripartite division is based on the recognition that by far the most people living during the time of the Holocaust were neither perpetrators nor victims but people who sometimes claimed to be 'bystanders,' thus emphasising that they were 'there' or 'around,' maybe even caught up in events beyond their control, but not *involved in* the calamity. In his book, Hilberg introduces various examples of bystanders, ranging from other nations, messengers, Jews, the allies, neutral countries, and churches, who played the roles of either helpers, gainers, or onlookers.[156] They had their own way of participating.

As well as discussing bystanding nations and institutions, Hilberg spends one chapter comparing ordinary individuals who acted as helpers, gainers, or onlookers.[157] He suggests that the term 'bystanders' covers those who went out of their way for Holocaust victims, those who took advantage at the expense of Jewish victims, those who took away property from Jewish victims, and those who watched Jews being taken away without doing anything to help them. This highlights that, for Hilberg, the category 'bystanders' includes a wide spectrum, from those who actively used their agency to help to those who remained passive onlookers or even gained from the victims. This definition characterises the range of bystander actions, and it consequently foreshadows expectations that some of the bystanders will be helpers and casts a judgmental eye back on those who, due to any reason at all, did not help those in need or those treated unjustly.

Staub's Understanding of Bystanders

There is another, narrower, definition of bystanders, which emphasises the expectation that they help victims and potential victims. Staub defines bystanders as 'witnesses who

---

[155] Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*.
[156] Hilberg classifies and discusses different types of bystanders: 1) nations in Adolf Hitler's Europe; 2) helpers, gainers, and onlookers; 3) messengers; 4) the Jewish rescuers; 5) the allies; 6) neutral countries; and 7) the churches (*Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*). The 'gainers' he refers to are those who passively or actively benefit from a situation. For example, manufacturers passively gained market share after Jewish businesses were forced to liquidate; looters actively searched the ghettos for valuables after the Jews were deported. See Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, 214.
[157] Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, 212–16.

are in a position to take positive, helpful action against harm doing.'[158] He asserts that bystanders can play active roles: they are able to and ought to intervene if they witness harm doing. But, as he continues, 'They usually remain passive, and often are complicit, at least in that they continue with business as usual as they participate in the life of the group that perpetrates harm doing.'[159] Staub determines that bystanders remain in their original position and do not offer help. He presumes that bystanders' inaction is due to a controllable passivity.

In his book *The Roots of Goodness and Resistance to Evil*, Staub clearly states that his childhood experiences during the Holocaust profoundly influenced his professional work.[160] These early experiences may also account for his position and determination. His survival was ensured by the actions of two persons: a Christian woman, Maria, and the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. Maria promptly hid the six-year-old Staub and his sister when she realised they were suspected of being Jews after she saw them walking down the street; later, she endangered herself by continuously providing them with food, shelter, and a hiding place. Staub records that she continued with her actions even after the Nazis threatened her with death and forced her to stop what she was doing. He explains that her actions taught him the 'possibility of goodness.' This possibility highlights that ordinary active bystanders can do something prior to knowing the effectiveness of their actions. The second person who saved Staub is Wallenberg. He set up 'protected houses' for Hungarian Jews, including Staub and his immediate family, and saved many lives through his intelligence and courageous acts.[161] The heroic active intervention of Wallenberg motivated Staub to study what makes some people help others and to commit to educating others in active bystandership.[162] In his publication, he emphasises the interconnectedness of atrocity,

---

[158] Staub, *Overcoming Evil*, 283.
[159] Staub, *Overcoming Evil*, 283.
[160] Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Goodness and Resistance to Evil: Inclusive Caring, Moral Courage, Altruism Born of Suffering, Active Bystandership, and Heroism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xi–xii.
[161] Wallenberg was a Swedish businessman, who became a legendary hero through his actions to rescue Jews in German-occupied Hungary during World War II. He saved thousands of Hungarian Jews in Budapest in 1944 by providing them with protective passes, shelters, food, and medicine. He did not use traditional diplomacy. His 'unorthodox financial doings' shocked the Swedish legation but resulted in successful rescues. For further discussion, see Paul A. Levine, *Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest: Myth, History and Holocaust, 1944–1945* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010), 185–87.
[162] Daniel Gordon and Joshua Nevett, 'Ervin Staub: A Holocaust Survivor's Mission to Train "Heroic Bystanders",' BBC News, 5 October 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54339252.

altruism, and active and passive bystandership.[163] He chooses the term 'active bystander' rather than 'upstander' as it sits in contrast to the passive bystander who does not help people in need.[164] His experience highlights the expectation that active bystanders positively intervene in an atrocity to prevent harm to others.

Reviewing the usage of the term 'bystander' by Hilberg and Staub, we can see that there are ambiguities in its denotation depending on the extent to which Hilberg and Staub recognise active or passive bystander roles and the existence of bystanders' inaction. Hilberg's usage denotes various available subtypes of bystanders and options for bystanders' actions; Staub's usage denotes all those who are able to help but who eventually do not. Additional studies of the Holocaust show a wide range of bystander responses, spanning from heroic deeds to evil actions and also encompassing non-action. The term 'bystander' is therefore inadequate to describe the multiple roles of bystanders during the Holocaust. After reviewing the studies by Hilberg and Staub, we at least know that active roles and passive roles are recognised in Holocaust studies. Historians have attempted to evaluate bystander studies that focus on the Holocaust.[165] These historiographical studies may explain the ambiguous definitions of bystanders that have arisen in scholarship in the wake of the Holocaust.

In her essay, historian Victoria J. Barnett raises questions about the traditional ethical studies on individual bystander behaviours.[166] She queries the view that individual bystanders in the Holocaust studies represent collective terror. She looks at the links between individual responsibility and collective behaviour and examines the political and ethical implications of the roles of bystanders throughout the historiography of the Holocaust. Barnett observes the changing view of bystanders in Holocaust scholarship. This changing view may explain why the term 'bystander' carries different meanings in Holocaust scholarship and also later in other settings. Below, I will summarise Barnett's observation of this changing view in order to trace the chronological changes and the reasons for these changes. This will help clarify the

[163] Staub, *Roots of Goodness*.
[164] Staub, *Roots of Goodness*, 13.
[165] David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine, eds., *Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-Evaluation* (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Victoria J. Barnett, 'The Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship: Historical, Ethical, and Political Implications,' *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017): 633–47, https://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2017/iss4/1.
[166] Barnett, 'Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship.'

terminology used to describe types of bystanders, thus facilitating subsequent discussions.

Barnett's Review of Changing Views on Bystanders

Barnett observes a historiographical shift in Holocaust scholarship, whereby the bystander role has gone from being passive, to active, then to being associated with complicity in Nazi crimes. According to Barnett's observation of Holocaust historiography, the role of bystander was understood in the aftermath of the Holocaust as a passive one.[167] She explains that this was because the German citizens (bystanders) in the post-war denazification programmes were viewed as having little capacity or autonomy to resist the pressure of the totalitarian (Nazi) state. She adds that, at that time, examples of heroic rescuers were rare, and Hilberg had not yet published his work about bystanders encompassing encompassing 'helpers, gainers, and onlookers.'[168] Therefore, we can see that the understanding of bystanders differed in the years prior to Hilberg's and Staub's scholarship. Bystanders were referred to as those who were passive and had limited ability to intervene due to being under the control of the totalitarian state, although they might have witnessed some harm being done to their neighbours.

Barnett observes that the active roles of bystanders (both individuals and institutions) were recorded in Holocaust historiography after Holocaust scholarship expanded in the 1960s.[169] She mentions that Hilberg's works, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (1961) and *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (1992), included mention of many different bystander roles, which encompassed passive onlookers, helpers, and gainers.[170] Barnett highlights another three-volume work on bystanders by historian Michael Robert Marrus, published in 1989, which also illustrates that understandings of bystanders at that time encompassed a wide range of behaviours.[171] Then Barnett explains how the term 'bystanders' shifts

[167] Barnett, 'Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship,' 635.
[168] Barnett, 'Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship,' 635–36.
[169] Barnett, 'Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship,' 636.
[170] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002). Citations refer to the 2002 edition. See also Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*.
[171] Michael Robert Marrus, ed., *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews. Part 8: Bystanders to the Holocaust*, 3 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter Saur, 1989). These three volumes form one part of a nine-part series on the Holocaust edited by Michael Marrus.

further to refer to accomplices during the 1990s, when historians explored how bystanders had participated in Nazi acts.[172] She illustrates the change through the scholarship during this period, which uncovered the involvement and collaboration of international banks, German citizens, and populations in countries under Nazi occupation. From Barnett's review, we can see how the term 'bystander' connotes a mixture of passive roles active roles, and even complicit roles.

In addition, Barnett also observes the 'chronological development' of bystander behaviour: people began as a 'bystander'—a person who is present at an event but does not become involved in it— then they became more involved at later stages during the Holocaust.[173] Therefore, she queries whether the term 'bystander,' which originally connoted passivity and non-involvement, can still accurately describe the people whose behaviour is no longer passive.[174] Such a 'chronological development' does not only happen to bystanders; it also happens within bystanders studies focused on the Holocaust, as Barnett's study illustrates. As she concludes, greater responsibility is expected from bystanders:

> Any discussion of the bystander phenomenon during the Holocaust entails a more complicated and multifaceted historical and ethical examination of the actions of individuals and groups, one that acknowledges the greater autonomy and therefore greater responsibility of many individuals and groups previously categorized as 'bystanders.'[175]

If we compare more recent understandings of bystanders with those articulated in the early works written during the aftermath of the Holocaust, we find less emphasis on the passive roles and low autonomy of bystanders. This shift may be due to over sixty years of accumulated reports of heroic cases that acknowledge the autonomy of some bystanders and their successful intervention. During the Holocaust, state pressures and threats were undoubtedly very real, so we cannot dismiss the possibility that bystander inaction was genuinely due to a sense of fear and/or helplessness. It is too

---

[172] Barnett, 'Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship,' 636–38.
[173] Barnett, 'Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship,' 638–39. For further details, see also Barnett, *Bystanders*; Victoria J. Barnett, 'Reflections on the Concept of "Bystander",' in *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity*, ed. Henrik Edgren (Stockholm: The Living History Forum, 2012), 35–52.
[174] Barnett, 'Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship,' 639.
[175] Barnett, 'Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship,' 639.

much of a generalisation to say that bystanders were passive, or active, or complicit. As David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine propose in the introduction of their book that re-evaluating bystanders during the Holocaust, Hilberg's tripartite model reflects new research in that it 'erod[es] the distinctions' between perpetrators, victims, and bystanders and moulds 'a previously diverse subject matter in one of three monolithic blocs.'[176] Cesarani and Levine affirm that the discussion is limited under the single catchall term 'bystander.'

My Evaluation of Understandings of the Bystander Thus Far

Between Hilberg's and Staub's understandings of the bystander, I cannot say which I find more convincing. I do appreciate the application of Staub's account for subsequent situations and settings, but I do not agree with him because he puts responsibilities and obligations on bystanders and gives less consideration to their situations. Hilberg's account is more sympathetic to bystanders who are not omniscient and are also impacted at the traumatic moment. They may have struggled, regretted, or attempted to help, but they were not explicit or heroic in their efforts compared with active bystander behaviours. This group of bystanders, who have struggles and regrets, is who I would like to draw out through the text of Ecclesiastes and its readers. I will elaborate this reading of Ecclesiastes with the bystander approach later.

Barnett's study demonstrates the chronological shift in understandings of bystanders as taking on more active roles. On the one hand, this demonstrates bystanders may have a certain degree of agency and autonomy and may play a role in helping people in need. On the other hand, the passivity of the bystander is gradually forgotten, unaccepted, or despised. The overlooked passive and yet-to-decide bystanders are indeed present in other contexts. Therefore, I would like to bring this type of bystander out of the shadows of history, particularly from the historiography of the Holocaust. I want to examine the bystander's passivity, their feelings, and their agency. Instead of asking *Why did bystanders do nothing?* I would like to know *What comes into bystanders' minds? What do they feel and experience? What have they been thinking of or attempting to do?* These questions are in the present and present perfect tense to represent the study of bystanders who are still in this role instead of only

[176] Cesarani and Levine, *Bystanders to the Holocaust*.

viewing them in the past. The intentional use of present perfect continuous tense in the last question represents my concern about the continuous, incomplete, and repeated experience of bystanders who have witnessed terror, violence, or some other traumatic event at a particular moment in time. They are continuously experiencing the pressure and threats in dangerous environments, being shocked by unexpected happenings and developments, struggling with decision-making, and thinking of solutions. My questions are applicable to the reading of biblical texts—they are questions about the bystander characters in the texts as well as the reader reading as a bystander. In the final section of this chapter, I will present my reading of Ecclesiastes with Qoheleth as a bystander, and demonstrate how the reader may read as a bystander.

I have been reviewing the shifting definitions of bystanders in Holocaust studies. The next section examines the types of bystanders that can be found in the Bible. I will illustrate the roles of bystanders and issues of bystanding in the Bible.

The Bystander Approach and Biblical Studies

Bystander studies within Holocaust studies and in sociology are well developed, but there are few discussions of bystanders in the Bible. John C. Lentz, a pastor of a Presbyterian church in Ohio, USA, has done a survey on bystanders in the Bible.[177] His survey is published in a student-published journal, the *Utah Law Review,* which might not pass the rigours of academic peer review or receive particularly wide circulation. It is, however, a very comprehensive survey, covering bystanders in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. I have not as yet found any such equivalent survey in any biblical studies journal. Lentz demonstrates that, alongside lawyers and historians, he too, in his capacity as a religious leader, has a contribution to make to the discussion. Before my review of Lentz's survey, I would like to introduce the background of that particular issue of the journal, which focused on bystanders.

[177] John C. Lentz, 'The Bystander in the Bible,' *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017): 661–706, https://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2017/iss4/3.

Summary of Lentz's Survey

Lentz's essay is published in a symposium issue of the *Utah Law Review.* The symposium on which it reflects was held at the S. J. Quinney College of Law, University of Utah, on 31 March 2017 and was titled, 'The Bystander Dilemma: The Holocaust, War Crimes, And Sexual Assaults.' The symposium was inspired by Professor Amos Guiora's book *The Crime of Complicity: The Bystander in the Holocaust*.[178] Guiora challenges the legal and moral obligation of bystanders in the Holocaust and explores comparable situations in contemporary society. Based on the personal experiences of his grandparents, who did not survive the Holocaust, and his parents, who were survivors, Guiora asserts that moral responsibility is not enough to motivate people to help others. He suggests that a legal obligation would make a bystander who witnesses a crime intervene and prevent that crime. He determines that it is a legal issue, and that a law is required to stop this kind of non-intervention crime. Inspired by Guiora's book, the symposium aimed to critically examine the legal and moral obligations of bystanders. The symposium addressed bystanders during the Holocaust, highlighted the bystander dilemma, and discussed bystander dilemmas in present-day contexts, including war crimes and sexual assaults.

In the symposium issue of the *Utah Law Review*, three essays are from members of the Holocaust panel, which was composed of historians Victoria J. Barnett and Robert A. Goldberg and pastor John C. Lentz. Their essays are titled 'The Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship: Historical, Ethical, and Political Implications,' 'The Bystander During the Holocaust,' and 'The Bystander in the Bible,' respectively. These essays provide a foundation for discussion in terms of types, contexts, and responsibilities of bystanders. In addition to the speakers' essays, a written contribution titled 'Upstanders, Whistle-Blowers, and Rescuers' by Martha Minow (Morgan and Helen Chu Dean and Professor of Law, Harvard Law School) is also included in the issue. This essay highlights the reasons for the inaction of bystanders. Since Lentz's essay specifically discusses the bystander in the Bible, I put it at the centre of my attention among these other essays. I will summarise how he classifies

[178] Amos N. Guiora, *The Crime of Complicity: The Bystander in the Holocaust* (Chicago: Ankerwycke, 2017). Further details about this book are available on the author's website (https://crimeofcomplicity.com/).

bystanders, analyse what is useful about his survey, and evaluate how I will adapt his study to mine.

Lentz is a pastor of Forest Hill Church, a progressive Presbyterian church in Ohio, USA.[179] In an interview, he was questioned about his job searching process, and he said that he was impressed by Forest Hill Church because it has a foundation of social action and is engaged in its community and issues of social justice.[180] This background may explain why Lentz chose to speak about bystanders in the Bible at the aforementioned symposium. His essay begins with the response to Guiora's critique of religion and morality as motivators for humans to act in the pursuit of goodness. As a pastor, Lentz believes his professional position helps him to contribute his opinions to the debate. Though he is a pastor, he does not treat the Bible as the direct divine word. He therefore does not aim to enforce any biblical statement as legally binding through his essay. He reads the Bible as authoritative because the Jewish and Christian faith communities regard it as authoritative. He finds that the Bible endorses the values of justice and responsibility among individuals and communities. These values lay a foundation for understanding the expectations about bystanders and, in the symposium context, for deciding whether civic laws are required to compel individuals to act on behalf of people in need.

Methodologically, Lentz searches verses and passages in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament that directly and indirectly address the issue of bystanders .[181] He sets himself the task of finding stories related to the issue of 'culpable' bystanders—those who are able to help but do not act.[182] In his search, Lentz does not look for the technical terminology 'bystander' in the biblical texts because it is nearly impossible to identify a word in Hebrew or Greek that carries such a meaning, let alone having to

---

[179] "Staff Archive," Forest Hill Church, Presbyterian, accessed October 6, 2023, https://fhcpresb.org/staff/. In addition, he received his Master of Divinity degree from Yale University Divinity School and attained his PhD from New College School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh.
[180] John C. Lentz, 'John C. Lentz Interview, 11 June 2012,' interview by Heidi Fearing, *Cleveland Voices*, 11 June 2012, https://clevelandvoices.org/items/show/2270.
[181] Lentz's survey of bystanders and bystander issues covers the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. I will mainly focus on his engagement with the Hebrew Bible. For his discussion of the New Testament, see Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 690–702.
[182] According to the classification of bystanders in the previous section, this type of bystander can be categorised as an onlooker or passive bystander, depending on whether the bystander has decided whether or not to help. I will discuss the classification of bystander in Lentz's survey in due course. See Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 663.

factor in the ambiguous meaning and usage of this term. Instead, he tries to read biblical texts in an attempt to find figures and characters we might today refer to as bystanders. (As in my investigation of trauma, the word 'trauma' itself does not appear in the biblical texts but what the word describes is in evidence.) He demonstrates this methodology, perhaps predictably, with the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). The word 'bystander' is absent from the parable of the Good Samaritan, but its scenes illustrate how people come across someone in need and act differently in response. By using this lens, he searches for verses and passages that can inform us on bystanders. The following table summarises the verses and passages according to the sequence and categorisation Lentz uses in his essay, as well as the implications that he draws from those verses and passages.

Table 4. Summary of Lentz's Survey on the Bystander in the Hebrew Bible

Biblical Passages	Implications for understanding bystanders
Genesis • 18:1–8: Abraham offers hospitality to three strangers; he is alone when they come to him. • 18:22–33: Abraham intervenes on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah when God is about to destroy the towns and kill all the inhabitants.	• In the ancient biblical society, hospitality is a way to help others survive in a hostile environment. • Abraham's sole decision to welcome strangers relates to the study of the 'bystander effect'—a person's decision to intervene is affected by the presence of other witnesses. • One does not stand idly by even when others may 'deserve' their punishment.
Exodus • 1:15–19: The Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, refuse to comply with the Pharaoh's order to kill male Hebrew infants at birth. • 2:11–12: Moses does not stand by when he sees the Egyptian overseer beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. • 2:13–15: The one who sees Moses kill an Egyptian reports the murder to Pharaoh.	• Action is expected from those who are within the covenantal community.

Biblical Passages	Implications for understanding bystanders
The Ten Commandments and the Law Exod 20:3–17 and Deut 5:6–21 • The covenant between God and the people. • Exod 20:2: The LORD brings the Israelites out of the house of slavery. • There are eight negative commandments beginning with 'You shall not.'	• The covenant expresses an intimate and mutual relationship between God and the people. The people's responsibility to God is expected to be expressed through their actions towards others. • The covenant expresses the perspective of victims because the Israelites experienced enslavement. • Though negative commandments are not instructions to do good, they imply a concern for others. • Many biblical laws are based on a concern for victims and the vulnerable.
Leviticus and the 'Golden Rule' • Lev 19:18, 33–34: 'You shall love the neighbours/alien as yourself' (NRSVue). • Lev 19:15–16: 'You shall not stand idly by when the blood of your neighbour is at stake' (NRSVue).	• The scenario of the bystander is not limited to a clear or dangerous situation; it also includes doubtful ones. • If a bystander can help, the bystander should help.
Esther • With the aid of Mordecai, Esther puts her royal position, wealth, and power at risk to protect and defend Jews.	• This is an example of an intervention on behalf of the whole empire that is not initiated directly by God but by individuals. • Individuals can actively play their own part.
Job • Job's three friends do not help Job and instead blame him for his own calamity.	• 'Blaming the victim' is a common response of the bystander.
The Psalms • Ps 10:12: 'Rise up, O Lord; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed' (NRSVue).	• The unknown authors and their psalms reflect the changing historical context of the Psalms. • Many psalms of lament offer the victim's perspective (either an individual or community)

Biblical Passages	Implications for understanding bystanders
	• The perpetrators are not named but their presence and the victimisation they cause are clear. • Psalms include expressions by victims who believe that no one, not even God, will help them. Psalms also include expressions of confidence that God or the community will offer support.
The Prophets • Amos 1–2: Amos denounces the transgressions of Israel's neighbours and then turns to condemn Israel itself. • Isaiah 1:16–17; 3:15; 10:1–2; 58:1, 6–7: Isaiah blames those who focus on religious offerings but fail to care for the vulnerable. • Micah 6:8: 'He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?' (NRSVue)	• Prophets do not allow bystanding, overlooking, and ignorance. Lentz illustrates what prophets expect from bystanders.
Jonah • 4:11: 'And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many animals?"' (NRSVue)	• Lentz illustrates that God's care for the citizens of Nineveh is proof that God cares for foreigner, even the enemy; this example extends the 'duty to act' to include non-Israelites.
Habakkuk • 1:2–4 'O Lord, how long shall I cry for help…' Habakkuk cries out to God about the deity not being involved. • 1:5 'Look at the nations and see!'	• To Habakkuk, God is a bystander who ignores the destruction and violence; meanwhile, he holds God accountable to God's edicts.

Lentz's survey on bystanders in the Bible is organised according to the biblical books. Though he does not name them using technical terminology, the types of bystanders he mentions in his survey can be separated into two types: those who act on behalf of one in need ('active bystander') and those who stand idly by the one in need ('passive bystander').[183]

Lentz identifies 'active bystander' behaviours in Genesis, Exodus, and Esther. In each book, a character comes across someone in need and offers them help. Lentz identifies Abraham's (and his wife Sarah's) hospitality to three strangers as 'active bystander' behaviour because, in the ancient society, hospitality was a way to help others survive in a hostile environment (Gen 18:1–8).[184] Abraham comes across these three strangers as he sits by his tent, and he immediately runs from the tent entrance to approach them, brings them water to wash their feet, and offers them a feast. Abraham is like an active bystander.[185] Lentz continues with Abraham's intervention for Sodom and Gomorrah, where God is about to destroy the towns and kill all the inhabitants. Abraham negotiates with God and persuades God not to destroy the towns if there are ten righteous people found living there (Gen 18:22–33).[186] Abraham is an 'active bystander' because he is not an inhabitant in these towns, yet he intervenes in the planned destruction in an effort to save the inhabitants there.

Lentz then introduces two 'active bystanders' in Exodus 12: the Hebrew midwives and Moses.[187] The Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, refuse to comply with the Pharaoh's order to kill the sons of Hebrew women upon their birth (Exod 1:15–

[183] Since Lentz does not distinguish between the motives for bystanders' action and inaction, the terms 'active bystander' and 'passive bystander' with quotation marks are used here to represent a broader classification. 'Active bystander' refers to those who do respond to help the person in need. 'Passive bystander' refers to those who do not help or have not helped, no matter the reasons.
[184] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 672–73.
[185] It is arguable whether Abraham responds as a bystander because he knows that the three men are messengers of the LORD. He may intentionally serve them as guests because he knows they are divine messengers. Even if we consider him as a bystander, does he think things through and decide to take action? I will discuss this further in my analysis.
[186] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 673–74.
[187] I would also see the rescue of Moses by Pharaoh's daughter from the River Nile as an example of bystander action (Exod 2:5–10). I do not know if Lentz deliberately chooses not to discuss the intervention of Pharaoh's daughter because she is not a member of the covenant community. Or perhaps Lentz simply does not recognise her as a bystander.

19). For the sake of following the command of the Pharaoh, they need to kill these male infants, but they choose to let the boys live. When the Pharaoh summons them and asks them why they allow the boys to live, they give an excuse that it is because the Hebrew women are strong and give birth before the midwife arrives. They are 'active bystanders' because they actively think of an alternative way to keep the boys alive, and they think of a reply to the Pharaoh when they themselves are under threat of punishment. The next 'active bystander' in Exodus 2 mentioned by Lentz is Moses, who does not stand by when he sees an Egyptian overseer beating a Hebrew, one of his own people (Exod 2:11–12). This happens to Moses when goes out to his people and sees their forced labour. He cannot stand that one of his own people is beaten by an Egyptian overseer, so Moses actively intervenes by killing the Egyptian and hiding him in the sand after checking that there is no one present (but eventually, we learn that there was witness). Such a murderous act is not a proper and legal action, but the focus here is on how Moses reacts spontaneously and actively to mitigate the Hebrews' suffering under forced labour, even though he puts himself at risk.

Besides the 'active bystander,' Lentz also mentions 'passive bystander' behaviours in the Bible. The passive bystanders are those who come across people in need but do not take any action to help them. Lentz identifies Job's three friends as 'non-participating bystanders' in the book of Job because they do not help Job.[188] Lentz does not only identify human characters as 'passive bystanders'; he also sees the divine as a 'passive bystander' who has not yet responded. Lentz includes the diety as a bystander in his survey of the Psalms and the book of Habakkuk. He illustrates this with Psalms 10, where the psalmist's cry of 'O Lord' represents a recognition that God is accountable to the covenant.[189] He identifies that God is viewed as a bystander because there is an expectation of God's action. He affirms that Psalms include the expressions of victims who find that no one, not even God, will help them; some Psalms also express confidence that God or the community will offer support. In addition to the examples in the Psalms, Lentz illustrates with the book of Habakkuk that the deity is a bystander who appears to ignore the destruction and violence.[190] At the beginning of the book of Habakkuk, Habakkuk cries out to God about not being involved, saying 'O

[188] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 680.
[189] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 681–84.
[190] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 688.

Lord, how long shall I cry for help' (1:2). Lentz also suggests Habakkuk challenges God, saying 'Look at the nations and see!' (1:5) because this attempts to hold God accountable to his edicts concerning the covenant people. Through the example of Job's friends in the book of Job and the two examples of the deity as bystander in Psalms and the book of Habakkuk, Lentz provides an illustration of 'passive bystanders' in the Bible.

Having illustrated active and passive types of bystanders that can be found in the Hebrew Bible, Lentz includes his analysis of the responsibility of bystanders in light of the symposium's focus on the legal and moral obligations of bystanders. Lentz mentions the responsibility of bystanders in the Hebrew Bible in these examples: 1) the Ten Commandments, 2) Leviticus, and 3) Esther.

First, through the illustration of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:3–17 and Deut 5:6–21)—the covenant between God and the people—Lentz establishes the people's responsibility to God in this covenant, which expresses an intimate and mutual relationship between God and the people.[191] The people's responsibility to God is supposed to be expressed through their behaviour towards others. Amongst the Ten Commandments, the eight negative commandments, which begin with 'You shall not,' are not instructing people to do good, but they do imply a concern for others. Lentz, therefore, suggests the Ten Commandments and many other biblical laws are based on a concern for victims and the vulnerable.

Second, through the illustration of the 'Golden Rule' in Leviticus 19, Lentz highlights that bystanders have a responsibility to love their neighbours as they love themselves (Lev 19:18, 33–34).[192] This commandment rejects anyone who stands idly by while their neighbours are in need. In addition, Lentz also draws attention to the commandment that one shall not stand idly by when the blood of one's neighbour is at stake (Lev 19:15–16). Lentz illustrates that these two commandments oblige everyone to help people in need. Furthermore, the scenarios that draw bystanders to act are not limited to explicitly critical situations but also include general and even ambiguous ones.

[191] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 675–76.
[192] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 677–80.

Third, the book of Esther is the only book that does not mention God. With the aid of Mordecai, Esther puts her royal position, wealth, and power at risk to protect and defend Jews. Lentz indicates that this is an example of an intervention on behalf of the whole empire that was not initiated directly by God but by individuals.[193] This illustrates that individuals are expected to do their own part actively when others are suffering. Besides the examples from the Ten Commandments, Leviticus, and Esther, Lentz also illustrates such a responsibility through Psalms and the book of Jonah. He attempts to persuade his readers that the covenantal relationship between God and people embeds people's responsibility to God and extends it to others. Lentz's discussion lays the biblical foundation for bystanders' responsibility to others, even in the absence of God in some situations.

Through the above three illustrations of the Ten Commandments, Leviticus, and Esther, Lentz identifies the roles and responsibilities of bystanders and how they respond to God, to neighbours, and to others. Lentz argues that bystanders are obliged to help people in need.

Analysis of Lentz's Survey

After summarising Lentz's survey, I am going to analyse its advantages and shortcomings. Then, I will evaluate how I would adapt, extend upon, and complement the findings of his survey before I apply a bystander approach to reading my chosen biblical text—Ecclesiastes—in the next section. I find Lentz's survey has three strengths: its coverage of the biblical books, its coverage of types of bystander interventions, and his reference to the implied reader.

First, in terms of its coverage of the biblical books, Lentz covers both the Hebrew Bible (in his term, the Old Testament) and the New Testament. His illustrations of bystanders in the Hebrew Bible ranges from the Torah to the Prophets (Nevi'im) and the Writings (Ketuvim). Table 4 summarise his survey of the bystanders in the Hebrew Bible. The survey is not limited to scenes in the narratives that explicitly require the intervention of a bystander but also includes victimisation inflicted by nameless perpetrators as described in the Psalms.

[193] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 680.

Second, in terms of his coverage of types of bystander interventions, Lentz illustrates different bystanders who appear in the Bible, including those ordinary people who offer helping hands through simple acts. He explains that Abraham's hospitality can be understood as an act to help people survive in the ancient days. He also includes the Hebrew midwives who refrain from complying with the Pharaoh's order to kill the sons of Hebrew women. These bystanders act within their familiar situations. Lentz also includes the deity as a bystander, though the deity is not an explicit character in the examples Lentz uses (Psalms and Habakkuk). Such an inclusion goes beyond the texts and reminds readers that a bystander can exist in silence.

Moreover, Lentz mentions different types of bystanders in two major categories: 'active' and 'passive.' Among the 'active bystanders' that Lentz mentions, there are four examples in Genesis and Exodus—Abraham, the Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah, and Moses—all of whom seem to act rather intuitively and instinctively without considering the consequences too much before taking action. Abraham opposes the deity's judgemental plan in an effort to rescue the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah from the deity's punishment. He negotiates with the deity without showing fear of getting the deity angry. His hospitality to strangers is also an act done without too much consideration, particularly of his wife. In the story of Lot in the following chapter, Lot invites two messengers to his house but then the men of the city demand to 'know' the guests, and Lot attempts to negotiate by offering his daughters as a substitute (Gen 19:1–11). The experience of Lot illustrates that providing hospitality to a stranger is not risk-free. Abraham may not have considered the risks when he offers hospitality to the strangers.[194] The Hebrew midwives refuse to comply with the Pharaoh's authoritative order to kill the newborn sons of Hebrew women. This is incredible risky as it violates Pharaoh's order. It is uncertain whether the Hebrew midwives consider such a risk, and the text does not say if they recognise their responsibility to intervene then choose to save the boys. Moses acts spontaneously when he kills the Egyptian overseer to stop him beating a Hebrew man. This is another example where someone acts on behalf of those in need without going through a decision-making process. In these cases, it is

[194] One might argue that Abraham does not ever consider Sarah's safety as he has previously asked her to say to the Egyptians that she is his sister and has let her be taken into Pharaoh's house (Gen 12). However, at the time Abraham offers his hospitality, the deity has blessed him and promised to make of him a great nation and make his name great. Abraham is supposed to care for Sarah for the sake of begetting their coming son. If he thinks of the risk of providing hospitality, he will probably protect her.

ambiguous whether the bystanders recognise their responsibility to act. Lentz includes these examples regardless of the bystanders' motives and decision-making processes. Another example of 'active bystanders' mentioned by Lentz is Esther and Mordecai. Through his analysis of the Ten Commandments and the laws in Leviticus, Lentz argues that there are requirements for helping people in need.[195] If a bystander can help, the bystander should recognise such a responsibility and choose to help. When Esther and Mordecai discover Haman's plan to destroy the Jewish community, they find a way to overthrow this plan and save the community.[196] They act consciously with a plan and have considered their responsibility.

Lentz also mentions a range of 'passive bystander' types. Some of them decide not to act but some may not have decided yet. Lentz emphasises that Job's friends do not participate in helping Job; they blame Job, which makes Job suffer further after the satan brings him calamities. Instead of helping Job, they seem like *accomplices* bringing more harm to Job. I appreciate Lentz's inclusion of 'passive bystanders' in his survey; but I do not entirely agree with his analysis of these 'passive bystanders' because he fails to examine their feelings, motives, and other actions. I will discuss the shortcomings of his classifications and his failure to consider bystanders' perceptions in the next section, and I will present my suggestions for a new form of classification in the evaluation section later in this chapter.

The third advantage of Lentz's survey is his inclusion of the implied reader in his observations about bystanders in the Bible. He illustrates that 1) readers are present, 2) readers are accountable, and 3) he himself is a bystander-reader. First, Lentz mentions the reader in the discussion of Exodus 2. Moses kills an Egyptian overseer who is beating a Hebrew labourer. He believes no one has seen him commit this murder. But when he breaks up a fight between two Hebrew men the following day, one of the men indicates that he knows what Moses has done. Lentz highlights that the reader does not know whether this Hebrew man witnessed the brutal actions of the Egyptian overseer before Moses killed him.[197] Lentz does not further elaborate on the effect of this ambiguity on the reader, but he does address the reader in his survey on bystanders in the Bible. Lentz's acknowledgement of the reader reminds us that, when

[195] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 675–79.
[196] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 680.
[197] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 675.

the reader reads a description of an event in the text, it is as though they have just come across some snapshots of that event. In this way, the reader is like a bystander to the descriptions in the text. Moreover, even if the reader does not know what the Hebrew man actually witnessed, the reader themselves *does* know how the Egyptian overseer was behaving prior to Moses killing him (Exod 2:11). A bystander reader can sometimes know more than some of the snapshots provided, although they are still not omniscient.

Second, Lentz uses the book of Habakkuk to illustrate that implied readers are accountable. Lentz mentions that one of Habakkuk's tasks is to hold the people accountable for becoming 'responsible agents of compassion and justice.'[198] The 'people' here can refer to the implied reader of the book of Habakkuk. Lentz's survey looks at the people *in* the text and the people *in front of* the text, and then he suggests these people have a responsibility to help those in need. Through this inclusion of the accountable implied reader, Lentz illustrates that an implied reader may act as a responsible agent, and the text is read as an invitation to the reader to take up this role. When such an invitation is sent, readers can decide how to respond.

Third, Lentz demonstrates how he, a reader, understands the texts as affirming bystanders' duty to act through his survey of the Ten Commandments, the 'Golden Rule,' and the Prophets. He argues that these passages illustrate how standing idly by and claiming ignorance are forbidden to the covenantal community by the deity and the prophets. This is another reminder that Lentz's survey subtly assumes the bystander role of the reader. He demonstrates that the reader's presence in front of the texts is not only seen as a chance encounter but also places upon them a duty to act. The reader is like a bystander encountering an event and having expectations placed upon them. Readers, like bystanders, are accountable for taking action; standing idly by or remaining ignorant will be criticised. Though Lentz is aware of the role of the reader, he does not discuss it explicitly. He pays more attention to the bystander intervention (or lack of intervention) in the texts. I find that the role of the reader as a bystander is an important perspective from which to read the biblical texts, along with affect and trauma perspectives. So I will take his proposition of the reader as bystander into consideration later in this chapter. In sum, Lentz's inclusion of the presence, accountability, and role

[198] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 688.

of the implied reader opens up a broad perspective for analysing the role of the bystander-reader in front of the texts. In the following paragraphs, I will further evaluate how this will be applied to my research.

The shortcomings of Lentz's survey are 1) his assumptions as to the obligations of the bystander , 2) the implicit classifications of bystanders in generalised contexts, and 3) the failure to consider bystanders' feelings. First, Lentz defines a bystander in terms heavily based on whether the bystander takes action at the moment of witnessing, resulting in a framework based on bystander obligation to act. He relies on Guiora's definition at the very beginning of the article:

> The Bystander [is] an individual who observes another in clear distress but is not the direct cause of the harm. A culpable bystander is one who has the ability to mitigate the harm but chooses not to.[199]

Lentz adopts this definition of the bystander as an individual who is present when a person needs help. There is an assumption that a bystander is obliged to help; otherwise, the bystander is a culpable bystander. The bystander is motivated to help, not to aid a person in need but in an effort to evade punishment. Therefore, Lentz argues that bystanders have an obligation to act on behalf of the person in need. Such an obligation is based on the divine-human covenantal relationship. However, this is a theological relationship in the biblical text. It does not apply to everything, especially to present-day society, where people are affiliated with different religions or none.

Moreover, under this assumption of obligation, the bystander is compelled to act. If a bystander does not help, he or she is left owing the person in need a helping hand. Lentz therefore mentions that he looks for 'what is due the victim.'[200] But I find this definition of a bystander overly simplistic, as it neglects other important factors, such as trauma, culture and capacity. These factors can make a bystander's decision to intervene or not more complicated. An account is required to acknowledge the complexity of a situation with which a bystander is faced. I would suggest incorporating a trauma-informed perspective in defining types of bystanders. Bystanders exposed to an event may be traumatised or at least unprepared for encountering an unpredicted event, and this may impede or delay their ability to respond. Lentz's assumption of

[199] Guiora, *Crime of Complicity*, 85, cited in Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 661.
[200] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 663.

obligation to intervene limits the understanding of bystanders to nothing but their actions. It also limits their corresponding classification because, according to Lentz, bystanders are classified only according to their response. The reasons underlying a bystander's delayed response are not taken into consideration; instead, the delay is interpreted in the same light as the deliberate non-response of a bystander who refuses to help. Bystanders experience a moment of struggle when they are exposed to an unpredictable event; they must decide whether to intervene, how to intervene, what the outcome might be if they do intervene, and what the better action might be after they intervene. Being a bystander is not limited to the moment of witnessing; instead, the bystander goes through a process of decision-making. It is therefore unfair to judge any bystander, either 'active or 'passive,' by their spontaneous reaction to an event. Such an assumption of obligation to act will limit understandings of bystander types to one based solely on their immediate response at a single moment in time.

The second shortcoming of Lentz's survey is that it aims to review bystanders in the Bible, but he does not consider the bystanders' contexts. He draws on one of the general understandings of bystanders adopted in Holocaust studies but does not analyse in detail the differences between the contexts of bystanders in the Holocaust, in each biblical passage, and in the present day. During the Holocaust, bystanders situated in different contexts acted differently and were classified as different types of bystanders. Therefore, studying context is closely related to the identification of bystander types and, in relation to Lentz's claims, understanding why a bystander does or does not act on behalf of the person in need. In Lentz's illustrations of 'active bystander' behaviour, the bystanders face different levels of challenges and threats. Abraham's hospitality is offered within a struggle between the potential danger faced by three travellers and the risk of danger to his family. When he negotiates with the deity about the destruction of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, he faces a dilemma over how to prevent a genocide in the towns and whether he will be killed or punished for challenging God. The midwives face a similar dilemma: how do they stop the genocide of Hebrew infants while maintaining their own safety before the Pharaoh? Considering the responsibilities of bystanders without taking their contexts into account is not helpful for understanding why bystanders help or not and why it may not be possible to motivate bystanders to help.

Lentz's lack of engagement with bystanders' contexts can also be found in his analysis of the bystander issue in the Prophets. Lentz does briefly mention the backgrounds of the prophets Amos, Isaiah, and Micah in terms of their historical and geographical locations, but he does not discuss other aspects of the contexts they were facing. In addition, he uses the example of being an 'active bystander' from the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule in Leviticus without considering the context in which these texts were written. Lentz generalises about bystanders in varied contexts by creating a dichotomy between bystanders who help and culpable bystanders who do not help. However, he does identify the different roles of an 'active bystander' when he accuses the culpable bystander of *in*action: 'The bystander who does not involve herself or himself as advocate, defender, or helper of a person in need is not worthy to be part of the covenant community.'[201] To be an advocate, a defender, or a helper, a bystander requires different skills and abilities; they must experience different challenges and put themselves in the way of different threats. It is therefore difficult to put all bystanders into a single basket. Similarly, with regard to those 'passive bystanders' (or 'culpable bystanders' using Lentz's term), Lentz does not discuss whether the bystander who 'stands idly by' does so after careful decision-making and for a particular reason. Even if the bystander is passive, Lentz does not identify any reason for such passivity. Again, I would argue that the lack of consideration of the bystander's context limits the understanding of the types of bystanders because, according to Lentz, bystanders are classified only based on their response to their covenantal responsibility. A bystander may have refused to help or remained undecided about helping due to a number of factors, including trauma. But Lentz would argue that these circumstances are immaterial and that *all* non-responsive bystanders owe the person in need a helping hand. In reading the Bible with a bystander perspective, I will attempt to identify if any bystander is passive and allow space to explore any reasons or factors affecting them, rather than pigeonholing them with those who are apathetic or refuse to help.

The third shortcoming of Lentz's survey is that it does not pay attention to bystander's feelings**.** He acknowledges the feelings of the psalmists who are victimised personas in the book of Psalms, but he does not mention the feelings of bystanders who are also alluded to in these psalms. In his analysis of the book of Job, Lentz identifies

[201] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 684.

Job's friends as 'non-participating bystanders,' and he emphasises their speeches blaming Job's calamities on his sins.[202] Though Job's friends go and stay with Job for seven days and seven nights before delivering their speeches, their early participation is not recognised (Job 2:11–13). Then, after learning about the unexpected and inexplicable nature of Job's traumatic experiences, they may feel compelled to seek reasons for why and how these experiences happened. Although it is not an empathetic response to a victim, they may still have been pained to see calamities happen to a righteous person and his family. Their sorrow may keep them in a state of passivity and unable to help; indeed, they cannot do anything to bring back Job's children. In sum, bystander feelings are of less concern to Lentz due to his focus on the response of the bystander.

Lentz's survey focuses on the final actions of the bystander, as I have mentioned in my analysis of his assumption about the obligation of bystanders. Though a bystander's actions are significant in some situations, bystanders are also affected by what happens around them. Bystanders can struggle when confronted by a traumatising event, and even when they intervene they may be traumatised afterwards, especially if their efforts fail to help. For instance, even if a bystander offers first aid, the person they help may die. The bystander may suffer regret if they believe they did something wrong or did not respond promptly. Another example would be a bystander feeling guilt and regret, even if their intervention was partially successful. According to the biographical film *One Life*, the organiser of the *Kindertransport* operation, Sir Nicholas Winton, lived with guilt and regret for a long time because the last train scheduled to transport Jewish children from Prague to Britain was unable to leave.[203] These practical examples show that bystanders may actively intervene, but they are still affected by what they have witnessed. Their role as an active bystander can have lasting impact on them.

Lentz's survey demonstrates the Bible is full of examples of intervening bystanders, non-intervening bystanders, and the deity as a bystander, but these texts are less often read through the lens of the bystanders themselves. Though active bystanders may be described as a model to be emulated and non-intervening bystanders as a source of critique, Lentz does not analyse the position of the bystander, nor does he examine

[202] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 680–81.
[203] James Hawes, dir., *One Life* (Warner Bros. UK, 2023).

their contexts and feelings. Having acknowledged that Lentz's assumption about bystander obligation to act and his lack of consideration of bystanders' context and feelings limit the understanding of bystanders and their corresponding classifications, I will now further evaluate how to move forward from his survey. I will also extend the discussion of types of bystanders and present my suggestions for classification before I apply the bystander approach to my reading of Ecclesiastes.

Evaluation of Lentz's Survey

Having analysed Lentz's survey, what I am taking forward from it is the coverage of a wide range of passages in the Bible and the inclusion of readers. There are three aspects that I would not follow: the failure to study reasons for action and inaction, the notion of responsibility being based on the covenantal model, and the generalised classification of bystanders. Instead, I would supplement Lentz's survey with the consideration of bystanders' feelings, the rethinking of obligation of bystanders to act, and the reclassification of types of bystanders. In this section, I will evaluate Lentz's survey in light of five aspects and elaborate how I am going to apply the bystander approach to reading Ecclesiastes.

First, Lentz' survey is important because no one else has done a similar study of bystanders in the Bible. His survey covers a wide range of passages in the Bible. This illustrates that the issue of bystanders is present in different books with different backgrounds and genres. However, he does not mention Ecclesiastes, so I would like to build on that. Unlike most of the biblical books Lentz has covered in his survey, in Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth speaks alone without anyone else talking to him. I would like to look for any bystander issues in Ecclesiastes and how Ecclesiastes is read with a bystander perspective.

Second, the inclusion of readers in Lentz's survey is important to bystander studies because readers witness the happenings through the texts. Lentz mentions the 'reader' seven times in his essay. In his discussion of Psalms, he includes the reader in the reading process of Psalm 22: 'As the Psalm continues, the reader is led to understand that the victim has been saved and restored.'[204] In his analysis of the book of

[204] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 683.

Habakkuk, Lentz also notes the presence of 'people' and includes them as being 'responsible agents of compassion and justice.'[205] Lentz can see the 'presence' of the implied reader among the biblical texts, but in his survey, the reader is only a reader. The reader's role is limited to reading the text. Readers' engagement is not included as part of the biblical narrating and reading process. I would like to consider the reader as a bystander who is part of the reading process using my reading of Ecclesiastes as illustration. There are bystanders described *in* the text, and the reader *in front of the text* is also a kind of bystander. When some readers read the text as a sacred witness informing (or potentially informing) their actions, the investigation of the reader as bystander becomes more essential. I would also like to explore the types of bystanders that readers may be and the impact of this on their biblical reading. Lentz's survey looks at the people *in* the text and the people *in front of* the text, and then he places responsibility on these people to help those in need. Through the survey of the Ten Commandments, the 'Golden Rule,' and the Prophets, he understands the texts as stipulating that bystanders have either 'duty of act' or 'duty of care.' I am not going to make the case that Ecclesiastes is another text that shows the readers' responsibility to help those in need; rather, I want to analyse if there is room for bystander readers who may be traumatised after witnessing what is happening in the text. The traumatising text may prevent readers from giving a response.

Third, Lentz does not address the reasons for bystanders' action or inaction or the feelings of bystanders in the Bible; so I would like to include these issues in my discussion. As in his study of Job's friends, I do not agree that these characters are 'non-participating bystanders' because they actively participate in visiting Job, and they stay with him in silence for seven days and seven nights. They recognise that Job's suffering is very great (Job 2:11–13). Lentz suggests that Job's friends blame Job by attributing his suffering to his sins. However, asking 'why' and 'how' during a traumatic event maybe an instinctive response, though it is not good for the victim. Job's friends seek the reason for Job's suffering, and this may be due to the unexpected and inexplicable nature of the traumatic events that have happened to Job. His friends may also be traumatised indirectly by Job's calamities. Their feelings and the reasons behind their reactions are seen as being less related to concern for Job when they are studied as

[205] Lentz, 'Bystander in the Bible,' 688.

bystanders in Lentz's survey. I would like to consider these bystanders' feelings with reference to their response as witnesses to someone suffering. The consideration of feeling and reason are also not found in the previously mentioned sociopsychological study by Darley and Latané. So, I would like to fill the gap left by Lentz concerning the reasons for bystanders' (in)action and their feelings. Such considerations may help develop understandings of the different types of bystanders; particularly, I would like to focus on the 'passive' bystander. I suspect that the bystander may experience fatigue due to repeated exposure to terror and trauma, and/or the freezing effect due to traumatic scenarios, and/or the bystander effect due to the presence of other bystanders. In the next section, I will read Ecclesiastes using a bystander perspective. After that, in Chapter 4, I will connect this reading of Ecclesiastes with the affect and trauma perspectives discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 and with a critical empathy approach to provide a triangulated reading of Ecclesiastes that considers bystander, trauma, and affect perspectives.

In addition, besides considering Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes as a bystander, I will also consider the reader as a bystander approaching the text. Although the prevalence of bystanders in the Bible is known, their impacts and functions on the implied readers have not been examined. Lentz's survey illustrates the repeated occurrences of bystanders situated in life-threatening scenarios, such as the genocides in Genesis and Exodus; readers are exposed to these life-threatening scenarios as well. I would like to analyse, through reader-response criticism, how the repeated occurrence of terrorising, violent, or traumatic texts affects readers who read the texts as a witness and a bystander. Because there has been an exponential increase in scholarship that firmly illustrates the presence of terror and violence in the Bible, reading the Bible with a bystander perspective has become more important.[206] The impact on the bystander-reader of such repeated exposure to this terror and violence is worth studying.

[206] Trible, *Texts of Terror*; Markus Philipp Zehnder and Hallvard Hagelia, eds., *Encountering Violence in the Bible*, The Bible in the Modern World 55 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013); Helen Paynter and Michael Spalione, *The Bible on Violence: A Thick Description*, Bible in the Modern World 73 (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2020); Jacques van Ruiten and Koert van Bekkum, eds., *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception*, Old Testament Studies 79 (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Graybill, *Texts After Terror*; Michael Spalione and Helen Paynter, eds., *Map or Compass? The Bible on Violence*, Bible in the Modern World 79 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022).

Fourth, Lentz's survey illustrates that the presence of bystanders and issues relating to bystanders are pervasive in the Bible, but Lentz argues these biblical depictions illustrate bystanders' obligation to help those in need. His discussion of the bystander's responsibility is based on the covenantal model, and this is another aspect of his argument that I would not follow. Responsibility based on the covenantal relationship is not strong enough to convince bystanders to offer help, particularly those who follow other religions or none. Besides, the biblical texts can also be read in secular contexts. It is not necessary to confine readings of biblical bystandership within the covenantal relationship. Human interactions in the biblical texts can be read without factoring in the covenantal relationship, though it is an essential element within some conservative faith-based communities. Human relationships can occur outside the contexts of both the covenantal relationship between God and the chosen people (the Israelites) in the Hebrew Bible and the salvific relationship between Jesus and humans in the New Testament.

In addition to not considering the foundation of bystander responsibility beyond the biblical contexts, Lentz's survey of bystanders in the Bible also fails to address the issues of inaction and indecision. These issues also deserve attention. As mentioned, in different contexts, there may be factors impeding bystander action. Such factors are also important to acknowledge, include, and investigate, although not necessarily in order to justify inaction. Lentz focuses on the obligation of bystanders to help victims. There is nothing wrong with expecting a bystander to help a person in need, but I want to explore what actions might be considered as 'helping' victims. In addition to taking action to mitigate the suffering of the victim, do bystanders have any other types of response? I would suggest it is also part of the bystander's responsible response to distinguish right from wrong. When a bystander witnesses something happening, they need to recognise that something is problematic before they can further evaluate whether they are capable of intervening to help the person in need. If bystanders fail to recognise their responsibility to distinguish between right and wrong, they will never realise that a situation may need their intervention. I will explore how Ecclesiastes allows readers to understand this responsibility and learn about their agency.

Table 5. Reclassification of Bystanders

Bystander	
Onlooker Refuses to help	**Upstander** Prepares to help
Passive bystander Affective but stays passive, not able or not yet able to decide whether to take action	**Active bystander** Acts intuitively and instinctively without thinking about it

Fifth, Lentz simply classifies bystander as 'active' or 'passive' based on whether they intervene to help the people in need. I find that such a generalised definition and the consequential categorisation of bystanders—helping or not helping the people in need—is not clear enough. The narrow definition of bystanders in Lentz's study does not fully depict the dilemma of a bystander, so I would like to incorporate bystander studies into biblical studies. From the discussion of bystander studies in Holocaust studies, as covered in the previous section, we have seen that there are different forms of bystanders. The study of the passive roles of bystanders became less popular after more examples of heroic rescuers were identified in later Holocaust scholarship. In my analysis of Lentz's survey, I have explained that the categories of 'active bystander' and 'passive bystander' may have nuances. Some 'active bystanders' act more intuitively and instinctively; some of them act with consideration and decision; and some of them prepare themselves in advance in response to the situation. Being aware of these differences, I would like to separate those who decide to be trained to help from the group of 'active bystander' and name them as 'upstanders' because they have been 'upfront' in preparing to speak up or choosing to help the person in need (see Table 5). There are some upstanders who further act sacrificially, like martyrs, against the authority causing the harm in order to resist or even subvert it. 'Active bystander' specifies those who act intuitively and instinctively but without first thinking about it.[207] Similarly, I would like to separate those who decide not to help from the category of 'passive bystander' and name them as 'onlookers' because they refuse to help the

[207] With regard to those who act with consideration and decisiveness, it is currently difficult to define whether they are upstanders or active bystanders. They seem to be somewhere in between. On the one hand, they engage in planning and decision-making, but on the other hand, they also seem to make decisions on the fly. So, I cannot classify this type yet.

person in need. ‘Passive bystander’ specifies those who stay passive because they are unable or undecided about whether to take action or not. The category of ‘passive bystander’ does not include those who do something that brings more harm to the victim. This latter group are onlookers because they choose not to help. Additionally, they then become accomplices when they subsequently act in ways that bring harm to the victim. After reviewing and reclassifying the types of bystanders, in Chapter 4, I would like to highlight the overlooked passive bystander—those who are affective but not *yet* able to respond. These passive bystanders are usually conflated with those who have chosen not to help. I would like to investigate how they remain passive and undecided.

Having analysed and evaluated Lentz’s survey, I have confirmed that bystander issues are common in the Bible and have elaborated on the types of bystanders. Lentz’s essay does not cover all the books in the Bible, and Ecclesiastes is one of the books that receives no mention in his survey. In the next section, I apply the bystander approach to my reading of Ecclesiastes.

The Bystander Approach and Ecclesiastes

In Chapter 2, I highlighted that more attention is paid to the victim in trauma studies carried out by biblical scholars, and the presence of bystanders and their responses, as well as the impact on them, are of less concern. In the following discussion, I regard Qoheleth not as a victim but as a bystander who reacts after seeing others suffering. At the beginning of this chapter, I reviewed the types of bystanders and the changes in perceptions of bystanders in Holocaust studies, alongside the application of bystander studies in biblical studies. In the previous section, I examined Lentz’s survey of bystanders in the Bible. I have enumerated five aspects that are not covered in his survey: 1) a focus on Ecclesiastes; 2) an awareness of the presence of readers; 3) the feelings/affects of bystanders; 4) responses to bystanders other than the assumption of responsibility; and 5) distinct types of bystanders. In this section, I would like to bring these aspects to the fore to re-read Ecclesiastes with a bystander approach. I will do this in two parts: first, by regarding *Qoheleth* as a bystander; and second, by reading Ecclesiastes *myself* as a bystander.

I will briefly explain why Ecclesiastes can also serve as a suitable text to explore further (in other words, how the bystander approach helps bring out things otherwise missed) and how Qoheleth is not a perpetrator or victim but a bystander in Ecclesiastes. Next, I will discuss how Qoheleth is affected by what he sees—that is, how being a bystander shapes him. Hence, Qoheleth responds and struggles after he mentions that he has seen something. Finally, I will re-read Ecclesiastes with a bystander approach (with a particular focus on Ecclesiastes 4); here, Qoheleth witnesses specific events of injustice, namely, oppressions. I will re-read the texts regarding Qoheleth as though he were two different types of bystander: an active bystander and an onlooker. I will illustrate a bystander reading of Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes by regarding him as a bystander in the text and thereby suggesting an alternative reading of Ecclesiastes. I am not suggesting this will be a definitive reading; instead, I would like to explore how a bystander perspective can attune us to what might easily be overlooked. My reading represents a way of witnessing, of seeing, what is in the text, while remaining sensitive to trauma and affect.

Regarding Qoheleth as a Bystander

How He Sees

Having examined Lentz's survey of bystanders in the Bible, let me now read Ecclesiastes from the perspective of Qoheleth as a bystander. Among those books in the Bible that receive no mention in Lentz's survey, I find Ecclesiastes to be one that is worthy of exploration. The repeated occurrence of 'I saw' strikes me as an indication of a kind of testimony, like the witnessing of a bystander.[208] Besides that, when I read Ecclesiastes, *I become a bystander* listening to a witness and thinking 'What can I do?' or 'What should I do?' regarding the unjust situations mentioned by Qoheleth. (I will discuss this in the next part.) In addition, reading Ecclesiastes as a bystander is a case of being exposed to the witness reports of several problematic scenarios during the course of the book. Unlike other texts containing problematic scenarios, say sexual violence or warfare, neither Qoheleth nor any depicted character in Ecclesiastes takes a role as either the perpetrator or the victim. This keeps Qoheleth in the role of witness and as

[208] ראיתי occurs in 1:14; 2:13, 24; 3:10, 16, 22; 4:4, 15; 5:12, 17 (Eng 5:13, 18); 6:1; 7:15; 8:9, 10, 17; 9:13; 10:5, 7; אראה occurs in 2:3; 4:1, 7.

one giving testimony as a bystander. So Ecclesiastes serves as a suitable text to explore both bystanders *in the text* and the reader of Ecclesiastes *as a bystander.*

Ecclesiastes starts with the introduction of Qoheleth as a king in Jerusalem (Eccl 1:1) and then describes his achievements (Eccl 2:4–11). Among these introductions, as well as the poem about time in Ecclesiastes 3, the text mentions what Qoheleth sees. The first-person perfect and first-person imperfect with waw consecutive, which can be translated as '(and) I saw' (ראיתי and ואראה), occur twenty times in Ecclesiastes 1–10. Across the first three chapters, Qoheleth says that he sees all the deeds that are done under the sun, and he sees (or recognises) all is vanity (1:14): wisdom excels folly (2:13); enjoyment is from the hand of God (2:24); he sees wickedness (3:16); and nothing is better than enjoyment (3:22). The text does not describe *what* Qoheleth sees until Ecclesiastes 4, where there is the first description of Qoheleth's witness to specific unjust events, namely, oppressions (העשׁקים).

ושׁבתי אני ואראה את־כל־העשׁקים אשׁר נעשׂים תחת השׁמשׁ והנה דמעת העשׁקים ואין להם מנחם ומיד עשׁקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם:	I turned and saw all the oppressions which are done under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed and there is no one to comfort them, and from the hand of their oppressors, power, there is no one to comfort them. (Eccl 4:1)

Ecclesiastes 4 starts with the phrase ושׁבתי אני ואראה (literally 'I turned and saw'), which emphasises that Qoheleth directs his attention and perceives that there are oppressions. Before the text mentions the oppressions, there is a pause signalled by והנה ('and behold'; Eccl 4:1). The NRSVue translates this word as 'look.' This pointer strongly indicates a pause, as well as preparation or a moment of anticipation for what follows. I am reminded of a bystander, not standing too close but trying to focus on what he is seeing, someone looking for some clues that can help him understand what has happened. From the beginning of Ecclesiastes 4, the text shows Qoheleth summoning his attention.

Instead of reporting what the oppressions *are* as is usual in present-day news reports (where they have taken place, exactly who perpetrated them and against whom, or their chronological development, for instance), the attention falls on 'the oppressed' and 'their oppressors' and on affect. The text describes Qoheleth seeing the tears of the

oppressed (והנה דמעת העשׁקים), rather than simply seeing the oppressed. Fox notes that והנה is an indicator of Qoheleth's focus on the tears of the oppressed.[209] He believes that, at this moment, Qoheleth is more concerned with the tears than with the oppression itself. I agree that the presence of והנה functions as a pointer to Qoheleth seeing the tears of the oppressed. Their tears explicitly reflect their suffering under oppression, and it is apparent that their suffering has reached a virtually unbearable level of pain and/or sadness. Their tears catch Qoheleth's attention and suggest that he is affected by the tears rather than just objectively and impartially informing readers of the presence of the oppressed.

How He Is Affected

Next, I will apply the bystander approach to discuss how Qoheleth is affected by what he sees. As my evaluation shows, Lentz's survey does not examine the feelings of bystanders. Let me consider how Qoheleth, as bystander, is affected when he sees the tears of the oppressed. The text does not describe what has happened to the oppressed, but the tears reflect the severity of their suffering. Qoheleth pays attention to their tears. It seems this is important to him. Regarding him as a bystander, the tears are what he sees when he looks for clues so he can understand what has happened. The tears are what Qoheleth as a bystander can remember and retell about what he sees. Besides the tears of the oppressed, the text also mentions 'from the hand of their oppressors, power' (ומיד עשׁקיהם כח).[210] Although the text does not describe the details about the oppression suffered by the oppressed, it at least indicates that the oppressed are under the power of their oppressors. This difference in power makes the oppression less likely to be eradicated.

In addition, the text emphasises the oppressions are *all* done under the sun (תחת השׁמשׁ); it therefore illustrates that the oppressions are open and visible (Eccl 4:1). Regarding Qoheleth as a bystander, there are two layers that he can see under the sun. The first layer is the oppressions that have taken place; Qoheleth, as well as other people, no doubt, see the oppressions. Another layer is the cruel truth that the

[209] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 200.

[210] There are contested emendations to the clause ומיד עשׁקיהם כח. In his commentary, Seow does not find it necessary to emend it to 'in the hand' as other witnesses support the MT. See Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 177–78. Fox suggests an emendation to 'in the hand' because he finds the oppressed cannot get power 'from' the hand of the oppressors. Power should be 'possessed' by somebody—there is power in the oppressors' hands. See Fox, *A Time to Tear Down*, 218–19.

oppressions take place under the sun. It is outrageous that the oppressions take place blatantly, in broad daylight. They are not hidden or concealed in darkness. Qoheleth is exposed to witness *both* the oppression itself and such glaring injustice happening. Besides 4:1, the phrase 'under the sun' occurs 29 times in total in Ecclesiastes. The text tells us that Qoheleth sees there are infuriating things taking place blatantly and repeatedly.

How He Responds and Struggles

Having discussed how Qoheleth is stirred up after he mentions that he has seen the oppressions, tears of the oppressed, and the flagrancy of the oppressions, let me next discuss how Qoheleth responds and struggles as a bystander.

The text shows that Qoheleth sees the oppressed need comfort. The unbearable pain and sadness experienced under oppression make the oppressed have a need for comfort, as the text goes on to describe that there is no one to comfort them, or literally, 'there is no comfort' (ואין להם מנחם). The word מנחם is a piel participle and can refer to an expression of one's comfort or a person offering comfort. In either case, the oppressed receive none. It is ambiguous whether their tears are due to the lack of מנחם. Fox translates המעשׂה as 'events' in v. 3 to include both the evil deeds and the lack of comfort.[211] If the tears are because of such a combination of evil deeds and a lack of comfort, the people's situation would be even more miserable. No matter what the actual causes of the tears, Qoheleth finds there should be comfort offered to them.

As well as referencing the oppressed, Ecclesiastes 4:1 also mentions the oppressors. But surprisingly, it does not list who they are, what they do, how they exert oppressions, or what advantages they take from the oppressed; but it does emphasise their power. Moreover, the phrase mentioning the oppressors is full of ambiguities: it is unclear whether the oppressors are grammatically the subject of the sentence and whether the second occurrence of ואין להם מנחם refers to the oppressors or the oppressed. The translation of this verse impacts how the reader understands what the verse says about comforting actions. So, here I list two different translations and explain my preference. Then I will discuss how comforting actions are described by Qoheleth. It is

[211] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 202.

significant to my ongoing analysis of how Qoheleth responds and struggles because it relates to the suggested actions and who is going to take these actions.

וְשַׁבְתִּי אֲנִי וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־כָּל־הָעֲשֻׁקִים אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשִׂים תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וְהִנֵּה דִמְעַת הָעֲשֻׁקִים וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם וּמִיַּד עֹשְׁקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ וְאֵין לָהֶם מְנַחֵם׃	I turned and saw all the oppressions which are done under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed and there is no one to comfort them, and from the hand of their oppressors, power, there is no one to comfort them. (Eccl 4:1 my translation)	Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them. (Eccl 4:1 NRSVue)

Here are two different versions of Ecclesiastes 4:1. In the NRSVue translation, the phrase וּמִיַּד עֹשְׁקֵיהֶם כֹּחַ starts as a new sentence, describing the power held by the oppressors then continuing with the phrase 'with no one to comfort them.' In this way, the oppressors are grammatically the subject of the sentence, and they have no one to comfort them.[212] Weeks admits that the text is probably corrupt in the last part of this verse and perhaps originally said 'a rescuer' instead of 'a comforter.'[213] However, my preference would be to see a condition—from the hand of their oppressors (of/with) power—as the grammatical subject in that clause, and the second occurrence of the phrase 'there is no one to comfort them' referring to the oppressed.

I prefer that both occurrences of the phrase refer to the oppressed—there is no one to comfort them—when they shed tears over their oppressions and when they live in perpetual deprivation at the hand of their powerful oppressors. This resonates with Cherry's bystander studies analysis of the Kitty Genovese case, which involved the rape and murder of a woman by a man.[214] Cherry criticises the fact that the gendered nature of the crime was excluded in Darley and Latané's laboratory-based studies of the Genovese case. In Ecclesiastes 4:1, the text shows that the oppressed suffer in tears because of their oppressors' power. There are two elements here: the suffering and the

[212] This may lead to doubt about the legitimacy of the oppressors with power having comfort, or it may cause disagreement regarding people offering empathetic comfort to the oppressors. This involves a broader moral discussion on the punishment and forgiveness of perpetrators. It is worth exploring further, but due to restraints on the of scope of this dissertation, I am not covering it here.
[213] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*, 569.
[214] Cherry, *Stubborn Particulars of Social Psychology*, 16–29.

injustice of the power hierarchy. This may explain the repetition of the phrase 'there is no one to comfort them' because the oppressed require two different levels of comfort.

In his commentary, William P. Brown understands the two occurrences of מנחם on two levels: the first is a sense of consolation and the second is an active role, which is more than consolation.[215] And in this active role, Brown considers the consoler as an 'advocate.' John Goldingay adopts Brown's twofold understanding of מנחם and suggests that, 'while comfort (*nāḥam* piel) implies *empathy* and words of consolation, it also implies *action* that changes people's situation, and the situation means people need comfort in the sense of action' (emphasis added).[216] So, from the perspective of the oppressed, they need מנחם, but from the perspective of a bystander, who sees the oppressed and/or the system of injustice, they need to offer the oppressed מנחם through empathy and action. In sum, the depictions of the presence of the tears of the oppressed and the absence of מנחם accentuate the need to offer מנחם to the oppressed and a call upon implied readers to deliver this much-needed comfort.

In his commentary, Weeks finds Ecclesiastes 4:1 'uncomfortable with a simple repetition,' and he explores whether the second occurrence of ואין להם מנחם should be read or understood differently from the first.[217] He identifies that the Syriac version uses the noun 'deliverer' in the second occurrence compared to 'comforter' in the first. He proposes that the second occurrence of ואין להם מנחם, together with the awkward כח, is a displacement of a clause that refers to the 'absence of some rescuer or redeemer,' but he admits that there is no way to recover the incomplete original text or to make an emendation.[218] If the second clause is not read as a repetition of the first, it underlines the absence of a third party playing a role for the people involved in the oppressions: to comfort the oppressed and to either comfort, rescue, redeem or else the oppressors.

Having re-interpreted the phrase ומיד עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם and suggested interpretations of the repeated occurrence of 'there is no one to comfort them,' I now link it to the discussion of the struggles of Qoheleth as a bystander. The text shows that he sees there is no one to offer either form of comfort. This implies that he recognises

[215] William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000), 48.
[216] John Goldingay, *Ecclesiastes*, The Bible in God's World (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 151.
[217] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*, 574. For a detailed discussion, see pp. 574–75.
[218] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*, 575.

the oppressed need to be comforted, but the text emphasises not the lack of comfort but the lack of someone to comfort. Qoheleth sees there is no *one* who does this, and if he is a bystander, he could consider that he is the one who ought to do it. However, due to the bystander effect, he is affected by the (in)actions of other bystanders. The people having no one to comfort them becomes a reason for him to wait and see before taking action.

In sum, reading with a bystander perspective, this verse acknowledges the people involved in oppressions—the oppressed and the oppressors—as well as a third party who might, or could, act as comforter, rescuer, or redeemer. This verse also depicts how Qoheleth sees the presence of the victims (the oppressed) and the perpetrators (the oppressors), as well as the absence of an active bystander. He is stirred up by the tears of the oppressed, the oppressions that take place blatantly under the sun, and the lack of empathy and action. He struggles to respond to what he sees, and he witnesses no other bystanders responding to the people and the situation.

How He Chooses

After reading how Qoheleth as a bystander is affected by what he sees and how he responds and struggles, I now discuss his decisions. I will first discuss whether and how he is able to choose, and then I will consider how the text reveals his decision in his following sayings. In Ecclesiastes 4:1, Qoheleth sees the oppressions and the oppressed, and he sees people in need of empathy, the system in need of an advocate, and the absence of people responding to these needs. The text also shows that *he* seems to be able to respond to these needs. Qoheleth is depicted as a wealthy and capable person in Ecclesiastes. First, from the self-introduction in 1:1 and 1:12, he is portrayed as a king in Jerusalem. He has a royal position, which comes with power and authority. Then, in 1:16, he claims that he has become great and increased his wisdom (אני הנה הגדלתי והוספתי חכמה) more than those who have ruled over Jerusalem before him, and his heart knows (ראה) great experience of wisdom and knowledge. Additionally, in 2:4–8, he gives a stocktake of his achievements and possessions. He builds houses, plants vineyards, makes gardens and parks with all kinds of fruit trees, constructs pools for watering the forest of trees, acquires male and female slaves, owns great possessions of herds and flocks, gathers silver and gold, and acquires male and female singers and many concubines (2:4–8). Having such abundant resources of wisdom, knowledge, achievements, and possessions, he emphasises in 2:9 that he *himself* has becomes

greater than anyone in Jerusalem before him (וגדלתי והוספתי מכל שהיה לפני בירושלם). The NRSVue translates והוספתי as 'surpasses.' So Qoheleth surpasses all who were before him in Jerusalem. The Revised Chinese Union Version (RCUV) translates this word as 勝過 (*sing gwo*; literal translation: win out), which means that Qoheleth is better than all who were before him in Jerusalem. These translations both confirm that he understands his wisdom, knowledge, and possessions make him superior to other people.

Next, in 2:10, he proudly describes that he is capable of obtaining whatever he desires. He is not a puppet ruler who just has a title but no way to exercise his power or to exert any influence. He has autonomy to make decisions about the use of his possessions and capabilities. In sum, he is a king with abundant resources, superiority, and autonomy. Reading his portrayal with bystander perspective, he has resource and autonomy to hand that would allow him to take action. He is virtually the best person to take action because he surpasses all who were before him in Jerusalem. In the next section about the reader as bystander, I will discuss more about how Qoheleth's capabilities affect the reader's decision about passivity or activity.

Having seen the oppressions and the oppressed in Ecclesiastes 4:1, I am going to continue the reading with a bystander perspective to see if Qoheleth decides to respond to what he has seen. Qoheleth has seen what has happened and recognises the needs of the people; as a bystander, he might be expected to intervene in order to relieve people's pain or get them out of danger. Surprisingly, the text does not mention any intervention by Qoheleth towards the oppressed or against the oppressors, though he is moved by the tears of the oppressed, and he, as a king, has more resources and power than others, which he could use to intervene. The text then tells us that the dead are more fortunate than the living (Eccl 4:2). They are no longer suffering oppressions. Those who have not yet been born are even better off because they never see any evil deeds that are done under the sun (Eccl 4:3). They cannot see any evil deeds, whilst Qoheleth has no choice but to see the oppressions. At the moment he is expected to intervene, Qoheleth has made his decision not to offer any real help, which is a disappointing decision.

In this section, I have brought forward Lentz's survey to apply to the reading of Ecclesiastes, particularly with regard to Ecclesiastes 4:1, where Qoheleth is first mentioned as a bystander who witnesses the oppressed. I have explained what he sees as a bystander, how the text shows that he is affected, how he then struggles to respond,

and finally how the text shows his decision. After demonstrating this reading with a bystander perspective, I will continue reading Ecclesiastes 4, focusing on Qoheleth's role as an active bystander, and/or onlooker.

Regarding Qoheleth as an Active Bystander

From the previous section, we have seen that the text shows no action from Qoheleth in response to the oppression and the oppressed he witnesses. He is less likely to be regarded as an active bystander because the text does not describe him intervening in any of the ways portrayed in the examples from Lentz's survey. In this section, I attempt to re-read Ecclesiastes 4, continuing in particular with Qoheleth's role as witness and possible active bystander. I will first discuss what else he sees besides oppression and the oppressed. Then, I will examine how the text depicts Qoheleth's 'speaking out' in response to what he sees. Finally, I will elaborate on how his 'speaking out' is a significant action in terms of being an active bystander.

Speaking Out

At the beginning of Ecclesiastes 4, Qoheleth sees the oppressions and the oppressed. This is not the only time Qoheleth witnesses; indeed, Ecclesiastes 4 relates three further episodes where witnessing occurs. I will re-read these three episodes in Ecclesiastes 4 in light of Qoheleth's role as an active bystander and demonstrate how the text suggests indifference through Qoheleth's ongoing testimonies about the situation that he witnesses. After he first witnesses oppression and the oppressed (4:1–3), Qoheleth then testifies to witnessing the work and toil that separates people (4:4–6) and those who have no succession (4:7–8). The work and toil cause separation and never bring people satisfactions. Instead, there is concern about people's relationships; as Weeks concludes, Ecclesiastes 4 suggests that 'we should not let work separate us from others, may find more purpose in our work if it is on behalf of others, and will benefit from working alongside others.'[219] The third thing Qoheleth witnesses concerns how the solitary person suffers due to toil, a fall, the cold, an attack (4:7–12), and his desire for the presence of another person to be the companion and support of the solitary person. The fourth thing Qoheleth witnesses regards the questionable succession to a higher authority—the kingship (4:13–16). He sees that a youth will stand in the place of the

[219] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*, 567.

king. These acts of witnessing are diverse in scope, but each one shows what Qoheleth sees and how he speaks about them.

In addition, in Ecclesiastes 4, neither the oppressions nor the people involved in these oppressions are specified in any detail. The anonymity of the people serves rhetorically to universalise the situations Qoheleth sees. In his study on Judges 19–21, Don Michael Hudson suggests at least five functions of anonymity in the Hebrew Bible: 1) anonymous characters play minor roles; 2) anonymity focuses or quickens the plot; 3) anonymity serves to focus and highlight *other* characters; 4) anonymity 'universalises' the characters and events of the narrative; and 5) anonymity parallels the loss of identity and personhood.[220] Ecclesiastes does not provide details of the oppressions witnessed by Qoheleth, but it denotes they are widespread and common. Though there are many, he does not refrain from speaking out about them.

Being a Whistleblower

As I have mentioned in the previous section, the phrase 'there is no one to comfort them' is repeated (4:1). Goldingay has described that there are two levels of comfort (מנחם), including 'empathy and words of consolation' and 'action that changes people's situation.'[221] If we regard Qoheleth as an active bystander in our reading of Ecclesiastes, his testimony about witnessing injustice likens him to a whistleblower. A whistleblower is an active bystander who 'exposes wrongdoing in the hope of stopping it.'[222] Whistleblowing exposes secret, illicit situations to the public as a means of mitigating the suffering or stop it from becoming exacerbated. It is particularly important, but challenging, in tyrannical regimes where citizens are not allowed to talk about any fault in the governance or among governing officials. Bystanders fear talking about any problem, even if they see the problem and the people suffering from it. If we read Qoheleth as an implied author of Ecclesiastes, he gives his testimony of what he sees. He daringly points out which practises under the sun are actually oppressions (4:1). There seems to be a contradiction between the oppressions being practised 'under the

[220] Don Michael Hudson, 'Living in a Land of Epithets: Anonymity in Judges 19–21,' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19, no. 62 (1994): 59, https://doi.org/10.1177/030908929401906204. Hudson proposes that the fourth and fifth usages of anonymity apply to Judges 19–21. More discussion can also be found in Paynter, *Telling Terror in Judges 19*, 30–39.
[221] Goldingay, *Ecclesiastes*, 151.
[222] Martha Minow, 'Upstanders, Whistle-Blowers, and Rescuers,' *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017): 816, https://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2017/iss4/9/.

sun' and Qoheleth's need to expose them. If they happen 'under the sun,' they should surely not need to be exposed. Unfortunately, it is often the case that no one identifies problematic issues that cause people to suffer, nor do they speak out about these issues.

Intervention

Speaking out as a whistleblower is an important act of intervention under two circumstances. First, it is essential for outsiders to speak out because vulnerable victims are not able to help themselves. During the Holocaust, Jews, gay and lesbian people, Sinti and Roma, political dissidents, and disabled people, among others, were targeted, killed, or sent to the concentration camps. They had no resources to rescue themselves from danger. They relied on outsiders to speak out for them and rescue them from danger. Second, speaking out is important when part of narrative is hidden. Part of the narrative is hidden particularly when it furthers the interests of the authorities.

At the time of writing, there is another example of a whistleblower speaking out for the sake of others' wellbeing. On the thirtieth of December 2019, before the global outbreak of COVID-19, Dr Li Wenliang, an ophthalmologist working at Wuhan Central Hospital, blew the whistle.[223] Through a message to fellow doctors in a chat group, he notified them about seven patients diagnosed with a SARS-like virus and warned them to wear personal protective equipment to avoid infection. Being a whistleblower, he exposed the situation that was as yet unknown for the sake of his fellow doctors' safety and perhaps also in the interests of public health. In this example, Dr Li and the outsiders are not victims, and they can choose to do nothing. For the sake of others' wellbeing, Dr Li chose to be a whistleblower to tell others what they saw. Likewise, in Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth tells his audience what he sees and expresses that it is problematic. In addition, a whistleblower, like Dr Li, does not need to speak up when there is no crisis. Dr Li blew the whistle to raise attention and send a warning to his fellow doctors after he suspected that patients and medical workers were in jeopardy. In Ecclesiastes 4, Qoheleth is not describing something mundane and inconsequential during a time of peace. He gives testimonies to show that he sees something wrong. After indicating that he witnesses oppressions, Ecclesiastes 4 does not continue immediately with a report on how Qoheleth resolves the situation. It states that

[223] 'Li Wenliang: Coronavirus Kills Chinese Whistleblower Doctor,' BBC News, 7 February 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51403795.

Qoheleth not only sees the oppression; he also witnesses the tears of the oppressed. He can see their sorrow and pain. He then remarks that there is no one to comfort them (ואין להם מנחם, 4:1). This shows there is an expectation that the oppressed receive comfort—but there is none. If we regard Qoheleth as an active bystander, Ecclesiastes raises the implied reader's attention to not only the oppression and the oppressed but also the lack of comfort. Ecclesiastes is calling for empathy and action from its implied reader through Qoheleth's whistleblowing.

Next, Ecclesiastes 4 describes Qoheleth observing that the dead who have already died are better than those who are still living:

ושׁבח אני את־המתים שׁכבר מתו מן־החיים אשׁר המה חיים עדנה׃	Therefore, I commended the dead, who have already died, over the living, who are still living. (Eccl 4:2)

The conjunction waw (ו) prefixed to ושׁבח at the beginning of v. 2 suggests a translation of 'and I commended,' but the connection between the two verses is loose. It is unclear why v. 2 comes right after Qoheleth's testimony about witnessing oppression. If the conjunction waw (ו) is read with consequential meaning, giving a translation of 'therefore, I commended,' this would indicate Qoheleth's commendation for the dead who are no longer suffering oppression and/or witnessing oppression. Verse 3 indicates that the one who has 'not yet been' is even better than both—the dead and the living—because they have not yet seen the evil deeds (את־המעשׂה הרע) that have been done under the sun. This clearly indicates an emphasis here on whether one *sees* bad deeds (rather than suffering bad deeds). The verb for 'see' occurs twice (vv. 1, 3) and will occur persistently also in the verses that follow (vv. 4, 7, 15). *Being an onlooker* and bystander and *witnessing oppression* is at issue here. There are three layers of problems: oppression, lack of comfort, and witnessing bad deeds.

Influencing Action

Having discussed how Qoheleth speaks out likes a whistleblower and gives testimonies of what he sees, I will now further develop how giving testimonies (continuously) is a valuable active bystander behaviour. Qoheleth's act of giving testimony like a whistleblower is counted as an active bystander behaviour because, first, it expresses his notion of justice. He sees some happening that has reduced people to tears. This might be the end of his observation, but Qoheleth identifies that there are oppressions and that

the people in tears are the oppressed. He notices them and realises something wrong is happening. Such an identification of evil is an example of what justice should be. Second, giving testimony and speaking out can flag an issue even though no concrete solution is yet known. Qoheleth does not solve the situation or order the persecution of the oppressors, but he draws attention to the presence of the oppressions and the oppressed who lack comfort. When Qoheleth highlights the oppressions, this can sensitise the implied reader to the problem. Ideally, it can encourage the reader to not read passively.

Regarding Qoheleth as an Onlooker

Fox remarks that Qoheleth 'seems more concerned with the disturbed equanimity of himself and the reader.'[224] He suggests that Qoheleth considers himself not as a victim but as an onlooker.[225] Fox does not explain his reasoning for this interpretation. It is also unclear how Fox is defining 'onlooker': as one who witnesses, or as one who witnesses *and* refuses to offer help. In this section, I also regard Qoheleth as an onlooker—one who turns down the opportunity to help. (I will regard Qoheleth as a passive bystander in the next chapter.) I will explain how the text shows him refusing to intervene on behalf of the people in need. Continuing with my analysis of Ecclesiastes 4:1—Qoheleth's first act of witnessing the oppressions that are practised under the sun, the tears of the oppressed, and the absence of anyone to comfort them—the text does not mention any intervention on his part. If we regard Qoheleth as an onlooker in this reading of Ecclesiastes 4, we might see how the text talks about the immediate responses, choices, decisions, and withdrawal of an onlooker.

Immediate Response

After the first mention of Qoheleth witnessing injustice, the text tells us that he thinks the dead are better than the living and that the one who has not yet been born is even better as they have not seen the evil deeds that are under the sun (Eccl 4:2–3). The first part—'The dead is better than the living'—suggests an end to life, rather than a comfort to the people suffering. The second part—not seeing the evil deeds is even better—also suggests an impossible way out for the people suffering oppressions. Qoheleth's

[224] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 201.
[225] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 201.

responses are like those of an onlooker who turns away from witnessing oppression *and* from the people. Many commentators have commented on Qoheleth's indifferent responses. Crenshaw is disappointed that Qoheleth does not comfort the oppressed nor invite the implied readers to rectify the situation.[226] Roland Murphy finds Qoheleth 'simply registers the fact without condemnation.'[227] Benjamin Shaw suggests that Qoheleth is expected to be able to halt the oppression, but he does not.[228] Similarly, Tremper Longman III sees Qoheleth resigning himself; he neither acts himself nor asks others to act towards alleviating the situation.[229] He describes Qoheleth discussing oppression in a 'detached, clinical manner' because Qoheleth (only) *observes* when he approaches the topic.[230] He is dissatisfied that Qoheleth simply resigns himself to the oppressors who have power, but he does not intervene to mitigate the suffering of the oppressed.[231] Fox also finds Qoheleth's attitude one of withdrawal from oppressions: moreover, this withdrawal does not only happen once but occurs in response to the multiple oppressions that are described in Ecclesiastes (3:16; 8:9, 10).[232] When witnessing oppressions, Qoheleth never looks for any possible way to change the situation. In addition, Fox affirms that Qoheleth sees the oppression 'entirely from the perspective of an onlooker' because he does not see himself as a source of comfort to the ones who lack comfort; he just feels sorry for them.[233] Also, he does not command others to offer comfort, though he feels sorry for the people suffering. Given their disappointment about Qoheleth's indifferent responses, we can also see these commentators express their expectations about Qoheleth offering help. As we regard Qoheleth as an onlooker in the reading of Ecclesiastes 4, we can see his immediate responses include getting annoyed about the oppressions he is witnessing and tending to turn his back on the suffering without further exploring what he can do.

Available Choices

In addition, though Qoheleth is depicted as a king with abundant resources and autonomy, the text suggests that he reserves his resources and power and does not

[226] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 106.
[227] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 37.
[228] Benjamin Shaw, *Ecclesiastes: Life in a Fallen World* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2019), 54.
[229] Longman, B*ook of Ecclesiastes*, 133–34.
[230] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 133.
[231] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 133–34.
[232] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 200.
[233] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 201.

intervene to make any changes. He seems to accept the situation, effectively leaving people in the midst of their oppression and letting oppressors continue unchallenged. In Ecclesiastes 2, when Qoheleth describes his achievements (2:4–9), the word לי (for myself) appears at least once in each verse. Murphy points out the redundancy of 'for myself' (the word is pleonastic) and suggests it emphasises the personal investment that Qoheleth makes.[234] Longman describes this phrase as signalling a shift from sensual and self-centred pleasure to the achievement of building works (v. 4); meanwhile, he recognises that the language, particularly the repeated לי, implies that Qoheleth's works are entirely self-centred.[235] He further remarks that the continued use of לי (vv. 5–6) shows Qoheleth's self-orientation and his focus on self-pleasure rather than philanthropy.[236] Longman states that Qoheleth is self-centred and is not talking about *public* building.[237] In v. 7, the repeated use of לי continues; however, it is usually not translated. For example, NRSVue and Longman's translation omit this redundant preposition with a first-person pronominal suffix. Weeks provides a version with the word לי translated: 'I acquired servants and maidservants, and home-born slaves. I also had livestock *for myself*—cattle and herds: I had more *for myself* than all who were before me in Jerusalem' (italics added).[238] In v. 8, the use of לי continues with his acquisitions: he gathers silver and gold *for himself* and gets himself singers. If we read these actions as him reserving his resources, it also makes sense that he says, 'Also my wisdom I kept/reserved to myself' (אף חכמתי עמדה לי) in v. 9. Ecclesiastes includes such a glorification of Qoheleth through his personal achievements, rather than praising his contributions to the place and the people. Qoheleth is like an onlooker who tends not to utilise his resources and wisdom for others even when he first discovers they are in need.

In his role as bystander, Qoheleth has the option to call for God's intervention, but he does not choose to do so. In Ecclesiastes, unlike in the prophetic literature, there is no call to God for restoration or deliverance in response to the situation Qoheleth sees.[239] God is mentioned but is not called on to intervene. Conversely, the presence of

[234] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 18.
[235] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 63.
[236] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 63.
[237] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 63.
[238] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*, 327.
[239] Examples of calling to God for restoration or rescue include Jeremiah 15:15–18 and Micah 7:14–20.

suffering is not followed by God's intervention. As Robert Alter concludes from his reading of Ecclesiastes 4:1, the oppressed situation is registered but there is no indication of a rescue from God, as in Psalms, or exhortations to the people to rescue the oppressed, as in the Prophets.[240] Instead, there are reassurances that God orchestrates all things (Eccl 1:13; 2:24; 3:10; 5:17–19 [Eng 5:18–20]), calls to obey to God (5:1–6 [Eng 5:2–7]), and expressions of belief in God's judgement (3:17; 11:9). Submissiveness to and fear of God are also mentioned in the text (Eccl 5:6 [Eng 5:7]; 8:12 (twice), 13; 12:13). This submissiveness resonates with the repeated occurrences of the mantra 'Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.' It appears as a hypnotic statement by Qoheleth about accepting the unchangeable and yet-to-be resolved situation. However, Qoheleth is depicted as one who has abundant resources; he is therefore supposed to be able to do something rather than being submissive and indifferent towards the situation he has been seeing. What Qoheleth has *not* done in response to the oppression he witnesses implies—from my bystander perspective—inaction.

Decisions

As previously mentioned, witnessing oppression is not the only kind of witness. In Ecclesiastes 4, there are four other witnessing situations mentioned. However, the text shows that Qoheleth remains standing idly, like an onlooker, in his witnessing. We cannot see from the text any attempt to intervene in the situation or to offer help to those in need, though he is portrayed as having abundant resources in his royal position. During the first act of witnessing (4:1–3), he sees all the oppressions under the sun and the lack of comfort for the oppressed and the oppressors. After he realises that there is no one to comfort them, he does not express any comfort to them either. He does not see himself as a possible provider of comfort. Instead, he thinks it is better to have not seen the evil deeds that are under the sun (4:3). In his second act of witnessing (4:4–6), he sees the rivalry between people. He sees that a person can experience rivalry within himself, where an internal conflict arises between disapproving of both hands being occupied with work and the belief that one hand should be dedicated to calmness (4:6). Then, he uses the phrase 'striving after wind' (v.6), which resonates with the mantra 'This also is vanity and a striving after wind' (v.4) and brings his witnessing to an end. He does not make attempts at solving the rivalries. In his third act of witnessing (4:7–8),

[240] Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes; A Translation with Commentary* (London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), 358.

Qoheleth repeats his disapproval of solitary people working hard to amass wealth, despite having no children or siblings to inherit their fortune. Again, he ends with the mantra 'This also is vanity' (4:8). He does not help alleviate the burden of overworked labourers by using his ample resources that come with his royal position. In his last act of witnessing (4:13–17), he testifies to the succession of kingship, which is closely related to his own situation, but again he does not offer any advice or solution. He sees that succession impacts *all* the people under the reign of the regime. However, he admits that there is no end to all the people in such cases, and then, again, he ends with the mantra 'This also is vanity and a striving after wind' (4:16). Through these four acts of witnessing, the text shows that Qoheleth sees the people affected by oppressions, rivalries, solitude, and the fragility of power. Sadly, he, like an onlooker, does not seem to pay much attention to these issues and just explains them away indifferently with the same mantra.

Withdrawal

When Qoheleth uses the expression 'vanity,' it performs something like a dead end and diverts or simply moves the conversation on to the next topic. It also shows his inaction and withdrawal, because it has no specific meaning and offers no help, or even prospect of help, to the victims or their situations. It just puts an end to what he sees before leaving the matter behind. The word הבל (*hebel*) occurs thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes. Different commentators have different renderings: 'futile,'[241] 'vanity,'[242] 'meaningless,'[243] and 'illusion.'[244] These varied renderings indicate that there is no single English word for *hebel* that adequately captures all its meanings. Murphy suggests the meaning of *hebel* is 'breath' or 'vapour' and notes that it can refer to 'lacking in substance, ephemeral, without any result.'[245] He further predicates it is used in a 'pejorative sense.'[246] Choon-Leong Seow discusses the literal meaning of *hebel* as 'breath, whiff, puff, steam' and the extended meaning as 'anything that is superficial, ephemeral, insubstantial, incomprehensible, enigmatic, inconsistent, or contradictory.'[247] He defines the characteristics of *hebel* as ungraspable and

[241] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*.
[242] Fox, 'Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet,' 412; Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 102.
[243] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*.
[244] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*.
[245] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 3.
[246] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 3.
[247] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 47.

uncontrollable, with connotations of 'something that one encounters or experiences.'[248] All the above definitions can only roughly point to the elusive meaning of *hebel*. Having no concrete and clear meaning, the repetition of the expression is like a placeholder that signifies the onlooker vaguely avoiding the topic.

Regarding the Reader as a Bystander

I have discussed how the bystander approach is applied in readings of Ecclesiastes that regard Qoheleth as a bystander, an active bystander, and a passive bystander. The bystander approach can also be applied in readings of Ecclesiastes that situate the reader themselves as a bystander reading Ecclesiastes. There has been a tendency to identify those involved in traumatic events as either 'victims' or 'perpetrators.' The role of the bystander, however, is often passed over; and yet, notwithstanding the large numbers of victims, survivors, and perpetrators of atrocities, bystanders are probably the largest category of those involved in such events.[249] For example, bullying at school or in a work setting usually happens in the presence or with the knowledge of other students or colleagues. Moreover, while many of us may not be victims or perpetrators, virtually all of us will find ourselves bystanders of a difficult or traumatic event (e.g., an accident, the illness or death of a loved one). Indeed, there can be slippage between categories: bystanders can feel affected and suffer trauma (and have some affinities with victims), or they may be passive and feel survivor guilt or regret that, by not being active, they contributed to the trauma (feeling affinity or identifying with perpetrators). Whatever the case, paying attention to bystanders is crucial. Not only is Qoheleth a bystander in Ecclesiastes, I also see myself, a reader, as a bystander who is making decisions about my passivity or activity. This is due to the fact that, for the person of faith, reading the Bible is not like reading other texts. The Bible is a canon, read for guidance and to inform life, beliefs, and actions. There may be parts of the Bible to which this applies less (e.g., the genealogies, the didactic purpose of which is not clear to me) and others

[248] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 47.

[249] In natural disasters, when there is truly no human factor involved, human perpetrators are absent. The spectators learn about disasters through the news, especially with today's communication technology and social networks, and the number of bystanders far exceeds the number of 'victims.' Comparing the number of victims and bystanders is not to dismiss the tremendous number of victims of genocide or any other disaster; rather, it is to recall the presence and potential agency of the population other than perpetrators and victims.

to which this applies more (e.g., the Ten Commandments and the Great Commission, which clearly inculcate certain ways of acting).

In this section, I will demonstrate how the reader's bystander perspective can be applied to interpretations of Ecclesiastes. I will imagine reading Ecclesiastes as a bystander-reader, with the sense that the happenings described in the text have just happened to me as I read as an outsider and at a distance. Then, I will elaborate how I am affected by reading as a bystander, how I respond and struggle, and finally how I choose to respond.

How I See

Ecclesiastes promotes a sense of reading as a bystander because it circulates the scenarios that I, as a reader, 'happen to see' when they are depicted in the texts. I happen to be there to see what Qoheleth sees as he lays things out. The terms 'I saw' (ראיתי and ואראה) occur twenty times across the first ten chapters of Ecclesiastes.[250] Unlike other biblical narratives, such as the book of Job, the layout of Ecclesiastes does not tell me what happened/is happening in a step-by-step sequence. The soliloquy of Qoheleth guides me to listen to him talk about some apparently vague and abstract topics instead of following the development of an event. For instance, he sees there is nothing better for humankind than to eat and drink (Eccl 2:24); he sees wickedness in the place of justice and righteousness (Eccl 3:16); he sees there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their lives in their evildoing (Eccl 7:15); and he sees servants on horses and princes walking like servants (Eccl 10:7). Thus, reading Ecclesiastes, I am less prepared to see what happens; but suddenly, I am taken to (mis)happenings once Qoheleth signals that he sees them. For example, the text records he sees all the oppressions that are done under the sun (Eccl 4:1). I suddenly perceive that there are oppressions without being forewarned by an exposition that introduces characters and setting. This keeps me unacquainted with the details of the happenings—the causes and the processes of what he says he sees; meanwhile, I cannot acquire a happy ending or solution until the end of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes does not go over any details of the (mis)happenings witnessed by Qoheleth. Qoheleth is not sharing what he sees with companions or with God. He is not seeking

[250] ראיתי occurs in 1:14; 2:13, 24; 3:10, 16, 22; 4:4, 15; 5:12, 17 (Eng 5:13, 18); 6:1; 7:15; 8:9, 10, 17; 9:13; 10:5, 7; ואראה occurs in 2:3; 4:1, 7.

advice or a solution from companions or complaining to an authority or to God. Reading Ecclesiastes keeps me in solitude and with an unsolved ending, though I have perceived that there are (mis)happenings, like the oppressions happening under the sun and the absence of comfort for the oppressed. I happen to be there but remain there without a resolution. I, as a bystander-reader, happen to be there and am shown some 'snapshots' of (mis)happenings. On the one hand, I share the experience of seeing the (mis)happenings. On the other hand, I know very little about what happened and am unable to easily forget or withdraw from what I have seen.

Ecclesiastes promotes a reading at a distance through an uncertain and unfamiliar protagonist, Qoheleth. The prologue introduces a protagonist and brings him in front of readers (Eccl 1:1), but he is not an approachable protagonist because of his ambiguous identity. Though the text provides readers with his name or title (Qoheleth, קהלת), his identity ('the son of David'), and his position ('king in Jerusalem'), this information does not make his identity clearer. Scholars dispute whether the name 'Qoheleth' is a name or a title. The Hebrew (קהל) means 'to assemble,' but there are various forms of the word that appear in the text of Ecclesiastes, making it less likely that it is only the proper name of the protagonist. The feminine ending (־ֶת) also raises ambiguity about this son of David.[251] He sounds as though he might be Solomon, giving the description of his wealth and possessions in Ecclesiastes 2. But the text does not identify him explicitly as Solomon, and vocabulary used in Ecclesiastes shows that the book is unlikely to have been written during the period of Solomon. Alter suggests that Ecclesiastes 1:1 only means Qoheleth is from the Davidic line.[252] The last description, 'king in Jerusalem,' further makes this protagonist unapproachable as he is a figure with presumed superiority, authority, and wealth. He is superior to lay persons and is unlikely to speak to people closely. Qoheleth is depicted as a king, whose superiority is difficult to compare to others. All these factors do not make Qoheleth's identity clear; rather they create ambiguity about his identity. On the one hand, he claims to be the son of David. He seems to be a prestigious person who draws the bystander-reader's attention. On the other hand, the discrepancy and ambiguity about his character arouse

[251] The Hebrew means 'to assemble' and can imply different forms of assembling, such as 'assembling of sayings' or 'assembling of an audience.' The Septuagint translators chose the meaning of 'the one who assembles' and so the book was titled Ecclesiastes. More discussions on 'Qoheleth' can be found in Alter, *Wisdom Books*, 337.
[252] Alter, *Wisdom Books*, 337.

the bystander-reader's curiosity, with the result that they stay to see who he is and what happened to him.

The reading at a distance continues after the introduction of the protagonist. Having no other named protagonists present in Ecclesiastes, I am less likely to fit myself into the texts; therefore, I read about the scenarios like an outsider. Since Qoheleth is the only protagonist of Ecclesiastes, I am less engaged in finding other characters in the text whose roles or characteristics are more familiar than those of Qoheleth. Though the oppressed (Eccl 4:1), strong men, and female millers (12:3) are mentioned in the text, they are only mentioned once, and there are no more descriptions of them. Qoheleth does not have conversations with others; instead, he talks to himself or speaks in his heart. Reading Ecclesiastes, I can merely listen to Qoheleth's self-talk. The distance is kept until the first use of the second person pronominal suffix (written: רגליך your feet; read: רגלך your foot) in 4:17 (Eng 5:1).

The distance extends between Qoheleth and me when he talks about his witness to some other unknown people. I cannot see these people or listen to them directly; I can only hear about them through Qoheleth's witness. Unlike the other biblical books read with trauma studies, as mentioned in Chapter 2, Ecclesiastes does not have much description of victims. For example, when Reaves studies the story of Sarah and Hagar, she initially found common ground with Hagar as she compares herself with Hagar—a victim being oppressed.[253] But later she finds common ground with Sarah, given the privileges as a white woman that Reaves can enjoy. Another example is the book of Job, which talks about how Job suffers as a victim. I can be more engaged when reading Job because I can compare my suffering and feelings with the victim, Job. However, I find nothing in common with the people mentioned by Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes, so it is difficult to establish a connection. However, I find something in common with Qoheleth; that is, we are other people's bystanders. He is someone else's bystander seeing their suffering, and I am Qoheleth's bystander—I 'see' him—and also a bystander to his bystanding.

Though I read at a distance, there is no doubt that there are some things that I have seen and some I cannot see. As discussed, I happen to see what Qoheleth sees as

[253] Reaves, 'Sarah as Victim and Perpetrator.'

he lays things out. I can see wickedness even in the place of justice and righteousness (Eccl 3:16); I can see the oppressions and the oppressed (Eccl 4:1); I can see righteous people perish and wicked people enjoy a prolonged life in their evildoing (Eccl 7:15); and I can see servants and princes interchange their positions (Eccl 10:7). Having seen these, I realise what I have not seen. I cannot see what kind of wickedness has taken the place of justice and righteousness, and nor can I see its consequences; I cannot see the responses of the family and friends of righteous people who have perished; I cannot see what else the wicked people do during their prolonged life; I cannot see what happened before the servants and princes swapped their positions; and I cannot see who the oppressors are, what they do, why they do so, what they benefit, and how long their oppression lasts. Reading Ecclesiastes as a bystander-reader, I only happen to be there, and I read at a distance, having to rely on what Qoheleth tells me he sees. Unlike readers of the book of Job who know the cause of Job's suffering from the conversation between the satan and the deity (Job 1:1–2:10), readers of Ecclesiastes are like bystanders who do not know many details.[254] Nevertheless, I know that there is something I have missed before I happened to be there.

How I Am Affected

Although I am a bystander-reader reading at a distance, I am not entirely isolated from the text. As I read Ecclesiastes, I share with Qoheleth not only what he sees but also what he feels as the result of what he sees. In this section, I will talk about how I am affected through the affects in Ecclesiastes and the awareness of being called on to bear witness and uphold justice.

I feel sad when I read Ecclesiastes. In the section regarding Qoheleth as a bystander, I illustrated how Qoheleth might be affected by his role as bystander in the text. Qoheleth mentions he sees the oppressions are all done 'under the sun,' thus illustrating that the oppressions happen in broad daylight—they are open and visible (Eccl 4:1). At the time of writing, a film *In Broad Daylight* (2023), directed by Lawrence Kwan Chun Kan, was released.[255] The film, based on true events in Hong Kong, is about an investigative journalism unit at a newspaper, which receives a report

[254] Research on the historical context may be helpful, but, in the case of Ecclesiastes, it may not be as helpful because the date of the book is disputed.
[255] Lawrence Kwan Chun Kan, dir., 白日之下 [In Broad Daylight] (One Cool Pictures, 2023).

about the abuse of residents in a care home. One of the abusive events involved the elderly people in the care home being stripped naked while waiting to take a shower on the rooftop in during the day. Meanwhile, the newspaper and the film expose the incident and its inhumanity in broad daylight. Through the motif of daylight, the film reveals the care home's culture of abuse and the cruel truth that such abuse is not actually hidden at all. Such a double exposure in broad daylight expresses the sadness of the victims' existence, the shock that such injustice happens in broad daylight, and the expectation that it should be stopped.

When I read Ecclesiastes as a bystander-reader, I feel sad when I am told the injustice that Qoheleth sees, such as the oppressed having no comfort (4:1) and people's wealth and possessions being embezzled by a stranger (6:2). I am saddened to learn that there are people suffering, and no one is there to comfort them or ease their suffering. It also saddens me to see Qoheleth, like me, seeing this suffering. I am saddened to learn that people in different contexts, ancient and modern, are suffering. I am even sadder when I read 8:17: 'Then I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out the work that have been done under the sun, because though a man labour to seek, he will not find out; even though the wise one claims to know, he cannot find.' Learning about those who are suffering, I want to know more about what is happening, why it is happening, and how to help; but the text tells me that no one can find out what has been done. Reading Ecclesiastes, I cannot find out more details about what happened in the ancient context, nor can I resolve the suffering.

Besides sadness, I also get angry when reading Ecclesiastes, particularly when I see Qoheleth witness not only the oppression itself but also the glaring injustice happening with no one and/or no way to stop it in broad daylight. Unlike my sadness, which is related to my feelings about what happens to victims, my anger is directed towards the oppressors and the embezzlers, as well as those onlookers. The expression 'under the sun' indicates that the evils are done openly and visibly. I get angry not only when there is injustice mentioned but also when it happens in broad daylight with no one to halt it. The repeated references to the evils that happen 'under the sun' further infuriate me because it seems as though no one can prevent them from happening or may even allow them to happen.

Besides feeling sad and angry, I also find I am called on when I read as a bystander-reader. Ecclesiastes starts including the second person pronouns ‘you’ or ‘your’ from 4:17 (Eng 5:1) onward, and these occur frequently in 4:17–5:7 (Eng 5:1–8). These include ‘your foot’ (רגליך, רגלך), ‘you go’ (תלך 4:17 [Eng 5:1]); ‘your mouth’ (פיך), ‘your heart’ (לבך), ‘your words’ (דנריך), ‘you’ (אתה, 5:1 [Eng 5:2]); ‘your vow’ (תדר, 5:3 [Eng 5:4]); ‘your mouth’ (פיך), ‘your flesh’ (בשׂרך), ‘your voice’ (קולך), ‘your hands’ (ידיך, 5:5 [Eng 5:6]); ‘you see’ (תראה), and ‘you are amazed’ (תתמה, 5:7 [Eng 5:8]). The vocabulary of body parts strongly indicates a physical human being that Qoheleth acknowledges, in contrast to the abstract expression elsewhere in Ecclesiastes. As a Christian, I somehow view the biblical text as the Word of God, and I read like God is speaking to me. In a church setting, I also read it for didactic purposes. When I encounter second person pronouns, I naturally insert myself into the text. This acknowledgement of a bodily ‘you’ also denotes a connection to me as a reader after the distance that is kept in the first four chapters. In addition, Ecclesiastes builds up this connection after Qoheleth expresses his witness to oppression (4:1). The acknowledgement of the presence of ‘you’ may denote a question to me: ‘I see the oppression, don’t you?’ There is also empathic expression to me in 5:7 (Eng 5:8), which acknowledges that it may be common and not surprising if ‘you’ also see oppression.

אם־עשֹק רשׁ וגזל משׁפט וצדק תראה במדינה אל־ תתמה על־החפץ כי גבה מעל גבה שׁמר וגבהים עליהם׃	If you see oppression of the poor and deprivation of judgement and righteousness in the province, do not be surprised at the affair. For a higher above the high is watching, and there are higher ones above them. (Eccl 5:7 [Eng 5:8])

As Qoheleth continues that the dead and the stillborn are free from this witness, I, who am alive, am not free from seeing oppressions or the oppressed (4:2–3). If I attempt to excuse myself from the presence of the scene, Qoheleth is there to tell his testimony to me and call on me to look at my situation and rethink whether I also see any oppression. Therefore, I no longer read at a distance, and I am hardly able to escape from facing the existence of oppressions, either within the text or in front of the text. I am not called on in Ecclesiastes 6 when Qoheleth tells his witness about the evil that he has seen under the sun: how a person receives wealth and possessions from the deity but

then cannot enjoy these things (6:1–2). After that, the use of the second person pronouns 'you' and 'your' continues in each chapter.[256] This ongoing mention of 'you' keeps calling on me to witness Qoheleth's witness.

My reading at a distance is not only altered by the use of second person pronouns 'you' and 'your'; I am also drawn closer to the reading by the use of the address 'young man' (בחור) near the end of the book (11:9). I am called on through the calling of the 'young man' by Qoheleth. Seow interprets this youth as an imaginary audience.[257] We cannot identify whether this refers to an internalised listener or, instead, to a specific young man or another specific group or audience. Besides the unknown identity of the youth, the use of an address to a youth is a matter of concern. Goldingay relates this verse to Qoheleth speaking of God exercising his authority; therefore, the message and exhortation (11:9–1) is addressed to the youth and others.[258] Whatever the case, addressing the youth here is different from the wisdom literature method employed in Proverbs, where a father speaks to his son. Moreover, since this youth is only addressed once in the book, and his character or behaviours are not described, he is less plausibly a personified exemplar of an ideal wisdom student. I would suggest this address to the youth is a literary tool to connect with readers as bystanders to Qoheleth.[259] This address draws my attention to the concluding speech that follows (11:9–10). Since this youth is only addressed at almost the end of the book, Qoheleth talks alone (to an individual who is in front of the text). Readers may be drawn to the presence of this imaginary audience, who is also listening to Qoheleth's speech together with them. It is similar to when you listen to a sermon in church, and the speaker says 'brothers and sisters'; or members of parliament (MPs) in the UK's House of Commons address 'Mr Speaker/Madam Speaker' to draw attention during their debate in the

[256] The focus here is on the tension between the distance built up and then reduced with the inclusion of readers through the use of second person pronouns. It would be worth discussing the development of Qoheleth's use of 'you,' but due to space constraints, I am unable to discuss it in this chapter.
[257] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 370.
[258] Goldingay, *Ecclesiastes*, 279–80.
[259] Throughout the book, the tools to connect with readers are not limited to the use of this address; the frequent use of first-person pronouns and interrogations also invite readers to engage with Qoheleth's monologue. In addition, in most English translations, בחור is renders as 'young man.' It is disappointing that the NRSVue, which claims to offer 'clearer, more direct, and inclusive language,' does not use more gender-neutral wording here, given that the gender of the addressee does not seem to be an issue. The use of 'young man' infers that Qoheleth only calls on male readers, specifically young male readers. See 'New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue)—Home,' accessed 10 January 2025, https://www.zondervan.com/p/nrsvuebible/.

chamber. This connects speaker and audience. In Ecclesiastes, there is no other protagonist present. The address to the youth functions as an address to readers, denoting 'Hey, my reader, I am talking to you.'

In addition to having the (imaginary) audience, the monologue throughout Ecclesiastes is more like a soliloquy—a speech where the character talks about their own thoughts or feelings either when they are alone or regardless of an audience. A soliloquy is different from a monologue. The character is not standing on a soapbox and delivering his long speech; instead, he is speaking primarily to himself (if not also in the presence of an audience) about his thoughts and feelings. He and his audience might share similar thoughts and feelings and develop their connection through the soliloquy. Qoheleth describes the situations of people living in suffering; he shows his witnessing and understanding of these people who might be one of his audiences. Calling on the young man and giving a soliloquy about his witnessing, his thoughts, and his feelings function as though he is calling on me. At the same time, he speaks for some marginalised people and brings in their voices so that I can 'hear' them even if I cannot see them. In Qoheleth's soliloquy, he shares his empathy with the experiences of those victims he has witnessed. Then, he calls on me through calling the 'young man' and encourages us to take actions:

> Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment. Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body, for youth and the dawn of life are vanity (Eccl 11:9–10 NRSVue).

Qoheleth addresses the 'young man' as though he is and situated in a different context than himself. He advises him to follow his desires and intentions but reminds him of the coming judgement afterward (11:9). He understands his possible anxiety and pain (11:10). Qoheleth does not ask the young man to intervene promptly to what he has witnessed but allows him to decide what to do. If I am called on through this address of 'young man,' I am not asked to help sort out the situations described in the texts. I am encouraged to banish anxiety, put away pain in my reader's position, follow my desires and intentions, and decide what to do after witnessing.

I am called on in a similar way, even more intimately, at the end of Ecclesiastes. Qoheleth adds a final piece of advice and addresses 'my son' (בני 12:12). Fox finds that בני (literally 'my son') works in a way that the early reader immediately recognises as a familiar instruction format—namely, the father-son instruction of didactic wisdom literature. The epilogist is thus identified as a wise man. According to Fox, the function of this address is to establish the credibility and authority of the epilogist, as well as to draw the reader's attitude towards what is being said.[260] Seow explains that with such an address to the reader as 'my child,' the author evokes the narrative framework commonly found in the wisdom literature of the Ancient Near East—again, the instruction from a parent to a child. The epilogue is presented as a dialogue between a father and his son, in which the father urges the son to listen to the sage's instructions. This parent-child instruction is also found in the book of Proverbs.[261] In my view, instruction framed in this intimate but commanding way also contributes to the normativity, immediacy and timelessness of the biblical text, drawing the reader's attention to its message, even while the reader engages with the text as a bystander. On the one hand, I seem to have a more intimate relationship with Qoheleth in the reading. On the other hand, I seem to be able to free myself from the responsibility of responding to what Qoheleth has shown and told. If I see myself being called on as 'my son,' I will feel responsible for responding to what I happen to see. If I do not find that I am called on, I will feel that I can pass by what and whom I have seen. In terms of the bystander perspective, it is all about bystandership and whether I, as a bystander, believe that I am responsible for responding or if I think someone else can do so. I can choose to read as different types of bystanders: onlooker, passive bystander, or active bystander.

Having such options, how we read Ecclesiastes as bystander-readers will lead to different interpretations of the text. As a bystander reading with Qoheleth, how do we respond to him? Do we struggle to offer our help? Are we looking for someone to join him and join us? How does reading Ecclesiastes motivate us to speak up? Having discussed how I share the feelings with Qoheleth as a bystander-reader, and knowing the different types of bystander, I am going to discuss how I can respond and how I struggle to help as a bystander-reader.

[260] Fox, 'Frame-Narrative and Composition,' 99–100.
[261] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 388–89.

How I Respond and Struggle

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the film *In Broad Daylight* retells the scenes of elderly patients in a care home being stripped under the sun. The wider public did not learn about it until a journalist acted as a whistleblower. Qoheleth, as the only protagonist in Ecclesiastes telling readers what he sees, acts like a whistleblower. If I read the text for didactic purposes, I see Qoheleth as a biblical figure to be emulated. Reading Ecclesiastes as a bystander-reader, I find that I am called on. On the one hand, Qoheleth's whistleblowing also makes me think about what I need to do if I am within the text and if I face similar situations in my context. On the other hand, there is no description in Ecclesiastes of any interventions by other bystanders. This latter point may make me believe it is fine to simply follow the story plot and read it passively. This will encourage me to stay passive when I face similar situation in my context. There is no description of Qoheleth's intervention either. His inaction may show him up to be a deficient bystander; alternatively, this may reflect the difficulties he faces or even the impossibility of him making changes. The fact that he may find it difficult to make changes in his ancient context also legitimates my decision not to help in my context because I am not capable of doing so. In addition, due to the tradition of reading Qoheleth as a wise person, not to mention his association with Solomon, it is quite impossible to frame Qoheleth as a negative model even if I suspect that legitimating his and my inaction would not be a good option and would not provide a productive reading of Ecclesiastes. I find myself disturbed after reading Ecclesiastes as a bystander-reader, but I am like a passive bystander-reader, unable to decide whether or not to take action.

How I Choose

Ecclesiastes promotes a bystander reading and positions readers in the decision-making process. After reading about what Qoheleth sees and being affected by it, as a bystander-reader, I can choose to be an active bystander, a passive bystander, or an onlooker. On the one hand, I am shown the repeated injustice and the unresolved ending in Ecclesiastes. I feel sadness and anger about what happens in broad daylight. I want to be an active bystander-reader to help in the situations shown to me in the text. On the other hand, I cannot make any change to the ancient text or the ancient context. Maybe I can choose to be an onlooker, not thinking about what I should follow up after reading. However, reading the Bible is different from reading a novel or watching a film. If a novel or film has an ending that we do not find satisfying, we cannot alter the ending,

but I can choose not to read or watch it anymore, criticise its shoddy screenplay, or leave a bad review on social media. But the Bible is not always read for leisure; people in Jewish and Christian faith communities read it as Word of God and look to it for guidance; they cannot abandon reading it. The unresolved suffering and the cliched epilogue in Ecclesiastes leave the reader struggling to find teachings or a model to follow.

Should I be a passive bystander-reader, wait to see how clergy and commentators curate a reasonable and satisfying ecclesiastical interpretation from the text? However, like the proverb says, 'Once you see it you cannot unsee it.' It is difficult to just leave, forget, or wait. I am trapped—unable to help resolve the unjust situations or get relief from the reading. Even the final instruction to fear God (Eccl 12:13) cannot release me from the trap, because I cannot see any divine resolution at the end of the book that convinces me that fearing God is the solution. In the absence of divine intervention at the end of Ecclesiastes, I am left bearing the obligation to search for a way out.

In addition, the deity is also absent from Ecclesiastes. God (אלהים) is certainly mentioned in Ecclesiastes, but only when Qoheleth references the divine name. Unlike some other biblical books, God does not appear and/or speak to anyone in Ecclesiastes. For example, the LORD is present 'in person' on the Mount Sinai and speaks to Moses directly (Exod 33:11). And in the book of Job, God does not appear before Job but still speaks 'remotely' to him 'out of the whirlwind' (Job 40:6). Furthermore, unlike some other biblical books, there is no supernatural depiction of divine intervention in Ecclesiastes. For instance, in the book of Jonah, God sends a large fish to swallow up Jonah (Jonah 1:17), causes a bush to grow over Jonah to give him shade over his head, and then makes it wither (Jonah 4:6–7). In Ecclesiastes, there is no divine intervention in response to oppression (Eccl 4:1–3), nor is there divine comfort for the oppressed. God is mentioned in the text but the deity does not take any action. In the absence of God's speech and direct intervention, I as a bystander-reader have my own freedom to choose what to do; but I also have the implicit responsibility to respond.

Instead of looking for actions by Qoheleth that I can model or seeking out divine words of comfort, I can seek to understand Qoheleth and examine what he sees and how the situation he mentions (the context) influences his actions. Since I cannot make any

changes to the text, I, as a bystander-reader, can choose to reflect on how I share the same feelings and experiences as the bystander Qoheleth in the reading process. I can choose to imagine what it would be like to be in such a situation, witnessing repeated injustice as a bystander and being traumatised into fighting, flighting, freezing, and befriending reactions.

Summary: Why Is the Bystander Approach Helpful in Reading Biblical Texts?

This chapter has examined the bystander in biblical studies and has explained how a bystander approach applies to and enhances the reading of Ecclesiastes. Continuing my discussion of trauma, I considered how bystanders also experience the impacts of trauma. I applied the bystander approach in bifurcated ways: first, by regarding Qoheleth as a bystander, and second, by regarding myself as bystander-reader. Regarding the former, I explored how Qoheleth sees, is affected by, responds to, and witnesses the plight of the oppressed. I also analysed what he does by regarding him as an active bystander and considering how his responses can be viewed as those of an onlooker. These readings increase our understanding of trauma as something that reaches beyond the experience of the victim. Regarding the second approach, I examined the reader as bystander. This served as a way to address the reader's inability to alter the events in texts they are reading, just as a bystander is caught unawares by a situation or event in which, for instance, they recognise a victim and a perpetrator. Drawing on my own experience of witnessing distressing situations, leaving my homeland, and being a bystander to what is happening back home without being able to make a difference, I analysed how a reader may respond when reading Ecclesiastes. I explored how this can be an active process which can prepare a bystander-reader for resisting passivity, both when reading the text and when facing someone who needs their help.

Furthermore, the bystander approach is a strategy of reading biblical texts with heightened sensitivity, thus fostering critical empathy. It allows readers to regard the biblical figure of Qoheleth as a bystander who is exposed to traumatic events, rather than confining their focus on traumatic incidents to just perpetrators and victims. This expands the application of trauma studies in biblical studies through the inclusion of studying the bystander in a traumatic event; moreover, the acknowledgment of

bystanders' traumatisation can sharpen critical empathy. This process also attunes the reader to other figures present at a scene who are usually overlooked in biblical studies. The bystander approach, then, serves as a tool to analyse these figures' involvement, possible traumatisation, and agency.

Regarding the reader as bystander is also helpful. The reader is not present in the literary events. Hence, in the description of a traumatic event in a biblical text, the reader is neither the victim nor the perpetrator. But the reader is nonetheless present in the reading of the text, and the reader may also be affected by what they read. This may be because they are reading the biblical text as a document that determines or guides their faith, or as an object of study and critical investigation. Both apply to me. My readerly presence, given these roles, need not make me passive or disinterested, given the value the text holds for me. Indeed, as I have argued, it can make me a bystander with critical empathy; it can even invoke my agency.

The bystander approach can, through critical empathy, draw out readers' attention, even if they have not had a similar experience to the situations described in the text. As readers, we have bystander-ness imposed on us because we cannot directly intervene in past events. But given the didactic purpose and ongoing sanctity of a canonical text, the bystander approach offers scope for action going forward. The reader who reads as a bystander is then positioned to have an option of active or passive reading. This approach reminds us that we play a role in reading the text. Even though we cannot change the content of the text, we are able to respond, comment, accept or reject what is written therein. Furthermore, the bystander approach helps readers facing unresolved incidents in the text. There is not always a complete or happy ending in biblical texts. Readers are encouraged to imagine the ending, to make a decision on their own, and to explore their agential possibilities in the bystander role.

This reading strategy is in continuity with other movements within biblical studies—such as the emphasis on readers as agents and meaning-makers (in literary criticism and especially reader-response criticism), the acknowledgement of readers' subjectivity (in womanist and postcolonial criticism, for instance), and the adoption of affect and trauma studies and critical empathy approaches, all of which are currently burgeoning. This includes the work of biblical scholar Katherine Southwood, among others, on critical empathy. I am bringing this new strategy of the bystander approach,

developed from Holocaust studies, into biblical studies to complement these movements. I have also introduced a new focus on Ecclesiastes that has not yet been incorporated into bystander studies on biblical texts.

CHAPTER 4: CRITICAL EMPATHY, THE BYSTANDER APPROACH AND ECCLESIASTES

Introduction

Critical empathy is the fourth piece of the jigsaw for my reading strategy. As with the bystander approach, it brings something that is still relatively new in biblical studies to the process of interpretation. In this chapter, I will introduce what critical empathy is and how it can be applied in biblical studies and my reading of Ecclesiastes. Before that, I explain why I have included this piece in my interpretation jigsaw.

Having introduced bystander studies and reading Ecclesiastes with the bystander approach in Chapter 3, I read Ecclesiastes by regarding Qoheleth as an active bystander and an onlooker, as well as regarding myself as a bystander-reader. Even though I have discussed how I can choose the situation Qoheleth sees and the situation I see in a society in my own experiential orbit, I have not responded to the bystander Qoheleth, whom I encounter in the text. I have read with the question in mind as to whether Qoheleth is an active bystander or an onlooker. In my study of him as an onlooker, his withdrawn attitude and his standing idly by while others suffer make me feel uneasy or unwilling to admit that he is callous. The study of affective vocabulary in Ecclesiastes (outlined in Chapter 1) illustrates that Qoheleth is not portrayed as such a callous character. In Chapter 2, reading with a trauma perspective, I have shown how a witness can also be exposed to and suffer with trauma. Regarding Qoheleth as a callous onlooker seems to contradict the presence of affects, such as pain, anger, and sadness, in Ecclesiastes.

Furthermore, as I am a practising Christian, I believe it is my responsibility to respond actively to biblical texts, including what I read in Ecclesiastes, both the things I am shown in the text and the character of Qoheleth. I find it uncomfortable that such a dismissive interpretation may ultimately only stigmatise and cancel those who, for whatever reason, have stood idly by while others suffered. I wonder if Qoheleth in the ancient text and those standing idly by in contemporary contexts where oppression is taking place have other difficulties or unspoken reasons for not acting when they happen to witness a traumatic event. The emotions in Ecclesiastes fail to convince me that this kind of bystander is indifferent to others. There are commentators who criticise

Qoheleth for acting like an onlooker or a passive bystander; should I finish with him and accuse him in line with these commentators?

Moreover, I would think of myself as a callous onlooker if I were to leave my reading with such a dismissive interpretation and not respond to those criticisms of Qoheleth. As a bystander-reader, I find it difficult to turn away from Qoheleth and this kind of bystander. What *else* can I do as a reader? How can I empathise with this kind of bystander without justifying their inaction or denying those who criticise them for doing nothing? I am not satisfied with finishing my reading of Ecclesiastes in the previous chapter. Therefore, in this chapter, I am going to read Ecclesiastes as a bystander with critical empathy, and I will connect this with my reading of Ecclesiastes from affect and trauma perspectives.

The English word 'empathy' is the translation of German *Einfühlung* (literally, 'feeling into'). The German term, in turn, is derived from Hellenistic Greek *ἐμπάθεια*, meaning 'physical affection or passion', which comes from the ancient Greek *ἐμπαθής*, meaning 'in a state of emotion, affected (by something).'[262] In modern usage, 'empathy' refers to 'the ability to understand and appreciate another person's feelings, experience.'[263] Alongside the concept of 'empathy,' related terms such as 'sympathy' and 'compassion' are often discussed. Sympathy refers to showing 'understanding and care' for another person's distress.[264] Compassion involves not only 'a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness' for others' suffering but also 'a wish to help them.'[265] Among the three, the concept of compassion may seem like the most complete response to a suffering individual, as it includes emotional connection (empathy), care and concern (sympathy), and desire to help.[266] I have chosen the term 'empathy' rather than 'compassion' because empathy also involves the ability to *imagine* oneself in another person's situation in order to have a deeper understanding. According to the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus*, empathy is defined as 'the ability to *share*

[262] *OED Online*, s.v. 'empathy, n.,' accessed 2 June 2025, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4513297911.
[263] *OED Online*, s.v. 'empathy, n.'
[264] *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus Online*, s.v. 'sympathy, n.,' accessed 2 June 2025, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sympathy.
[265] *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus Online*, s.v. 'compassion, n.,' accessed 2 June 2025, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/compassion.
[266] I am aware of the philosophical discussions about the concept of empathy. For a detailed account, see Heidi L. Maibom, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*, Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy (New York: Routledge, 2019).

someone else's feelings or experiences by *imagining* what it would be like to be in that person's situation' (emphasis added).[267] This aligns with my bystander approach, which focuses on the role of bystander-reader who sees situations and recognises the emotions *shared* by readers during reading. The reader also understands the context presented in the text through their *imagination*. In addition, I tend to prefer the concept of empathy as it de-emphasises power hierarchy because it does not involve, for instance, the superiority often associated with those who grant pity in some expressions of compassion.[268]

Reading Ecclesiastes with empathy does not mean justifying what Qoheleth has done or not done according to the text; rather, it is to read the text both critically *and* empathically. The term 'critical empathy' is fairly new and not commonly used in biblical studies, but the concept has been implicitly applied for much longer. In recent years, different scholars have conducted personal reflections on their research, using self-criticism and compassion in their interpretations of the Bible. An early example is Harold Washington's reading of the captive woman in Deuteronomy 21.[269] Another example, as discussed in Chapter 3, is the work of Reaves, who identifies with Sarah vis-a-vis Hagar and offers what I would call a bystander reading with critical empathy.[270] Reave's focus is initially on Hagar, but later, with her self-awareness of her whiteness and her white privilege over black women, she reexamines the stories of Sarah and Hagar and reflects that she is actually in the position of Sarah who also enjoys privilege over Hagar.[271] In a forthcoming chapter, Southwood refers to this kind of personal reflection, which foregrounds self-criticism and compassion, as reading with critical empathy.[272] In her case, she reflects on both the biblical text and her earlier publications. Here, she applies critical empathy to make a self-corrective reading of Judges 21. She reexamines and critiques the 'marriage' by captivity described in the

---

[267] *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus Online*, s.v. 'empathy, n.,' accessed 2 June 2025, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/empathy.
[268] According to the *OED Online*, to have compassion is to have pity. See, *OED Online*, s.v. 'compassion, n.,' accessed 2 June 2025, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4233362021.
[269] Harold C. Washington, '"Lest He Die in Battle and Another Man Take Her": Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Laws of Deuteronomy 20–22,' in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 185–213.
[270] Reaves, 'Sarah as Victim and Perpetrator.'
[271] Likewise, at the beginning of my research, I read Ecclesiastes from the perspective of a trauma victim. Later, I realised that I am a bystander to traumatic events, not a victim.
[272] Southwood, 'Critical Empathy and Reading Judges 21.'

biblical text and identifies it as a form of rape that still happens in contemporary contexts, thereby emphasising its unjust nature. I will discuss how critical empathy is applied to biblical studies and refer in more detail to Southwood's application of critical empathy later in this chapter.

I have applied critical empathy in my previous work to read the story of Lot's wife (Genesis 19).[273] In that work, I imagine what Lot's wife experiences and how she feels when she is suddenly forced to leave her city in the wake of its total destruction. I recall that, when I re-read the story of Lot's wife as a married woman, moving away from my parents' home, I imagined how she had to separate from her family in Sodom and rely entirely on Lot. I reworked my earlier writing about Lot's wife from my own later perspective of leaving my home and family in Hong Kong. From this later vantage point, I reimagined how she might have felt as a refugee and why she looks back when she has to flee her home abruptly. Sharing a similar experience with Lot's wife creates a sense of critical empathy in reading the accounts of the flight of Lot *and his family*. The empathy I apply in the reading is critical in the sense that *I empathise with her* not just because of her vulnerable position as a woman in a patriarchal context. I came to review critically her possible reasons for looking back, the legitimacy (or otherwise) of the so-called punishment of being turned into a pillar of salt, and the commentators' interpretations of the implications of this 'punishment.' This empathy affected my reading, causing me to no longer look at her from the perspective of a dispassionate bystander—turning away and leaving her to stay silently as a pillar of salt. I have to admit that I could not save her from becoming the pillar; I am still a bystander. However, I can see my agency when I look back at her and imagine what she might like to say.

Reading Qoheleth's inaction from the perspective of the bystander approach, in addition to drawing insights from affect studies and trauma studies (see the first two chapters), makes me feel empathy for Qoheleth. The focus can be on more than whether he responds to the oppressions. We have seen the full range of affects and Qoheleth's exposure to trauma. In short, the unexpected happenings may cause Qoheleth to freeze—unable to function as usual after witnessing those injustices and being emotionally involved. This draws me to rethink how I, as a bystander-reader with

[273] Ng, 'Reading Lot's Wife with Marginalised Migrants.'

empathy towards Qoheleth, understand Ecclesiastes.[274] In this chapter, I am going to draw on affect, trauma, and bystander perspectives to read Ecclesiastes with critical empathy. I will first introduce what critical empathy is. Then, I will discuss how critical empathy is applied to biblical studies and comment in more detail on Southwood's application of critical empathy. Finally, I will apply critical empathy to reading Ecclesiastes. In addition to the treatment of Qoheleth as a different type of bystander (Chapter 3), I will explore possibilities for understanding Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes, particularly whether his passivity is due to some particular reason. I will also look for the agency that bystander-readers can gain from reading Ecclesiastes with critical empathy when facing their own contemporary (probably traumatising) context.

What Is Critical Empathy?

Before exploring critical empathy in the context of biblical studies, let me first discuss it in more general terms. There are different accounts of critical empathy, which overlap but have different focuses. I have selected accounts from gender and sexuality studies researcher Andrea Lobb and feminist researcher Alexis de Coning to highlight two key points that I find most relevant to my biblical study, which draws on affect studies, trauma studies and the bystander approach. I have also included an account from empathy and rhetoric theory researcher Eric Leake to further point out three distinct elements of critical empathy and to discuss how these elements are closely related to the application of critical empathy in biblical studies.

Lobb's Account

Lobb's account of critical empathy places emphasis on questioning ideology and power, alongside empathising with suffering. In her studies on empathy, Lobb observes that empathy is emerging in many disciplines, leading to both peril and promise in modern

[274] Though I suggest rereading Qoheleth with critical empathy, I do not regard Qoheleth as a real person. I interpret him as a character with humanity who at least deserves to be understood. We should not ignore his humanity when reading or studying Ecclesiastes; instead, we need to recognise his humanity. As discussed in Chapter 4, Alexis de Coning mentions the importance of humanity in her account of critical empathy. See Alexis de Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy: A Methodological Framework for "Unsavory" Populations,' *Qualitative Research* 23, no. 2 (2023): 217–33, https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941211019563.

empathy applications.[275] One of her observations about the perils of empathy research is that empathy may be 'rationalised' and 'domesticated to the status of a strategic technique' in the service of boosting profit, business efficiency, and human resources management.[276] She notices that there is a mixed typology of empathy in terms of the 'irreducible imbrication of empathy and power.'[277] She then maps the ambivalence of this typology of empathy and presents what she calls critical empathy. She clearly describes how critical empathy is different from empathy because it has socio-political concerns:

> Critical empathy is not just a process of feeling one's way into suffering or identifying with suffering in general, but of identifying with a morally specific variety of suffering that arises from social pathology and injustice.[278]

The important distinction Lobb is making separates critical empathy from the well-worn but functionally opposite empathy that Lobb names doxic empathy:

> Doxic discourses of empathy can shore up conservative ideologies of the always known and the already given. They are certainly not in the business of making strange. Rather, they reiterate deeply ideological images of the familiar that naturalize and thereby depoliticize the status quo. [279]

In contrast, critical empathy challenges familiar ideological images and the status quo. It is not only offering empathy to sufferers but is critiquing the causes of injustice.

Combined with the bystander approach, critical empathy sheds light on the bystander's responsibility, which is not limited to empathising with sufferers but also involves being critical of what has been observed. Bystanders' duties can also transpire through speaking up or acting against injustice and imbalances of power. Lobb suggests that sufferers of harsh socio-political conditions are prevented from making sense of their own negative emotional states; empathy can then offer them a form of 'intersubjective recuperation of those potential disclosure that could otherwise fail to

[275] Andrea Lobb, 'Critical Empathy,' *Constellations* 24, no. 4 (2017): 594–607, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12292.
[276] Lobb, 'Critical Empathy,' 595.
[277] Lobb, 'Critical Empathy,' 595.
[278] Lobb, 'Critical Empathy,' 597.
[279] Lobb, 'Critical Empathy,' 595.

deliver moral knowledge that a wrong or violation has indeed occurred.'[280] (I will discuss below the application of this 'disclosure' to biblical studies.)

De Coning's Account

While Lobb's account of critical empathy emphasises ideology and power, de Coning focuses on making use of researchers' own affective tensions and recognising the humanity of research subjects. She mentions affective tension as a kind of empathy—critical empathy—in the study of 'unsavoury' people.[281] Through her experience when attending the International Conference on Men's Issues (ICMI) in 2019, de Coning demonstrates how what she calls critical empathy has informed her work. The ICMI focuses on the social and legal aspects particularly affecting men and boys.[282] It alerts and resists the damaging stereotypes about men and boys, and it promotes the notion that men and boys deserve compassion, consideration for their unique needs, support, and respect. At the conference, de Coning describes being 'immersed in the culture of the men's rights movement (MRM),' particularly with some men's right activists who regard feminists (and sometimes women as a whole) as the source of male oppression.[283] In this context, she is regarded as an ideological opponent. But when a speaker at the conference conveyed the message that 'community and love will be our salvation,' she saw it as a powerful, affective message but, at the same time, felt conflicted.[284] On the one hand, she was critical of the MRM. On the other hand, she felt emotional resonance because she could not help some of the attendees, particularly those who had different ideologies within the MRM. De Coning found herself in a state of affective tension when she discovered the broad range of people and the ambiguous ideologies involved in the movement.

In these circumstances, de Coning developed what she calls critical empathy. It is not a concept original to de Coning, of course. Other scholars have also used the term

---

[280] Lobb, 'Critical Empathy,' 596.
[281] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy.'
[282] 'International Conference on Men's Issues 2019,' accessed 6 May 2024, https://icmi2019.icmi.info/.
[283] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 218.
[284] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 218. The message is delivered by the final keynote speaker Alison Tieman who is one of the founders of conference 2019 ICMI co-organiser of the Honey Badger Brigade. The term 'Honey Badger' refers the women in the men's right movement. The Honey Badger Brigade is a female-lead and female-founded organisation and is a significant and influential men's rights organisation in Canada.

'critical empathy' to discuss affective responses such as the ones she experiences. What is special about her definition is her emphasis on the contribution of affective responses, including 'contradictions, challenges, and frustration,' towards problematic communities.[285] She defines critical empathy 'as a methodological framework to account for the difficult and sometimes problematic emotional dimensions of research on "unsavoury" populations.'[286] She uses the affective tension she experienced at the conference to develop her study of critical empathy. She does not intend to resolve the tensions between empathy and critique; instead, she identifies that critical empathy compels researchers 'to grapple with these tensions' and make them more visible in her work.[287]

De Coning explains how she began her development of critical empathy by considering the definition of research subjects as 'unsavoury.' Her studies also discuss how empathy has been used in qualitative research, how other scholars have proposed similar concepts, the limitations of empathy in qualitative research, and the use of critical empathy as a lens to analyse data from her ethnographic and interview-based research. She concludes with seven theses for critical empathy. First, critical empathy as a framework acknowledges 'inherent complexity' in research on dangerous subjects and communities.[288] Second, critical empathy affirms that researchers face 'difficult and unresolvable tensions' in their research, which stem from conflicts with their own 'moral, ethical, and ideological commitments in the field.'[289] Critical empathy highlights the presence of tensions; meanwhile, it makes them visible in research rather than removing them. Third, critical empathy enables us to recognise the humanity of research subjects, even though we may find them dangerous, while being reflective about how these unloved groups' discourses, actions, and ideologies are harmful.[290] Fourth, critical empathy requires us to examine our own emotional responses and to take account of the humanity of both the oppressors and the oppressed.[291] Fifth, critical empathy offers a framework for attending to tensions with the 'unsavoury'

[285] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 219.
[286] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 218.
[287] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 217.
[288] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 219.
[289] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 229.
[290] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 229.
[291] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 230.

communities, rather than for overcoming these tensions.[292] Sixth, critical empathy reminds us to be alert to our own positionality and the distance between ourselves and the 'unsavoury' communities.[293] Seventh, we are required to reflect on how and why our empathy is aroused towards the communities.[294]

De Coning's account of critical empathy is helpful for biblical studies as well. First, critical empathy provides a way to read biblical texts with 'unloved' subjects.[295] These unloved subjects can be those characters obviously portrayed with unlovable characteristics, for example, the hard-hearted Pharaoh in Exodus or those kings who do evil in the sight of the LORD. The unloved subjects can also be those who are implicitly unloved and explicitly less loved, such as Hagar, Peninnah, and Orpah. These women are paired with other women—Sarah, Hannah and Ruth, respectively—in a comparison that does not favour them. Consequently, they are always in a secondary position and not the foremothers, or role models. Critical empathy leaves space to accommodate and investigate our affective response to these unloved characters instead of ignoring their presence in the text because they receive less attention or respect. In addition, the unloved subjects are not limited to people but also include those problematic scenarios and topics that make a researcher or reader uncomfortable, such as rape and other forms of violence in the Bible.

Second, critical empathy provides a framework to work with emotions and tensions developed when reading the Bible. As de Coning acknowledges, the affective responses to the unloved research subjects make the tensions between empathy and critique visible; hence, we can also acknowledge the affective responses to unloved characters in the Bible and make tensions arising from readings visible in biblical

[292] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 230.
[293] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 230.
[294] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 230.
[295] Instead of using the word 'unsavoury,' I choose 'unloved' to tone down the problematic connotations. 'Unloved' is intended to be more inclusive, as it implies that we may have critical affective responses to those whose gender, age, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, class, disability, or other categories are different from ours, meaning that critical affective responses may be evoked even we cannot tell what the problem is. Those communities are not 'unsavoury' by nature but are classified as 'unlovable' by us. Using the word 'unloved' avoids limiting discussion to a small number of extremely 'unsavoury' groups while misunderstanding or oversimplifying those who have been classified as 'unloved people' we encounter in research or daily life.

studies by applying critical empathy.[296] This helps when studying those unloved people or scenarios in the Bible.

Third, having acknowledged the presence of the unloved people and scenarios in the Bible and our affective responses and tensions, critical empathy allows us to recognise and remember the humanity of those characters in the texts. Even though we find those characters and their behaviours may contradict our own moral and ethical standards, critical empathy reminds us to be both critical and empathetic. Reading with critical empathy can help us to critically engage in the process of feeling with the characters in the texts. This provides a means to understand the groups or people that I do not know or am unfamiliar with or that seem irrelevant to me. Feeling with them may help us recognise their humanity; meanwhile, the emotions and tensions help us to unpack how the unloved people's actions, discourses, and ideologies contradict and challenge us. On the one hand, critical empathy reminds us not to ignore toxic ideologies in the texts. On the other hand, it can sensitise us to recognise the humanity of those who are unloved or less respected in the texts, as well as in contemporary society.

Leake's Account

De Coning's account of critical empathy helps us understand what it is, but her theory labels some people as 'unloved.' This may strengthen the stereotypes surrounding these people, even if it does not stigmatise them. Moreover, de Coning's account seems to limit the use of critical empathy to those unloved people. In some cases, it is not their behaviour that makes those people unloved; rather, it is a matter of their environment and the system in which they situated. This is akin to Lobb's identification of the 'suffering that arise[s] from social pathology and injustice.'[297] In our study of those who make us feel pity and helplessness, can critical empathy foster a response that moves us beyond simply shrugging or saying 'what a shame' when we encounter 'social pathology and injustice?' To answer this question, I will offer another scholar's account of critical empathy.

[296] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy,' 217.
[297] Lobb, 'Critical Empathy,' 597.

Unlike de Coning's account of the tensions felt towards unloved people, Leake's approach to critical empathy also understands this tension but puts more emphasis on the issue on knowing and understanding others from one's own perspective and in light of one's responsibility.[298] In contrast to the 'easy' form of empathy, which is shown towards those who are considered deserving of empathy (such as victims of abuse), Leake establishes the concept of difficult empathy.[299] He distinguishes difficult empathy from easy empathy as follows:

> Whereas an easy empathy does not require much of a stretch and can suggest a complete grasp, a difficult empathy pushes the limits of our understanding in *reaching out* to those with whom we might not otherwise wish contact or association.[300]

Leake does not identify or label any unloved people as de Coning does; he merely describes such empathy as a form of difficult empathy. And difficult empathy focuses on reaching those we need to *actively* approach. Considering this in terms of the bystander approach, difficult empathy is an action that encourages taking a step in response, just like being an active bystander.

In addition to the above-mentioned points, I would like to further point out three distinct elements of Leake's account of critical empathy. We shall see below how these elements are closely related to the application of critical empathy in biblical studies.

First, critical empathy can help us to understand and be sensitive to people we consider different from ourselves. There is no single human prototype. Neither can we understand everyone nor assume others will fit in with our norms. There are always some people whom we misunderstand or overlook. Leake suggests that being reflective of the 'personal questions of epistemology, differences, and relations' is essential when employing critical empathy.[301] When exercising critical empathy, the difference

---

[298] Eric Leake, 'The (Un)Knowable Self and Others: Critical Empathy and Expressivism,' in *Critical Expressivism: Theory and Practice in the Composition Classroom*, ed. Tara Roeder and Roseanne Gatto (Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse; Parlor Press, 2014), 150, https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2014.0575.2.10.

[299] Eric Leake, 'Humanizing the Inhumane: The Value of Difficult Empathy,' in *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*, ed. Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim (New York: Routledge, 2014), 176; Leake identifies critical empathy as a type of difficult empathy. See detailed discussion in Eric Leake, 'Critical Empathy,' chap. 6 in *Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters*, Routledge Studies in Rhetoric and Communication (New York: Routledge, 2024), 115–39.

[300] Leake, *Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters*, 176. Emphasis added.

[301] Leake, '(Un)Knowable Self and Others,' 159.

between self and other requires us to accept that we have biases and limitations.[302] By continuing to exercise empathy, we can understand more people who are different from us. Perhaps we can empathise more effectively given our original biases and limitations. This is significant to biblical studies because we cannot fully understand the characters in the ancient text. We can make guesses based on the information provided by historical research, but we also have biases and limitations associated with our positions. Critical empathy allows us to retain these unknowns and differences for analysis and even make use of them in research.

Second, critical empathy allows for reflection from one's own position. Leake tells us how critical empathy works:

> A critical empathy continually reminds us that any knowledge of self and others is always at best a careful and purposeful approximation of perspectives, situations, and experiences through the lens of the self.[303]

Critical empathy requires our self-reflections. It is a 'reflective awareness of the conditions, limitations, and outcomes of an empathic encounter.'[304] It requires our efforts to maintain such awareness and practise reflections on what we may encounter in any situations. This is significant to biblical studies because the Bible is a text for public reading, and people with different backgrounds can have different understandings. Biblical scholars can contribute to their own interpretations based on their backgrounds, situations, and experiences. This helps to have a fuller understanding of people and humanity in the societies in the texts and in the present day.

Third, critical empathy is an ongoing process. Unlike simple empathy that is shown towards a subject, critical empathy is a 'recursive process'—'one's critical reflection informs how one empathises, which then becomes subject to further critical reflection that informs that attempt and future attempts at empathizing.'[305] Leake's account emphasises that critical empathy is an ongoing empathising and reflecting process that is open to revision, and it necessarily keeps the empathiser and their empathy accountable.[306] This is significant to biblical studies because it helps refresh

---

[302] Leake, *Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters*, 118.
[303] Leake, '(Un)Knowable Self and Others,' 159.
[304] Leake, *Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters*, 118.
[305] Leake, *Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters*, 118.
[306] Leake, *Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters*, 118.

biblical interpretations over time. When researchers experience certain events—social, personal, local, or global—they will feel differently afterwards and discover meanings they did not have before. This will also change their interpretations of the biblical texts. Critical empathy allows these emotions and criticisms to be integrated into the interpreter's studies over time.

Critical Empathy and Biblical Studies

Southwood's Account and Application of Critical Empathy

In biblical studies, critical empathy has also been developed. Southwood's recent work clearly states it is an application of critical empathy to the reading of Judges 21.[307] In her self-corrective reading, Southwood applies critical empathy to her re-reading of the text by deploying empathy for the raped women and criticising the 'marriage by capture' practised in the texts, as well as in contemporary culture. Her previous study of this text did not judge the sexual violence depicted. After she receives book reviews commenting on her trivialisation of violence against women, whether or not it was intended, she absorbed the criticism, reflected on her previous work, and returned to Judges 21 with critical empathy. She defines critical empathy as

> reading attentively and thinking with feeling about the text, holding space for it through analysis and withholding judgement while emotionally engaging it, so as to attempt to understand it as fully as possible (even when this is uncomfortable).[308]

This captures how critical empathy creates space so she can read the biblical text with both critical analysis and emotional engagement. It also highlights her aim to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the text. In her re-examination of Judges 21, she corrects her previous reading by recognising her affect and emotion as being part of the critical engagement process. She does not ignore her emotions in her analysis, despite calls to maintain objectivity in so-called 'proper' academic writing.[309]

---

[307] Southwood, 'Critical Empathy and Reading Judges 21.'
[308] Southwood, 'Critical Empathy and Reading Judges 21.'
[309] Southwood, 'Critical Empathy and Reading Judges 21.'

Southwood's work demonstrates how critical empathy can be applied to texts depicting violence. She reads Judges 21 using critical empathy to find out how the text expresses witnessing violence—the 'marriages' depicted are actually acts of rape. She also points out the underlying structure that supports the violence—bride wealth and associated virginity. Southwood not only criticises this description of 'marriage by capture' and the monetisation of woman in Judges 21, but she also performs an empathetic reading of the raped women, who must endure marriage to their rapist 'husband' and suffer threats on returning to their family homes.

Southwood's work demonstrates why critical empathy is important in biblical studies. Her work acknowledges the presence and value of researchers' affect and emotions in their research. Unfortunately, conventional academic writing emphasises and pursues rationality, neutrality, and objectivity. Even in psychological counselling, counsellors need to be alert to countertransference. Emotions and affects seem to contradict expectations of 'proper' academic writing. Biblical scholars, as part of academic research, are also expected to beware of countertransference. As Southwood discusses, it is impossible and unnecessary to maintain neutrality in biblical studies because we are 'inescapably context-bound.'[310] Therefore, upholding 'neutrality' or 'objectivity' in academic writing may instead fall into the trap of trivialising violence. Emotions and affects can indeed help us see more keenly the penumbra of those who have been suppressed by power and the muttering of those whose voices have been masked by authority in the past and the present.[311]

Southwood's work is an example of the application of critical empathy in the field of biblical studies. I am aware this is an up-and-coming area of study, but it does not have strong theoretical background. As in Southwood's work, she has her own

[310] Southwood, 'Critical Empathy and Reading Judges 21.'

[311] 'Silenced' is the term usually used to refer victims of (sexual) violence because it is the term they themselves often use to describe their treatment during and after their assault. See, for example, Caroline Blyth, *The Narrative of Rape in Genesis 34: Interpreting Dinah's Silence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199589456.001.0001. But this word is too quiet and fail to express the actual violence involved in being silenced, so Lisa Oakley uses the word 'silence' in conjunction with a powerful 'breaking' action to confront it. See Lisa Oakley, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). I want to emphasise that the silence is due to being muzzled and muffled. It is a kind of silence that has been deprived of the right to speak. I choose to use the word 'masked,' which seems a bit gentle, but it also expresses the cover-up method used by powerful people. Perhaps, after experiencing the mandatory wearing of masks during the epidemic, we better understand the 'masked' people who experience the pain of being forcibly masked, including having difficulty speaking and being unable to be heard by others.

definition of critical empathy but does not mention any theoretical definitions or practices that she follows. When we apply it to biblical studies, we do not always have a full understanding of what it actually means. Even the terminology and categorisation varies between critical empathy and difficult empathy. There are many ways to make the concept of 'critical empathy' more complex. Without better understanding, scholars may draw on ideas that relate to critical empathy without even using the term itself. Reaves's work on Sarah is an example of this. She recognises herself as an 'unsavoury' person, a white woman with privilege over other black women; she re-reads herself as Sarah who also enjoys privilege over Hagar. Reaves's identification of herself as an 'unsavoury' person extends beyond de Coning's account of critical empathy. She reflects and criticises herself, forming a bridge between herself and the text. This breaks the scholarly rule of detachment and neutrality but illustrates that the inclusion of the researcher's emotions and affects can foster understanding. So critical empathy can be a useful hermeneutical lens for reading 'unsavoury' texts and characters in the Bible, but it is still quite rare in biblical studies, and the term 'critical empathy' is not always used, even when its premises are alluded to, as in Reaves's case.

Reading the Book of Job with Critical Empathy and Trauma Studies

Having discussed critical empathy and its application in biblical studies, I intend to combine it with the three-pronged approach—affect studies, trauma studies, and the bystander approach—to form a critical reading strategy to read Ecclesiastes in the last sections of my thesis. I will first adopt a simpler approach by engaging with critical empathy through a trauma perspective. I will offer a trauma-informed, empathetic reading of the book of Job. The book of Job is selected to illustrate this approach because the divine intervention in the book of Job can be compared with the absence of divine intervention in Ecclesiastes.

Of all the wisdom literature books in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Job, rather than Ecclesiastes, is more often the focus of discussions about suffering. The eponymous book is about a man called Job, his friends, the satan, and God. At the beginning of the book, we learn that Job is a man who is blameless and upright, fears God, and turns away from evil (Job 1:1). He also receives blessings from God, such as a big family and many possessions (Job 1:1–3). Then, the satan interferes, saying that Job

fears God solely because of the advantages he receives, and he makes the challenge that Job will curse God when he loses his blessings (Job 1:9–11). The bulk of the book expounds the conversations between Job and his friends after the satan, with God's permission, removes his possessions, orchestrates the death of his children, and afflicts his body with disease (Job 4–37). It ends with a reparative restoration of Job's possessions, and he sires ten more children and enjoys a long span of life (Job 42:10–16). The book provides a comprehensive narrative about Job's traumatic experience, but, I argue, it does not offer healing as Ecclesiastes does. In the following discussion, I analyse portions of the narrative in the book of Job with a particular focus on sufferers, suffering, and responses to suffering, and I end with a discussion of the book's shortcomings in terms of healing. After that, I will discuss how and why Ecclesiastes, while ostensibly not as preoccupied with any individual's plight and suffering, offers better prospects of comfort and healing.

Table 6. Comparison between the Book of Job and Ecclesiastes

	Job in the book of Job	**Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes**
Sufferers	Mainly focuses on Job; his children and servants died, but they are not treated as the focus. Job's wife's suffering is unacknowledged.	Qoheleth is describing the situation in which some(one) suffered (4:1).
Suffering faced	Several sudden events happening in very quick succession.	Over a rather long period, e.g., toil without reward.
Response to suffering	He curses the day of his birth (Job 3). He rebukes God for his suffering and complains about his friends' accusations. Job's wife asks him to curse/bless God and die (Job 2:9).	He stands back, watches everything happening, and absorbs it all.
Witnesses	Job's servants, neighbours, friends, wife, and God.	Qoheleth

Sufferers in the Book of Job

Throughout the book, Job is the dominant protagonist, playing the role of sufferer-in-chief. Though his children, wife, and servants are also suffering from the consequences of the deal between the satan and God, their suffering is not taken seriously in the book. There is no mention of the mother's grief or bereavement after the children die and are eventually replaced. It seems that only Job suffers. His wife's voice only appears one time in the whole forty-two-chapter book, but there is no depiction of the pain and feelings she suffered.

If we read the story of Job's suffering with critical empathy, we will discover more sufferers and hold back on our critique of Job's wife. His wife does not even get a mention at the end of the narrative. We do not know whether she is still in this family and whether she is the mother of those seven sons and three daughters with whom the Lord blesses Job in the latter days. Though she may not be physically afflicted, like Job, she loses her children, bears stress and strains as a carer, and witnesses a great deal of unexpected suffering—yet this is not mentioned in the text. We do not know when Job's wife dies (soon after her children are struck dead by the satan's antics? After bearing ten more children?), but her children, Job's servants, and Job's flocks all die due to the satan's actions authorised by God. If we say Job is innocent in his suffering, they are also innocent. According to the ancient culture, they are counted as Job's possessions. It seems appropriate that their deaths are depicted as part of Job's sufferings because he loses them. However, as the book of Job focuses on the trauma of an individual, it downplays the effects on people nearby or in the wider community. It misleads readers that personal suffering is limited to the individual. The deaths of Job's children, servants, and flocks are also a form of suffering unto them and for their friends and neighbours. Their relationships are disrupted suddenly. Sudden deaths can also create a horrifying atmosphere in the community. People would be afraid of similar suffering happening to other people or to their family. So Job is not the only sufferer in the book of Job. Moreover, the ending of the book suggests that Job seems to have recovered from his suffering by receiving reparative restoration, but the trauma is not yet over. Indeed, the family, friends, and community of the traumatised individual are affected on different levels. They are all living with potential traumatisation, including the fear of haunted trauma.

The focus on Job also limits the appropriation of the texts. The text might be a healing text to a father who loses his children, but it is less applicable to or even harms some readers. For instance, for people who lose siblings or cousins, the book of Job shows no care for them. For people who lose their friends, workers or neighbours, the book of Job shows no response from any adults. Job's friends engage with Job to counsel him, but they are punished by God after they have given care and advice to their friend. These two brief examples show that appropriation of the book of Job with the focus on a single victim is rather limited. The lack of coverage on Job's wife, children, servants, and neighbours implies ignorance of and inattention to other traumatised individuals and the wider community; it is not a healing text to these people.

Sufferings Faced

In addition to discussing sufferers, if we read the story of suffering in the book of Job with critical empathy, we will gain a deeper understanding of the suffering faced by the characters and their emotional responses. The book of Job presents the character of Job experiencing his suffering in a series of sudden calamities. The happenings suddenly disrupt his expectations for his *own* ordinary daily life. The book of Job starts with a conversation between the satan and God (Job 1:6–12). Since the satan believes that Job fears God because of the blessings he receives from God, the satan tries to prove that Job will curse God once he loses all his possessions. After God allows the satan to stretch out his hand over Job, Job (and his family) start to suffer dramatically and profoundly. Job suddenly loses his oxen, donkeys, sheep, camels, servants, and sons and daughters during the course of *one day* (Job 1:13–19). On another day, Job suffers further from being afflicted with sores over his whole body (Job 2:7–8). It seems that the focus of the book of Job is entirely on Job. However, Job is not the only one who suffers the loss of possessions and health; his family also suffered. David Clines points out in his book *Interested Parties* that the narrator of the book of Job has no insight into the difficulty of real poor people and pays no attention to the suffering of Job's wife and children.[312] They are not exempt from the loss of servants and a stable supply of food and protection now that Job's life is in jeopardy. Job's wife loses no less than Job when the satan takes their children's lives. As his wife, she needs to take care of Job without the assistance of servants when Job gets sores on his body (Job 2:7). Moreover, when

[312] David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 125–32.

Job's friends state that Job's suffering is due to his sins, this stigmatisation of Job as a sinner does not only affect him. The stigma also falls on his wife and his deceased children. They become a sinner's wife and sinner's children and his wife lives under the pressure of social stigma.

The restoration does not take Job's family away from the trauma that has been felt and continues to be felt. When a traumatic event is over, it does not mean trauma/traumatisation is over and that everything resumes as normal. For example, an earthquake or a war happens, and when the earthquake stops and the war finishes, it does not mean that trauma is over. Families and communities are in ruins long after. Furthermore, in terms of affect, they and all the people and buildings involved in the traumatic events become objects of the earthquake or the war and therefore vulnerable to trauma-related affect when they engage with each other in the future. For example, when people who have experienced war hear fireworks being set off, they might experience fear and try to escape because the sound reminds them of a bomb detonating during the war. So, the traumatisation is long-lasting, and any kind of restoration cannot bring victims back to the state they were in before they experienced trauma.

Job's Wife's Response to the Sufferings

Having identified Job's wife as also one of the sufferers and her possible emotional responses to suffering, I will further analyse her roles and actions. In contrast to the verbose conversations among Job and his friends, the book of Job leaves only one sentence for Job's unnamed wife, wherein she questions Job's integrity, urges of Job to curse/bless (ברך) God, and advises Job to die (Job 2:9). This sentence makes her sound like the satan's ally, even if unwittingly, in the eyes of many commentators.[313] But, as mentioned above, we have recognised that it is not only Job who suffers; his wife also suffers. Her complaint expresses her sadness and her unwillingness and inability to bear such a sudden calamity inflicted on her family. If we read Job's wife's responses to suffering with critical empathy, we may have a more empathic understanding of her responses. First, she does not want Job to die. In her reading of Job's wife, Asian feminist Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon does not believe that Job's wife really wants Job

[313] Samuel Rolles Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job: Together with a New Translation*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 25; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1985), 96.

to die because widowhood will bring her even more difficulties, particularly as she has already lost her children and her source of financial support.[314] Melanchthon suggests that Job's wife knows that she needs to empower Job to survive.[315] Here, we can see how Melanchthon empathises with Job's wife's emotions and understands her needs when the couple suffered. Applying critical empathy to the reading of this text offers an alternative meaning for Job's wife's single response in the book of Job. Her response can be an empathetic form of empowerment, rather than an indifferent attempt to blame Job.

Second, Job's wife stands with Job. Her brief but powerful command points directly to the divine—curse/bless God (ברך אלהים, Job 2:9). She demonstrates to Job how they can fight against the unjust and divinely mandated violence that has been forced upon their family. It is unknown whether her silence thereafter indicates she does not speak or whether her speech is unrecorded. Biblical and Mesopotamian legal scholar F. Rachel Magdalene reads Job's wife during the trial of Job based on feminist hermeneutics, legal hermeneutics, and comparative legal historical analysis.[316] Magdalene understands that this is Job's wife's only chance to speak, so she seizes this opportunity to motivate and defend Job in a 'shocking and forceful manner.'[317] Magdalene shows empathy to the suffering of Job's wife and critiques the injustice and violence forced upon Job's family; she also applauds Job's wife as a 'quiet hero' who maintains Job's integrity, provokes Job to resistance, and moves God to intervene.[318] If this is the case, she does indeed succeed in moving God to intervene.

Job's Friends' Response to His Sufferings

Besides Job's wife's response to her husband's suffering, the text also tells us his friends' response. After Job has been inflicted with suffering, his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, visit him and sit with him in silence for seven days and seven nights (Job 2:11–13). The book of Job does not tell us any of the thoughts and feelings

[314] Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon, 'Reading for Justice, Dignity, and Life in South Asia: Illustrated with a Reading of Job's Wife and Sati Savitri,' in *Asian Feminist Biblical Studies: Perspectives and Methods*, ed. Maggie Low (Hong Kong: Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2023), 144.
[315] Melanchthon, 'Reading for Justice,' 144–45.
[316] F. Rachel Magdalene, 'Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job,' *Biblical Interpretation* 14, no. 3 (2006): 209–58, https://doi.org/10.1163/156851506776722985.
[317] Magdalene, 'Job's Wife as Hero,' 232.
[318] Magdalene, 'Job's Wife as Hero,' 257.

of Job and his friends during these seven days and nights. There is then a huge contrast between all of them being silent and their surprisingly verbose conversations afterwards (Job 3–37). We also do not know how Job develops his thoughts about cursing the day of his birth after this period of silence (Job 3), nor how these friends endured the silence during those days and nights with Job. After Job curses his birth, Eliphaz answers, 'If one ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? Yet who can keep from speaking?' (Job 4:2). His friends, at least Eliphaz, may have words for Job, but they keep silent until Job speaks first. Eliphaz may not understand why Job does not initially speak and why he breaks his silence with a curse. Then, the book continues with conversations among Job and his friends, until the LORD speaks to Job and Eliphaz and restores the fortunes of Job (Job 38–42).

The above discussion offers an alternative trauma-informed and empathetic reading of the book of Job in terms of sufferers, suffering, and responses to suffering faced in the book of Job. It helps us to have more understanding of Job's wife and friends and to recognise and remember his wife's humanity. It also helps us to criticise the sudden violence and injustice that happens to Job's family. However, such a reading may lead the reader to feel helpless when faced with the trauma that happens to Job's family in the text. This is why I propose a critical reading strategy that uses a three-pronged approach, combining affect studies, trauma studies, and the bystander approach, to read biblical texts. I will illustrate the model by reading Ecclesiastes in the following section. Here, I continue with my reading of Ecclesiastes by applying critical empathy.

Critical Empathy and Ecclesiastes

In the bystander approach, the bystander can be either Qoheleth (standing by as he observes the world around him) or the reader (reflecting on what the text describes). Critical empathy, too, can apply to more than one bystander. It can mean Qoheleth performs critical empathy, or readers apply it to their reading of Ecclesiastes. My focus is on the latter—the application of critical empathy (with affect, trauma, and bystander perspectives) to the reading of Ecclesiastes, with myself as the reader/bystander. Before I do this, I briefly analyse whether Qoheleth performs critical empathy, following Leake's criteria: knowing and understanding others, having self-reflection, and

empathising recursively. After this brief analysis, I will move on to discuss the application of critical empathy (with affect, trauma, and bystander perspectives) to the reading of Ecclesiastes and with myself as a reading bystander.

Qoheleth and Critical Empathy

First, Ecclesiastes illustrates that even Qoheleth, a king in Jerusalem, identifies with the conditions of people of different classes to him. As we have seen, Leake's account of practising critical empathy emphasises our responsibility to know and understand others, even if their perspectives are different to our own. [319] Qoheleth sees others from his own perspective and seems to find it is his responsibility to know and understand others. For example, in Ecclesiastes 4, he sees the oppressed who have no comfort (4:1), those who toil endlessly (4:4, 8), and the solitary individuals without sons or brothers (4:8). Qoheleth, portrayed as a king, demonstrates recognition of the situation of oppression, namely, people who are overworked and lonely, and he sees that those people are actually being treated unfairly. He finds this problematic and speaks out for these people who are different from him.

Second, Qoheleth conducts self-reflection on what he sees, and he attempts to seek the causes of the conditions that he sees, and he criticises the power imbalance that causes suffering. He figures out that oppressors have power (4:1), that the rewards of toils are precarious (4:4, 8), and that some people feel empty and lonely (4:8). Such understanding shows his empathy towards the people; nevertheless, he expresses his criticism through the words 'better than' (מ…טוב). In Ecclesiastes 4, the word טוב appears five times. To the oppressed, Qoheleth says that the dead and the stillborn are better than the living (4:2–3). To people who toil endlessly, Qoheleth says that it is better to work less (4:6). Rather than saying that these are solutions, it might be an attitude that advocates enjoyment and rejects social norms or expectations. It is in line with the two worldviews 躺平 (*tóng pìhng*; 'lying flat') and 我不想努力了 (*ngóh bāt séung nóuh lihk líuh*; 'I don't want to work hard anymore'), which have been popular in recent years.[320] Some people adopt a 'lying flat' attitude because they have lived with

[319] Leake, '(Un)Knowable Self and Others,' 150.
[320] Ivana Davidovic, '"Lying Flat": Why Some Chinese Are Putting Work Second,' BBC News, 16 February 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/business-60353916; 'China's New "Tang Ping" Trend Aims

high levels of competition for a long time but have not gotten the rewards they feel they deserve. Finally, they quit jobs that they think are meaningless or unworthy and choose a simple life with low consumption. In a Cantonese version of Ecclesiastes, for example, 4:5–6 reflects these Chinese expressions.[321] It rejects the sayings that stupid people idle around waiting for themselves to starve (4:5); instead, a hand with a little and peace of mind are far better than full hands that have toiled to catch the wind (4:6).

There is an English word with a similar meaning—'goblin mode'—which was chosen as the Oxford word of the year in 2022.[322] Goblin mode is an attitude towards life, but 'lying flat' has a more specific meaning due to the context of Chinese society in recent years. To a certain extent, choosing to live 'lying flat' is a silent protest against the unchangeable social situation. It is also subversive. This is even a behaviour warned against by the governing bodies. From the perspective of critical empathy, the 'better' expressions in Ecclesiastes might be a similar form of passive resistance. The expressions implicitly deliver criticisms of the social conditions of the time that are making people suffer. These criticisms reflect Qoheleth's self-reflection rather than suggesting he is advocating a subversive action. As Weeks points out, '[Qoheleth's] observations do not lead him to cry out for reform or for social justice, but, if anything, for self-awareness and a proper sense of perspective.'[323] I agree with Weeks that Qoheleth calls for self-awareness, because he does not call for divine intervention. But I disagree that Qoheleth's observations do not prompt him to call for social justice. Qoheleth calls for social justice by giving voice to the oppressed.

Qoheleth's 'better' expression also applies to people who feel empty and lonely in life (4:8). After saying his well-known mantra, 'this also is vanity,' Qoheleth says another famous quote: two is better than one (4:9). It is true that having a companion is

---

to Highlight Pressures of Work Culture,' BBC News, 3 June 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57348406.

[321] The New Cantonese Bible is not the most popular version among Cantonese-speaking churches in Hong Kong, but compared with the widely circulated RCUV, this version presents local word usage and is very vivid. As the preservation of the Cantonese language becomes more and more of a concern, this version has attracted more attention. See 聖經──新廣東話 [Holy Bible—new Cantonese Bible] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Bible Society, 2006).

[322] 'Goblin mode' refers to 'a type of behaviour which is unapologetically self-indulgent, lazy, slovenly, or greedy, typically in a way that rejects social norms or expectations.' Lucy Knight, '"Goblin Mode": New Oxford Word of the Year Speaks to the Times,' *The Guardian*, 5 December 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2022/dec/05/goblin-mode-new-oxford-word-of-the-year.

[323] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*, 567–68.

good for solitary individuals, but for those who have no sons or brothers, it is ironic to ask them to find a companion who is like their sons or brothers. Scholars discuss the degree of Qoheleth's loneliness. Seow notes that the solitary individuals mentioned by Qoheleth have no one else, suggesting that they are 'unrelated to and unconnected with other people.'[324] Longman also finds that the individuals are *absolutely* lonely by virtue of having neither friends nor a wife.[325] Seow and Longman strongly believe that the solitary individuals referenced by Qoheleth are utterly alone, but they do not explain why they are so. There is also no discussion of why Qoheleth specifically mentions these individuals do not have son or brother, two of the closest male relatives. Nevertheless, I am doubtful that the text is emphasising the absolute absence of relationships for the solitary individuals because it mentions that they have no sons or brothers in the second part of the verse.[326] If the emphasis is on the first part, which indicates they are absolutely loners, it seems unnecessary to suggest that they have no sons or brothers. The 'better' expression this time—two are better than one—is less likely to help the solitary individuals solve the situation of the loneliness they face, and it is more likely an expression of Qoheleth's feelings of helplessness towards these lonely people.

Third, Qoheleth's speech is recursive, and he leaves an unresolved ending. His reflection does not happen once; instead, there are several cycles. Some may see these as contradictions, but no matter how often he repeats himself, the book of Ecclesiastes does not offer a resolution at its end to please everyone. Neither the deity nor Qoheleth provide a solution. The deity does not appear to intervene in any ways, unlike in the book of Job. The unresolved situations are still there. Even though the deity is mentioned, Qoheleth reminds readers to fear the deity at a point where he has no better answer. There is neither praise of Qoheleth's efforts nor resolution. However, there is no clue showing that Qoheleth gives up and leaves. After his recursive speech across the chapters, he rounds off with the saying 'Rejoice, young man, in your youth and let your heart be good to you in the days of your youth, walk in the ways of your heart and

[324] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 188.
[325] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 140.
[326] I doubt it is fair to say that the sons and brothers are at war or died on the battlefield. Their sons and brothers may have been killed when they travelled through the wilderness, or perhaps there is war at the time and they died on the battlefields. According to Seow, vv. 9–12 infers that people are travelling through the wilderness (*Ecclesiastes*, 188–90). However, there is still insufficient data to support this. More historical information is required to know whether there were wars at that time.

amongst your witness and know that for all these things, God will bring you to a judgement' (Eccl 11:9). It seems as though his reflection has not ended yet.

My Reading with Critical Empathy

How My Findings Differ from Southwood's Work

Southwood applies critical empathy to her reading of Judges 21 as part of an exercise in self-correction. T. M. Lemos criticised Southwood's previous reading of this biblical passage for trivialising sexual violence.[327] Southwood admits that her distant and unemotional writing tone was problematic, as was her failure to recognise rape in Judges 21.[328] She concedes that she insisted on objectivity and resisted having an emotional connection to the text because her training as an academic scholar pushed her in that direction. She realised that remaining detached and resisting her emotions when engaging with distressing biblical texts is harmful. Therefore, she now consciously pushes against the impulse to be detached and engages with the biblical text with a mixture of intellect and emotion.

During my own training, I received less emphasis on objectivity and staying detached from the text. I took two modules at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College that inspired me and guided me to read with critical empathy. The first one was Narrative Art in the Hebrew Bible, which aimed to explore the artistic and literary features (plot, character, dialogue, narrator and narration) of the narrative in the Hebrew Bible. It trained me to analyse the narratives from a literary perspective and to recognise and describe the literary features in the biblical narrative and reflect on how these

[327] T. M. Lemos, 'Review of *Marriage by Capture in the Book of Judges: An Anthropological Approach*, by Katharine E. Southwood,' *Review of Biblical Literature* 22 (2020):123–27, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1xsm8rn.10. A similar critique has been published since Lemos's review: Barbara Thiede, 'Taking Biblical Authors at Their Word: On Scholarly Ethics, Sexual Violence, and Rape Culture in the Hebrew Bible,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 143, no. 2 (2024): 185–205, https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1432.2024.1.

[328] Johanna Stiebert, 'Introducing the Contributors to "The Bible and Violence"—Katherine Southwood and Dominic Irudayaraj,' *The Shiloh Project* (blog), 11 May 2022, https://shilohproject.blog/introducing-contributors-to-the-bible-and-violence-katherine-southwood-and-dominic-irudayaraj/.

influence my view on the Bible as history and Scripture.[329] I am therefore used to engaging with biblical figures and imagining their emotions in their dialogue or their silence. The teacher taught us to pay attention to silence, imagine what was not said, and analyse whether the biblical figure who said nothing was not allowed to speak or their words were not recorded. This began my interest in imagining the situation of those who are usually overlooked in the biblical texts and attempting to give a voice to these silent, usually unnamed, biblical figures.

Such a reading strategy is also motivated by my personality. I resent being wronged, and I do not like seeing others mistreated. When I read the texts as a reader, I find it unpleasant to see someone suffer and be mistreated, misjudged, wronged, or even ignored. I am eager to bring their voices out. However, as a reader, I initially thought that I could only follow along but could do nothing to change the text or alleviate their pain. Later, I discovered that speaking up for these overlooked people can at least let them be seen and heard and mitigate misunderstandings about them. For example, in my previous work, I, as a migrant, imagine Lot's wife (Gen 19) as a migrant, looking back as she flees her hometown.[330] I attempt to empathise with Lot's wife as a migrant and to clarify that her looking back is not because she is nosy (as many women are wrongly assumed to be); nor does she disobey the messenger's order. She is looking back because of her daughters, her family, and her homeland. Though I cannot help Lot's wife or others who are stigmatised, sensitisation and empathy can help the reader acknowledge their presence before taking part in further activism on behalf of migrants and other oppressed groups.

In addition to the module about reading the Hebrew Bible as a narrative, another module, Contextual Interpretation of the Bible, also guided me to read with critical empathy. This module included learning what different contexts mean by engaging particular communities through field trips and reading assignments. I visited a shelter for migrant women workers in Hong Kong to understand their contexts.[331] My reading

[329] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, new and rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).
[330] Ng, 'Reading Lot's Wife with Marginalised Migrants.'
[331] Migrant women workers (MDW) are important contributors to Hong Kong society. Most of them are employed by families as foreign domestic helpers; they live in their employer's residence and perform household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, and elder care. As of December 2023, there were a

assignment was about reading 1 Samuel 1 with domestic helpers in Hong Kong to find out how they felt about 'Hannah giving up her son to God' and their own situation—having to leave their child/ren in someone else's care. This reading assignment helped me learn about their perspectives. This inculcated in me a respect for individuals within particular contexts in terms of how they interpret the Bible through the lens of their contexts. It also trained me to become more sensitive to the biblical interpretations of marginalised communities and to the ways that a particular stance of biblical interpretation may marginalise communities. The reading of 1 Samuel 1 by domestic workers later inspired me to re-read the text and analyse Elkanah's questions to Hannah through the perspective of coercive control.[332] All these aspects of my training cultivated my sensitivity to people in different contexts within the texts and in society and to include their 'voices.' As West suggests with regard to his reading experiences with African readers, 'What they hear, remember and retell is, I want to suggest, a remaking or a "re-membering" of the Bible.'[333] Though I am not exactly doing a contextual reading in this thesis, I might retell and 'remake' the Bible for marginalised communities through my proposed strategy—a critical empathetic approach with affect, trauma, and bystander perspectives.

Critical Empathy Is an Ongoing Process

Before elaborating on my reading of Ecclesiastes with critical empathy, I am going to explain how my reading developed and changed. When I first read Ecclesiastes with affect, trauma, and bystander perspectives, my focus was on Qoheleth, and I regarded him as a traumatised bystander. Later, I realised that I had overlooked those who are mentioned by Qoheleth in the text. Since then, they have become my targets of critical

---

total of 356,231 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong. See Information Services Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, *Hong Kong 2023* (Hong Kong: Information Services Department, 2024), 215, https://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2023/en/index.html. The MDW must leave Hong Kong within fourteen days once their contract is terminated, regardless of the reasons. Bethune House, the shelter that I visited, provides a holistic approach to empower MDW. It supports MDW, especially those who have encountered premature contract terminations or abuse and exploitation, so that they can stay in Hong Kong while their cases are processed in the judicial system. See Bethune House, https://bethunehouse.org/.

[332] Yannis Wing Yan Ng, 'Comfort or Cajole: Reading Elkanah's Response to Hannah with the Awareness of Coercive Control,' paper presented at the Society for the Study of Theology Conference, University of Warwick, 19 April 2023. A version of this paper was published on the *Shiloh Project* blog on 21 April 2024 (https://shilohproject.blog/comfort-or-cajole-reading-elkanahs-response-to-hannah-with-the-awareness-of-coercive-control/).

[333] Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*, Interventions 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 95.

empathy, even more so than Qoheleth. However, I decided not to remove my empathetic reading of Qoheleth because I still recognised there are traumatised bystanders in my contexts. Indeed, critical empathy is an ongoing process. It can create ways to read with sensitivity and an openness to finding new meanings and layers, which are constantly informed by the reader's own changing experiences. So, I made some changes: adding my criticisms of Qoheleth and adding a section for those I have previously overlooked but who truly deserve to be 're-membered.'

At the beginning of my reading process, I focused on Qoheleth because I had read lots of criticisms of him in the commentaries. With regard to Qoheleth's witnessing of the oppressed, some scholars query why he, as a king, cannot suggest some solution or halt the oppression.[334] More scholars question why Qoheleth does not take action when he sees oppression.[335] Murphy argues that Qoheleth merely leaves a record but not a condemnation.[336] Fox suggests that Qoheleth shows a 'lack of sympathetic fellowship for the oppressed.'[337] He then spends a long paragraph recounting Qoheleth's faults:

> Qohelet does not see himself as the needed source of consolation. He feels sorry for the pain of the downtrodden and regrets that no one will offer them solace, yet he seems more concerned with the disturbed equanimity of himself and the reader, whom he never envisions as a victim. He grasps the problem entirely from the perspective of an onlooker: How unfortunate is he who must behold such evils! When he recognizes a wrong—in this case, the lack of human sympathy—he bemoans it but resigns himself to it.[338]

Fox recognises that Qoheleth 'feels sorry for the pain,' but Fox does not empathise with Qoheleth's sense of 'disturbed equanimity.' As Fox argues, Qoheleth positions himself as an onlooker; Fox blames Qoheleth for his lack of sympathy and for not offering solace himself.

However, I do not find it disappointing when Qoheleth fails to act after witnessing the oppression, because I do not believe that it is easy to put an end to the oppression, particularly chained exploitation, or to defeat corrupted regimes. Goldingay

---

[334] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 106; Shaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 54.
[335] Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 133–34; Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 106.
[336] Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 37.
[337] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 199.
[338] Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, 201.

suggests such oppression might involve 'excessive or illegitimate and life-destroying' taxation or other possible collusions between imperial and provincial authorities.[339] Fighting against the oppressors is not the only option. Recognising the pain is more comforting because it lets me know there is at least someone who stands by the oppressed and does not harm them further. I find it is a hope offering to those who experience long-term and repeated suffering. Besides, as a reader, I recognise Qoheleth's requests for help, but I do not identify these as being on behalf of the people who suffer. [340] I can only be an onlooker, standing idly in front of the text. In order to be an active bystander rather than standing idly, I look for an active reading of Ecclesiastes with the application of critical empathy.

Commentators state that Qoheleth is an onlooker who stands idly by as oppressions take place. I argue that his passivity can be read as something other than the refusal to intervene. I evaluate his passivity through re-examining the text from the perspectives of trauma, bystanders, and critical empathy. (I will elaborate on this in next part of my first reading with critical empathy.)

During the development of my empathetic reading, I have also discovered the different views of other commentators. Jim Winter interprets Ecclesiastes 4:1 as the expression of a 'helpless bystander' witnessing the exploitation of the oppressed by the oppressor.[341] Unlike other scholars, Winter sees Qoheleth as helpless while he witnesses the injustice. As a reader, I also find myself like a helpless bystander because I cannot comfort the oppressed that Qoheleth sees. Even while I witness the many injustices I see every day on the news, I cannot comfort the victims. I recognise the presence of these victims in the texts and also my role as a bystander-reader.

I realise that I have focused on Qoheleth—with whom I share the experience of witnessing traumatising events to which I am unable to respond. However, I have ignored those people Qoheleth mentions who are suffering but receive no help from him. As Leake's account of critical empathy shows, critical empathy is to be sensitive to and understand people who are *different from* us. Seeing Qoheleth—who is similar to

[339] Goldingay, *Ecclesiastes*, 150.
[340] During my first reading process, I could not hear any cry for help towards or from the people who suffered.
[341] Jim Winter, *Opening Up Ecclesiastes* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 60.

me—is not the essence of critical empathy. In addition, the soliloquy in Ecclesiastes may also have (mis)led me to ignore the possible existence of other people, as it creates the illusion that no one is responsible for the situations Qoheleth witnessed. This realisation reminds me to recognise the suffering people hidden in Ecclesiastes.

Having explained the development of my reading process with critical empathy, I will now illustrate how to empathetically regard Qoheleth as a traumatised bystander. Then, I will add my critique of him from my re-reading of the text. Finally, I will attempt to make visible the vulnerable people in Ecclesiastes through listing those suffering people hidden in Ecclesiastes whom I have previously overlooked.

My First Attempt to Read with Critical Empathy

I have already discussed two points which I would like to expand on as I apply critical empathy to a reading of Ecclesiastes: first, critical empathy is an evolving process, which is practised and develops and evolves responsively over time; second, while most of us will be bystanders at some time or other, we cannot know *when* we might witness a traumatic event. What I would like to explore next is how reading the biblical text (in this case, Ecclesiastes—a text that I, as a person of faith and as a student of the Bible, read both for guidance and with critical focus) can help me develop critical empathy and, along with this, in time, a capacity to be an effective bystander.

As I read Ecclesiastes with critical empathy, I empathise with commentators' criticism of Qoheleth's inaction and imagine Qoheleth's position as a traumatised bystander. It seems unreasonable to empathise with a widely recognised onlooker, but my empathy is from my consideration of the humanity of a bystander, who happens to witness unpredictable events. I use the term 'humanity' to refer to humane qualities or aspects. [342] My consideration of the humanity of Qoheleth does not mean that I think of Qoheleth as a real person. But I perceive his human qualities and believe these should be recognised. No one can deprive another person of their humanity. No biblical scholar has the privilege to remove the humanity of the figures in biblical texts. It is no different to dehumanisation. In contrast, I am motivated to retrieve and inculcate with humanity those figures and people who have been overlooked. This is exactly what feminist

[342] The term 'humanity' seems to be limited to human qualities or aspects, but my respect for creatures also includes other living things, such as other-than-human animals. Since my scope is limited, I avoid overextending to cover other creatures.

scholars have been doing to re-interpret the representation of women in texts and to empower women in our contexts. In the critical empathetic reading of Lot's wife I made earlier, I do not see her as a real person but rather as a figure with humanity and dignity. I imagine her thoughts and emotions during that situation of flight and understand her looking back as the response of someone who is leaving her homeland. As I read Ecclesiastes with critical empathy, I attempt to understand Qoheleth's position as a traumatised bystander. Because Qoheleth not only represents the character in Ecclesiastes; he can also be a reflection of some people in real society. Ignoring the humanity of a bystander or even an onlooker is not how we should read or study Ecclesiastes; instead, as discussed earlier in this chapter, we need to recognise the humanity that de Coning mentioned in her account of showing critical empathy to unloved people.[343] It is also my goal as an effective bystander-reader to cultivate active reading.

If I read Ecclesiastes with critical empathy and relate this to the readings with trauma and bystander perspectives, I can consider Qoheleth as a traumatised bystander and take the opportunity to rethink whether there are any reason for his passivity and inaction. To be an active bystander-reader and to perform the ongoing process of critical empathy is to consciously practise self-reflection. Deliberately reading Ecclesiastes as a bystander with affect and trauma perspectives recalls my memory of being a bystander witnessing a suspicious act of sexual violence many years ago. I call it suspicious because I suspected sexual violence from my observation, but the victim denied that it was, and I could never prove it. Besides suspiciousness, I felt shocked and intuitively disbelieving. Then, I tried to describe what caused it to happen, to construct what actually happened, and to make sense of what I was seeing at that moment before I could think about how to respond. My frozen state and all those processes took time, and by then, I had missed the moment to intervene. At that moment, I wanted to see what was happening before I attempted to do anything or decided what I should do. Finally, I did nothing. As time passes, I cannot forget what I saw. Since that moment, I have been longing to know exactly what happened—whether it was or was not an act of sexual violence. I have never learned anything further. In this event, I was a bystander. I was not the victim, but I was affected, and I have lived with the scar and with the shame

[343] De Coning, 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy.'

and guilt. Even after all these years, I am still confused as to whether I made a wrong judgement; I am still struggling as to whether I should talk to someone about this. Throughout the years, I have denied my inaction at that time, but I try to understand what kept me passive. The moment I realised I missed the opportunity to intervene is, to me as a bystander, traumatic. I wish I knew what kept me passive so I would not stand by the next time something similar happens. Just as a trauma victim may have flashbacks, bystanders can also experience flashbacks involving reflections, questions, and a lack of explanations.

Having reflected on my own bystander experience, I re-read Ecclesiastes and realise that it raises a series of questions and explanations concerning Qoheleth after he sees something bad under the sun. In Chapter 3, I analysed Qoheleth's witnessing as an onlooker and how his testimony often finished with the mantra that all is *hebel*. In this section, I study a passage about Qoheleth where the mantra is lacking: 5:12–17 (Eng 5:13–18). I demonstrate an empathetic reading of Qoheleth's response in a series of questions and explanations after he sees a painful occurrence under the sun. After that, I also illustrate two other thinking processes that keep him passive: distinguishing between good and bad and suggesting possible solutions.

Reading Ecclesiastes empathetically and regarding Qoheleth as a bystander seeing different happenings, I can detect a series of questions and explanations within the text. Qoheleth sees that wealth is kept by its owner to the owner's detriment, and he finds something painfully bad in that (Eccl 5:12 [Eng 5:13]). He sees a man who has lost his wealth in a bad venture; he finds it is dreadful for the man who has lost all his possessions (ואין בידו מאומה) and has nothing left for his son (Eccl 5:13 [Eng 5:14]). In contrast to the pattern I have discussed above, Qoheleth does not finish with the mantra that all is *hebel*. Instead, there is a series of questions and explanations. Qoheleth attempts to explain why it happens: as the man came naked from the womb of his mother, so he will return (Eccl 5:14 [Eng 5:15]). He states that people dying with nothing is painfully bad and asks what advantage the man has when he toils in the wind (Eccl 5:15 [Eng 5:16]). Qoheleth finds these questions and explanations unhelpful. He realises that, though the man will eat in the darkness, he will be very irritated and have pain and anger (Eccl 5:16 [Eng 5:17]). Then, he explains that he has seen it is good to eat, drink, and find success in all one's toils with which one toils under the sun (Eccl

5:17 [Eng 5:18]). Reading this passage with critical empathy may provide more understanding of Qoheleth as a bystander who may feel shocked and intuitively disbelieving that a man—a man just like him—could likewise lose all his possessions and leave nothing for his son. He may be trying to describe what caused this to happen, and he may have attempted to explain what he happened to see before he could think about how to respond. There is nothing he can do to avoid becoming the next victim of such an unpredictable happening. His thoughts of eating and drinking become a comfort for him; he wants to enjoy his wealth until, one day, he will lose everything just like the man he sees.

The next thinking process involves distinguishing between good and bad. The word טוב ('good') occurs forty eight times in Ecclesiastes and fourteen occurrences out of the forty eight can be found in chapter 7 (7:1*2, 2, 3, 5, 8*2, 10, 11, 14*2, 18, 20, 26).[344] Among these occurrences, the word appears in the phrase מ…טוב (Eccl 7:1*2, 2, 3, 5, 8*2); מ…טוב can be translated as 'better than,' and it is used to indicate that one thing is better than another. Though Qoheleth's distinguishments scatter across different topics (better is a good name, the day of death, going to the house of mourning, sorrow, the end of a thing), his selections are not detailed; they present some guidance about how he is distinguishing between what is better and what is worse. Reading with critical empathy and reflecting with my bystander experience, the process of going through this guidance is like looking up a handbook to check what is better and how to make a better decision in response to what I have seen. Hopefully, there is some guidance out there that can tell me what to do. When I happen to see something unpredictably, I do not know which handbook I should look up. The scattered topics in Ecclesiastes make sense to me because, at the moment of seeing a traumatic event, I am required to act quickly and to figure out everything all at once. I scan through the guidance quickly to help me make a decision. Even afterwards, I keep searching in my mind for guidance, for the right way to handle the situation I have seen.

If we regard the 'better than' as the distinction between better and worse and as guidance for deciding on a response, Ecclesiastes continues with Qoheleth's reflections. Reading with critical empathy, I find Qoheleth tries hard to offer long-term solutions.

[344] The occurrences include both masculine and feminine forms. טוב occurs in Ecclesiastes 2:1, 3, 24*2, 26*2; 3:12*2, 13, 22; 4:3, 6, 9*2, 13; 5:4, 7, 17; 6:3, 9, 12; 7:1*2, 2, 3, 5, 8*2, 10, 11, 14*2, 18, 20, 26; 8:12, 13, 15; 9:2*2, 4, 7, 16, 18*2; 11:6, 7; 12:14.

From Ecclesiastes 8 until the end of the book, there are various exhortations: to obey the king (8:1–5), to enjoy life (8:15), to accept the inscrutable plan of God (8:17), to take life as it comes (9:1–12), to be diligent and cautious (11:1–6), and to remember the creator (12:1). Ecclesiastes finishes in the epilogue with the exhortation to fear God (12:13). I cannot confirm whether these exhortations are responding to what he sees or to the failure of his actions, or both. These exhortations may not bring about immediate change, but they exemplify Qoheleth's efforts as a bystander that are often overlooked by commentators or readers.

Evaluating Qoheleth

Reading Ecclesiastes with critical empathy and my experience with witnessing, I recognise that Qoheleth is a bystander to a lot of events. He has a lot to say, and what he sees and records is engaging. He is traumatised, too. But when I read Ecclesiastes again with my focus on other people mentioned in the text, I find that it would be cruel to people who are suffering if I only emphasise Qoheleth without acknowledging or evaluating his arrogance. At the beginning of Ecclesiastes, Qoheleth is introduced as a king of Jerusalem. His arrogance is shown in his claim to have acquired wisdom and knowledge and to have surpassed all those who ruled over Jerusalem before him (1:16; 2:9). His arrogance is also shown by his list of wealth and possessions (2:4–8). He has houses, gardens, parks, and pools; he has planted vineyards and fruit trees. He also has male and female slaves, male and female singers, and many concubines (שׁדה ושׁדות, lit. lady and ladies). Through these descriptions, he emphasises what he owns but shows no appreciation for what others have contributed to his possessions. Neither does he appreciate the talents of the singers but only sees them as a luxury, like the silver, gold, and treasures of kings and the provinces that he gathers (2:8). He sees the concubines as a luxury of sons of man (ותענוגת בני האדם, 'delights of the flesh' in the English version). Furthermore, he sees his wealth and possessions as a fulfilment of his desire and pleasure—his own reward from all his own toil (2:10). He excludes all the efforts of others and does not consider sharing his possessions or pleasure with others.

This sense of arrogance appears before the detailed descriptions of his seeing the oppressed in Ecclesiastes 4. As I discussed in Chapter 3, Qoheleth sees the tears of the oppressed and their need for comfort. Does he stop being arrogant and resigned after seeing the oppressed and other vulnerable people? After recounting Qoheleth's

testimonies, his emerging questions and explanations, his distinctions between good and bad, and his suggestions for possible solutions, the text shows us Qoheleth's tendency to control the unpredictable elements of life (and people) and create harmony. First, Qoheleth emphasises the importance of kings' commands and obedience to them. Qoheleth advises his audience to keep the king's command (8:2) and to not go from his presence (8:3). He also emphasises that the king is powerful, and no one can query him about his acts (8:4). People will come to no harm if they keep a command (8:5). This sounds like a promise or guarantee, but it can also be read as a warning to those who may disobey commands.

Second, Qoheleth's sense of inevitability remains. He makes sense of the unpredictability of life but legitimates the battle (8:8).[345] He despises the harm and casualties caused by the battle and only reiterates that he sees all that is done in broad daylight (8:9). He also expresses no surprise that a person may rule over another to the point of causing them harm (8:9). Unlike when he sees the tears of the oppressed and their need for comfort, he believes that this harm is a natural thing: those who dig a pit will fall into it; those who break a wall will be bitten by a serpent; those who quarry stones will be hurt by them; and those who split wood will be endangered by it (10:8–9). His sense of inevitability is so obvious that it makes these harms appear so natural that no one seems to need to take responsibility for their occurrence or prevent them from happening again.

Third, Qoheleth silences people and harmonises chaotic situations. He tells a person to stay calm and remain at their post even when a tyrannical ruler is angry with them (10:4). This assumes that the subordinate person should stay on to serve the tyrant without having the freedom to leave. Furthermore, he warns his audience not to curse a king, either in thought or in private, for a bird in the sky might carry the person's voice, and anything with wings might report the word (10:20). Qoheleth is warning that any thoughts or words of resistance will be reported. This can make anyone who wants to resist feel pressured to stay silently and obediently at the tyrant's side.

[345] The NRSVue renders this phrase in 8:8 as 'there is no discharge from the battle'; RCUV, renders it 這場戰爭無人能免 (*jéh chèuhng jin jāng mòuh yàhn nàhng míhn*; literal translation: this war no people can avoid).

Spotting Those Whom I Have Ignored

My evaluation of Qoheleth does not overthrow my empathy for him, for I regard him as a traumatised bystander. But as I am a bystander-reader, I cannot pretend that I do not see the presentation of Qoheleth's arrogance and power. So earlier in my interpretative journey, I looked back and attempted to re-evaluate empathetically whether Qoheleth's thoughts were because of his repeated witnessing of traumatic incidents. I could not work this out yet, but I believed that I had surely overlooked those he mentioned, especially those who suffered but were hidden beneath his sense of inevitability. It would be unfortunate if I only emphasised Qoheleth and ignored the others, especially after recognising them as being oppressed in some way. I cannot fully analyse these people due to the word limit of this thesis, but I want to include them at least at this stage. To be sure, they deserve more attention and empathy than I am giving them here. Nevertheless, this illustrates the ongoing process of reading with critical empathy.

First, some people put in effort, but they are not recognised or rewarded. They include those who build houses, gardens, parks, and pools and who plant vineyards and fruit trees for Qoheleth (2:4–6). There are probably people taking care of these facilities and plants. In our context, they are the workers responsible for all the construction, factory, and farming industries needed to support the luxurious lives of the wealthy. They may also be the working-class people who work behind the scenes of a city, such as labourers who build roads, bridges, tunnels, and pipelines, as well as those who clean our streets, offices, businesses, hospitals, and homes. These labourers often go unrecognised and unnoticed. In some industries, they are migrant workers or from a particular ethnic group, which leaves them vulnerable to lower pay and poor working conditions. Besides the people working for Qoheleth, Ecclesiastes mentions a father who has nothing to leave his son and a son who receives nothing from his father (5:13–14). This may be the outcome for working-class people who are paid low wages and struggle to earn enough to support their family.

Second, there are people who are objectified. Qoheleth mentions male and female slaves, male and female singers, and concubines when he counts his possessions. He sees his concubines as 'delights of the flesh' (2:8 NRSVue), thereby objectifying them as luxury products to be used by men. In addition, his animal imagery (3:18–19)

dehumanises people.[346] Though slavery operations in our contemporary contexts may be different from the practice in ancient contexts, workers who work in harsh environments and who are deprived of decent working conditions are comparable to ancient slaves. Human trafficking also exists in modern society, which forces people into prostitution (sexual slavery), the fishing industry, and scam farms.[347] These forced labourers are objectified as trading products and dehumanised in isolated and invisible condition.

Third, there are people whose suffering is understood by Qoheleth as inevitable. Qoheleth claims battles are unavoidable (8:8), but he shows no concern for either the people who must participate in the battle or the populace affected by war. In our context, there are wars and conflicts taking place in different countries, which impact many people. They may have lost their family, friends, homes, jobs, and sense of safety, and they may have suffered from subsequent unemployment, the need to seek asylum, and the trauma of relocation. Qoheleth gives no reason or excuse for waging war—resources, territory, nationalism, or revenge—and he claims that war is inevitable, thus irresponsibly exposing people to danger and suffering.

Qoheleth also mentions that builders may inevitably suffer harms (10:8–11). His claim is similar to the Cantonese proverb 食得鹹魚抵得渴 (*sihk dāk hàahm yú dái dāk hot*; literal translation: [the one] eating salted fish should put up with the thirst), which means that one must put up with the consequences of one's choice. His claim that 'those who dig a pit will fall into it, those who break a wall will be bitten by a serpent, those who quarry stones will be hurt by them, [and] those who split wood will be endangered by them' (10:8–9) implies that the workers have to bear all the risks and liability of any

[346] The Chinese New Version renders ותענוגת בני האדם as 'what the humans enjoy,' and the phrase is placed at the end of the verse, removing the linking reference to the concubines. This Chinese translation harmonises the sense of seeing the objectification of women.

[347] Sarah Spina-Matthews, 'Bolton Couple Jailed for Trafficking Hungarian Sex Workers to UK,' BBC News, 18 December 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c05pe5e48epo; Chris Clements and Monica Whitlock, 'Workers "Treated like Slaves" on Scottish Fishing Boats,' BBC News, 19 August 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd9dnk34k41o; Lindsey Kennedy, Nathan Paul Southern, and Huang Yan, 'Cambodia's Modern Slavery Nightmare: The Human Trafficking Crisis Overlooked by Authorities,' *The Guardian*, 2 November 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/03/cambodias-modern-slavery-nightmare-the-human-trafficking-crisis-overlooked-by-authorities. See also, a scam farm, fraud park, or fraud factory refers to a large scam centre found in Southeast Asia. The scam centre operators often recruit people through human trafficking and use them to deceive online users around the world into purchasing fraudulent cryptocurrencies, making cash transaction, and/or obtaining job offers. This job 'opportunity' is actually a ruse to recruit further victims of human trafficking.

injuries they receive. In our context, there are workers who labour in high-risk jobs and without proper protection, especially in the construction industry. These people are forced to bear the risks and liability of working in the industry, and this is a form of injustice.

Finally, I would also like to include people who lived or are living in the nearly abandoned city described in Ecclesiastes 12:3–6. The city is described as having reduced activity and a low population: the guards of the house tremble, the strong men kowtow, the women stop working (12:3), the doors on the street are closed, and there is no sound of any production work (12:4). All that is left is the sound of a bird (12:4), plants and insects, mourners marching in the streets (12:5), and damaged foundations (12:6). There are still people living there, but others have left or died. In the contemporary East Asian context, such as China and Japan, there are rural villages with aging populations, which feel the effects of urban migration, emigration and 'brain drain.'[348] The people left living there have spent their entire lives in the village, and they have less incentive to leave and less mobility to move to unfamiliar cities where their children or grandchildren may live. Their children and grandchildren may also feel guilty for leaving their parents and grandparents behind in dilapidated and remote villages. In addition, in my home city of Hong Kong, people are fleeing to other countries due to political reasons. Some of them fear they will face arrest upon returning home. Therefore, they and their parents need to live separately from each other. Their elderly parents are left in Hong Kong to live alone.

Having listed these four clusters of people mentioned but usually overlooked in Ecclesiastes, it is worth re-reading their presence in the text with critical empathy and trauma and bystander approaches. Reading as a bystander with critical empathy towards these overlooked people will help us to obtain an active reading, to become sensitised to their presence in our contexts, and to be an active bystander or upstander for them in relation to some social issues. Such an active reading is not able to solve the problems faced by these people in the text, but it will hopefully expand our understanding of the

[348] Matt Rivers and Lily Lee, 'Isolated and Abandoned: The Heartbreaking Reality of Old Age in Rural China,' CNN, 8 February 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/07/asia/china-elderly-people-new-year-intl/index.html; Takuro Chiba, 'While Migration to Tokyo Surges, Other Prefectures Dwindle | The Asahi Shimbun: Breaking News, Japan News and Analysis,' *The Asahi Shimbun*, 31 January 2024, https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15140199.

situations they are in and help us acknowledge their suffering, rather than misunderstanding and stereotyping them, which only creates further trauma. Due to word limitations, I cannot use my proposed reading strategy to study these people, whom I only identified late in my reading of Ecclesiastes. I will save this for future research.

The Agency Gained from Reading Ecclesiastes with This Strategy

Having read Ecclesiastes with critical empathy, I demonstrate how we can understand Qoheleth's passivity and inaction with respect to his exposure to traumatic events. I also talk about his struggles with multiple exposures. After this reading of Ecclesiastes with critical empathy, I will now discuss how reading Ecclesiastes can motivate readers to be active bystanders in their own present contexts by reflecting on Qoheleth's actions. This is important because readers read, in a sense, as though they are bystanders to the text. They can and do act like passive bystanders during their reading because they cannot alter, or intervene in, the situations or events depicted in the text. However, they *can* choose to exert agency if, in response to their reading (perhaps a critical empathetic reading), they adopt an active stance when they see people suffering injustices that are comparable to those Qoheleth sees. In other words, they can choose to act on what they derive and learn from the text—such as not being passive when there is an opportunity to intervene in situations they can change. This agency may be considered a less direct intervention, but I find it still significant, at least for the sake of justice. This is similar to Southwood's approach, where she is prompted to adopt critical empathy because 'marriage by capture' and rape are not just in the text of Judges 21 but are also in the world we live in.

First, bystander-readers can acknowledge and contemplate traumatic happenings and characters in need in the text. Hence, I have highlighted and discussed the oppressions and the oppressed in Ecclesiastes (4:1). We can identify the tears of the oppressed and also note that they have no comfort, which adds to their oppression and its burden. Empathy is not confined to events in our present; it can be incited by incidents that happened at a certain time, even long ago. It is also the case that empathy can be incited by fictional, rather than actual, events, such as those experienced by

characters in novels. For this reason, questions such as whether Qoheleth *is* the historical Solomon are immaterial to whether empathy is aroused.

During the Holocaust, when people saw their Jewish neighbour being forced by armed men into vehicles, how did they understand what was happening in front of them? They were witnessing a relocation; they saw people being forcibly relocated. Therefore, the first task of the reader reading Ecclesiastes is to clearly identify the people involved in the incidents mentioned in the text. These people include the oppressed who are in tears (4:1), the single person who has no son or brother (4:8), the youth who replaces the king (4:15), the poor and the high officials (5:8 [Eng 5:9]), the wealthy (5:12 [Eng 5:13]), the one who toils under the sun 5:17 [Eng 5:18], the righteous people who perish (7:15), the woman who is a trap (7:26), the poor wise man in a small city (9:14–15), the servants on horseback and the princes walking on foot like servants (10:5), the young man (11:9), the guards of the house, the strong men who have become bent, and the women who grind (12:3),[349] as well as the wise and foolish people frequently mentioned in the book. The lack of detailed descriptions of the people mentioned creates an inexplicable suspicion—a suspended feeling that something is not right—and a desire to know what is going on. No matter how much or how little readers know about them, identification with the people mentioned in Ecclesiastes sensitises them to similar events and people in real life. Readers might not know the details about these people or whether they are suffering and need help, but at least they may realise that something troubling has happened to someone. In affective term, readers are affected in their reading of Ecclesiastes. Though they see the people suffering in the text, they are no longer able to intervene at that time and place to change the situation described in the text or to provide comfort to mitigate the sufferers' pain. Instead,

[349] The phrase 'the women who grind' is once understood metaphorically as reference to teeth, forming part of the metaphor depicting the body getting old and approaching death. See, Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 181–89; Longman, *Book of Ecclesiastes*, 258–73. However, Seow rejects the allegorical interpretation of saying as teeth. (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 355, 377–78) He suggests that it can only be surmised that many women who work the mills either die suddenly or are forced to give up their vital work. He continues with the phrase 'those who look out the window,' linking it to a motif of women looking out of the window, often used to depict lost hopes of mothers, wives, and lovers. For example, Sisera's mother (Judg 5:28), Michal (2 Sam 6:16–23), and Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:30). He also suggests that the blurred vision may be due to grief (Lam 5:17), implying that 'something terrible is happening.' (Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 378)

readers can act in response to similar events in their own contexts and identify people in need in real life.

However, we should ask whether a reader will act after seeing the people suffering in the text; what motivates a reader to act in response to similar events in their own context? In his book, *Positive Social Behavior and Morality: Social and Personal Influences*, Staub studies the motivations of people who behave prosocially.[350] He regards the experience of another person's emotions as a motivator of prosocial behaviour.[351] He argues that experiencing another's emotions, such as distress, can motivate us to take actions aimed at mitigating the emotions. As he promotes empathy in his publications, he provides a thick description of empathy and how it implies a series of actions:

> Empathy implies a certain kind of identification with other people. The extent to which various conditions lead to identification without the experience of empathy is of interest. Identification with other persons implies the adoption of their goals and desires—to a degree as if the goals were one's own—and subsequent attempts to fulfill these goals.[352]

Ecclesiastes promotes a series of actions that readers can do in response to the suffering of people in need. Readers become the ones responsible for fulfilling the goals and desires of the people after they have identified these people's needs in the text. For example, readers can identify in the text the oppressed who have no one to comfort them (Eccl 4:1), and they can also identify people in similar situations in their own context and attempt to provide them with comfort.

Second, readers can make connections between text and context, like Reaves and Southwood do, relating what they have seen in the ancient text and in their own society. Having applied the bystander approach and critical empathy to the reading of Ecclesiastes, I acknowledge the critiques from commentators regarding Qoheleth's inaction, and I offer an empathetic consideration of Qoheleth's passivity. On the one hand, I can see why scholars criticise Qoheleth's inaction. As I discussed, Qoheleth has abundant resources and could, presumably, have intervened to assuage the oppression

---

[350] Ervin Staub, *Positive Social Behavior and Morality: Social and Personal Influences*, vol. 1 (New York: Academic Press, 1978).
[351] Staub, *Positive Social Behavior*, 1:44–5.
[352] Staub, *Positive Social Behavior*, 1:45.

he sees. On the other hand, there is a difference between doing nothing and being passive. That Qoheleth does not actively intervene does not mean he is not transformed in any way. I empathetically regard Qoheleth as a witness to multiple situations of injustice. When he seems not to take any action at all, he is at least giving testimony about the unjust situation, which, I believe, can be a traumatic recounting process. Witnessing the incident itself is traumatic, but so too is recalling the memory, admitting one's failure to halt it, or to halt it and bear the consequent sadness, guilt, and self-blame. I neither deny nor legitimate Qoheleth's inaction, but I doubt whether he condones or endures the injustice.

After reading Ecclesiastes, readers may not fully perceive the whole picture provided by the text; likewise, a bystander may not have a comprehensive understanding of the scene they are witnessing in their own context. However, we can see in Ecclesiastes how Qoheleth retells what he sees and how he is affected. He expresses that something has gone wrong even though he does not/cannot retell the whole scenario or make changes to solve the problem. Retelling is at least a means of standing with the victims, no matter whether we can bring changes to their situation. It also resonates with the well-known campaign of the British Transport Police (hereafter BTP), 'See it. Say it. Sorted.' This campaign asks people, particularly rail passengers, to report unusual items or activity on trains or in stations. According to the BTP website, the campaign's aim is to help keep passengers, people who use railway stations, and others safe.[353] It encourages all people to play a role in keeping the rail network safe for the sake of themselves and others. This suggests that what we see and hear plays a role in keeping the area around ourselves and others safe. The action encouraged (speaking up) is different from the victim reporting a crime; rather, it is a distinctive report by a bystander who is not reporting injury or harm from the perspective of victims, but is reporting that something *seems* wrong in terms of what they perceive. As the BTP states, it relies on members of the public 'to be our eyes and ears' and to report what they see and hear. In this campaign, rail passengers are not asked to 'sort out' the problem, but they can help to flag up a suspicious issue. A similar process can also take place in biblical studies. For example, in Southwood's chapter, she clarifies that she cannot and does not aim to alter the rapes occurring in Judges 21, but she recognises the

[353] British Transport Police, 'See It. Say It. Sorted,' accessed 3 October 2023, https://www.btp.police.uk/police-forces/british-transport-police/areas/campaigns/see-it-say-it-sorted/.

events described as rape when she retells what happens in the text, and she also aligns the events of Judges 21 with real-life situations in Asian countries. Readers' sensitisation to trauma and their retellings of biblical narratives of trauma help flag up the violence and injustice in the texts, as well as in their own social reality.

Third, readers can stay active by reflecting on the text and context. They can acknowledge and retell the disturbing issues they have seen in the text. A bystander's response can involve actions as well as feelings, waiting, reflections, expectations, and so on. It may not include a spontaneous action or intervention that immediately halts the harm or rescues the victim from danger, but it is still an important process that allows the bystander to sensitise themselves to their feelings and reflections. These feelings and reflections can keep us from getting desensitised to scenes of people suffering or acts of injustice, and from interpreting the disturbing issues as acceptable in the biblical world.

As discussed above, the reader can acknowledge the characters who are in need in the text and also the people who are in need in their own contexts. In Ecclesiastes, the frequent occurrences of 'good' and 'better to' can, on the one hand, be regarded as Qoheleth's response to explain what happened after witnessing a traumatic event. On the other hand, the repeated use of these words can encourage the bystander-reader to compare and reflect on their worldviews with the guidance given by Qoheleth. The worldviews can include universal values, religious exhortations, cultural values, and personal preferences. They provide a way for readers to consider a better way to respond to the people recognised as suffering in their contexts. The numerous occurrences of 'good' and 'better to' do not happen at the end of the book but are instead spread across different chapters. Qoheleth evaluates situations after he has seen them. This happens not only once but as a continuous process. He stays undecided about what to do in response to what he sees, which might be considered as inaction, but his reflection never stops. He picks up again to think through the poor and the wealthy, as well as the fools and the wise.[354] When he sees something similar again and feels it is not right, he thinks it over again rather than reaching an easy decision. Readers may also see people in need in their contexts, but they too have no easy solution.

[354] The passages about the poor and the wealthy occur in 4:8, 13; 5:7 (Eng 5:8)–6:2; 9:11; the texts about fools and wise occur in 1:17; 2:12–16, 19; 4:5, 13, 17 (Eng 5:1)–5:4; 6:8; 7:4–8:1, 5, 16–17; 9:1, 3, 10–18; 10:1–15; 12:9–11.

Uncertain decisions occur not only when we see people in need but also when we see mysterious and inexplicable happenings. There are some difficult passages in Ecclesiastes for which there are no clear meanings, such as Qoheleth's statement that a woman is more bitter than death (7:26) and his call to 'send your bread upon the waters' (11:1). There are also some verses whose meaning is unclear, like the mention of dead flies causing a stink (10:1) and the servants who ride on horses while princes walk (10:7). We cannot find the reasons for and meanings of all the things mentioned in Ecclesiastes, but at least we see Qoheleth raising them, investigating their details, and seeking to understand them with his wisdom. Readers can continue to read and bring up difficult or potentially problematic texts, such as the stigmatisation of women in 7:26, and seek to understand rather than censor, ignore, or expurgate them. [355] As we can see, there are also unbelievable and inexplicable social disasters in our contexts, such as warfare and the associated torture of women, children and soldiers, as well as genocide and terrorism. We do not understand how the perpetrators can do such a thing, causing people to suffer devastating pain and be treated without dignity. However, not discussing the texts does not help solve the situations depicted therein, which can indeed be found in our contexts. Certain biblical passages might deliver improper ideologies, such as Qoheleth's seemingly patriarchal comment about a woman being more bitter than death (7:26), but I am not advocating that any such text (including those whose meaning is unclear) be eliminated or altered. Eliminating these texts will just throw the baby out with the bathwater. Instead, empathetic readings using trauma-informed bystander perspectives can help embrace the unknown and unexplainable elements of a text, keeping those who suffer in mind and seeking to mitigate further harm to them and others. Critical empathetic reading, then, is a way to be active on behalf of those who are suffering. It is a way to give agency to the reader in what might be considered a passive process. A bystander-reader might be considered a passive bystander-reader who is unable to intervene in the situations in the text. Still, a passive bystander-reader can transform into an active bystander-reader who actively and recursively becomes sensitised to and resists the ideologies embedded in the texts and in the contexts where they read these difficult or even toxic texts.

[355] Deryn Guest has proposed this with regard to parts of Lamentations. See Deryn Guest, 'Hiding Behind the Naked Women in Lamentations: A Recriminative Response,' *Biblical Interpretation* 7, no. 4 (1999): 413–48, https://doi.org/10.1163/156851599X00308.

Summary: Why Is Critical Empathy Helpful in Reading Biblical Texts?

This chapter introduced critical empathy through three scholarly definitions. I discussed how critical empathy is applied to biblical studies, using as illustration the example of Southwood's application of critical empathy in her re-interpretation of Judges 21. I also presented a critical empathetic reading with a trauma approach to the book of Job. I applied critical empathy, combined with a three-pronged approach, to explore possibilities for understanding Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes. I explained that my application of critical empathy to biblical interpretation is based on my experience and personality. My work criticised Qoheleth, who is regarded as a bystander standing idly by; but I also empathised with his inaction as he happens to witness trauma and is possibly traumatised himself. I also demonstrated that critical empathy is an ongoing process by describing the development of my interpretations of Ecclesiastes; my first attempt to read the text with critical empathy focused primarily on Qoheleth's inaction; later, I evaluated his arrogance and then sought out others whom I had overlooked. I ended this chapter by suggesting the agency that readers can gain through reading Ecclesiastes.

CONCLUSIONS

Contributions to Reading Ecclesiastes

This study has highlighted the significance and effectiveness of a critical reading strategy that uses a three-pronged approach—combining affect studies, trauma studies, and the bystander approach—to interpret the biblical book of Ecclesiastes. I have argued that, taken together, these approaches facilitate critical empathy, which, in turn, brings relevance, meaning, and transformation to both text and reader.

Analysis of affective vocabulary in Ecclesiastes illustrates the correlation between emotions, or affect, and trauma in the text. Biblical trauma studies is in its heyday, and I have brought Ecclesiastes into trauma studies discussions, where the book has not hitherto been well represented. Through focusing on affective vocabulary in this book, I have revealed traces of trauma in the text. Moreover, while trauma studies acknowledges that traumatic events have an impact not only on victims but also on witnesses, I have nuanced this further with emphasis on the category of the bystander: both the bystander *in the text* and *the reader as bystander*. I have also acknowledged that the fight, flight, freeze and (be)friend responses to traumatic events or situations mandate against any one predictable reaction, thereby nuancing trauma interpretation. Divergent trauma responses can also help account for the contradictions and the lack of any accepted unifying theme for Ecclesiastes—indeed, it can allow us to desist from looking for unifying or tidy answers.

Alongside examinations of affect and trauma, the bystander approach has highlighted particularly the trauma of bystanders, which is distinct from that of direct victims. The application of the bystander approach is adapted from Holocaust studies. Its application to Ecclesiastes is novel in emergent bystander discussions. I have tried to illuminate the study of trauma through the perspective of bystanders, that is, not the 'main players'—the perpetrators and victims. By reviewing the terms 'onlooker' and 'bystander,' as used in Holocaust studies, I have attempted to clarify the connotations of these terms and to move the discussion of the bystander beyond their responsibility to intervene.

The application of the bystander perspective to Ecclesiastes is new. Lentz's survey is to date the most comprehensive survey of bystanders in the Bible, but it does

not include Ecclesiastes. My application considers not only Qoheleth as a bystander but also the reader of Ecclesiastes as bystander. This approach seeks to promote an active reading of Ecclesiastes, which encourages readers to engage with the text much like an active bystander engages; it is an approach that seeks agency. All in all, the reading strategy aims for critical empathy—that is, the combination of critical and intellectual inquiry with affective and imaginative engagement.

Contributions to Biblical Studies

While my proposed reading strategy is focused on the book of Ecclesiastes, I suggest it holds value for other biblical texts, too. As such, it makes a contribution to biblical studies more widely.

In this thesis I have demonstrated how Ecclesiastes can be interpreted from a trauma perspective, including through close examination of affective vocabulary. My initial focus was on the vocabulary of pain, fear, anger, and sadness, as well as evil (רע), a term that, as I have demonstrated, is widely rendered into emotions. This encounter with affective vocabulary and the affects it represents established a connection between the reader and the text. From there, I moved to trauma, focusing particularly on the witness's position. Hence, I viewed Qoheleth as a witness who reacts to seeing others suffer. This strategy expands the trauma approach in biblical studies, in that it focuses on bystander figures who may also have been traumatised by what they witness. I also extended this to interpret the reader as a bystander. All of this works against certain assumptions in some forms of traditional biblical criticism, where the biblical text is treated above all as a historical artefact and as something to be investigated dispassionately or objectively. My approach seeks a method that engages both critical and emotional faculties, or critical empathy. Especially when reading a biblical text as a document of faith and guidance—as is the case with me – this yields value. Why? Because it facilitates engaged reading and reading that can motivate to action (as comparable with an active bystander).

I have expanded the bystander approach, adapted from Holocaust studies, to foreground both trauma and personal engagement and responsibility. In doing so, I have moved beyond focusing only, or primarily, on victims (insiders) to include more

‘outsiders’ as stakeholders in trauma. This makes the application of trauma studies to biblical studies not limited to those who have been directly subject to traumatic events (victims of primary traumatisation) or have experienced trauma but also includes those who witness trauma. This approach opens up room for future research in two ways. One way is to identify bystanders in the biblical texts and examine whether they are traumatised, especially in what might be called terror texts. Another way is to extend awareness of the role and potential traumatisation of readers and researchers of the Hebrew Bible. This approach allows for the study of how readers and researchers are affected when exposed to traumatic scenes in the text. Moreover, bystander-readers and bystander-researchers are also invited to respond after reading about the traumatic experiences of others—the figures in the text.

Critical empathy is only beginning to find a place in biblical studies. I have applied it to my interpretation of Ecclesiastes, combining affect, trauma, and bystander approaches to gain a new understanding of texts as a traumatised bystander-reader. Critical empathy need not only be used to link affect, trauma, and bystander perspectives; it can also be used to link with other existing critical methods of interpretation. For example, it can link the bystander perspective to a postcolonial perspective. It can provide critique of the coloniser by the colonised and of the impacts of colonisation. Meanwhile, as a bystander, one can see both the colonisers and the colonised. The bystanders of colonisation who live outside the colonial power hierarchy of colonialism can choose to be onlookers. Alternatively, they can choose to be active bystanders because their position allows them to criticise the coloniser and colonisation without fear of threatening consequences. Critical empathy combined with the bystander perspective can create an active reading position and provide readers with an option to choose how to respond when reading about colonisation. Critical empathy opens up new paths that may be different from those of existing criticisms, for instance some postcolonial criticism and feminist criticism. This is not to pull these criticisms down or to ask feminists or colonised persons to empathise with patriarchal or colonial hegemony. Rather, it acknowledges more explicitly than these approaches tend to the role of affect and personal responsiveness to traumatic texts, and it invites bystander-readers to remain engaged with the issues discussed, to distinguish between taking sides, and to seek understanding of complexity. When a reader or bystander is not engaged, maybe because they see no relevance or purpose in speaking out or standing

up to such things as misogynistic hegemony, the ill-treatment on women, or colonial oppression in biblical texts, they have less motivation to participate in any discussion or advocacy. The bystander perspective and critical empathy aim to enhance the reader's sense of the text's relevance and their awareness of having a stake in the text through emphasising the reader's role as a bystander who can be active or passive.

Why Are Holistic Strategies Useful?

My approach has foregrounded that a biblical scholar is a person seeking knowledge and understanding of an intellectually motivated type but is also affectively engaged and brings experience, including of trauma, to the reading and interpretation process. Womanist biblical scholars have long demonstrated that the self, as a whole, reads the biblical text. Though I am not a womanist, my method also emphasises this engagement of the whole self. All affect, trauma, and bystander approaches are aimed at bringing to the surface a critically empathetic reading of the biblical text—in my case, of Ecclesiastes. This, in turn, can make the ancient text more relevant and poignant in our own respective settings.

Such self-engagement in biblical interpretation contrasts with the traditional emphasis on objectivity and rationalism. It is also different from the traditional historical-critical methods, which have obscured that readers read subjectively and in embodied, emotionally engaged ways. Self-engaging interpretation has become more accepted and, for me, a welcome development in biblical studies. My work makes a further contribution towards this by introducing a three-pronged affect-trauma-bystander approach. Reading as a bystander-reader further includes engagement of readers in the exploration of the text's meanings and significance to our modern diverse contexts.

Finally, I wish to comment on the non-exclusive specificity of this strategy. I suggest that this holistic strategy is useful in biblical reading, as I have illustrated with reading Ecclesiastes. It opens up new possibilities of reading the text and finding it can have meaning and speak into new and different situations; but I am not arguing that this is the only way to read Ecclesiastes. My personal experience and positionality shape my interpretation and empathic target group. Different readers have different experiences, concerns, and empathic priorities and will, consequently, interpret a text in different

ways. As such, I am not seeking this strategy to be prescriptive, neither in relation to Ecclesiastes nor other biblical texts.

Future Research Directions

By applying the proposed strategy, I have come to discover that there are many areas for further exploration in Ecclesiastes and other biblical texts. In Ecclesiastes, in addition to targeting Qoheleth as bystander, one can continue reading about other overlooked figures. I list these figures in the last section of Chapter 4. Applying this strategy, we might ask: 'Where are they? How are they? Who are they? What about them? Why do they receive less attention? How do these toils compare to the plight of (im)migrants? What traumatic experiences do they have? What is their agency?' Interrogating these questions is similar to what I would describe as a critically empathetic approach, such as in Makhosazana K. Nzimande's reading of the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1–16), which asks about Naboth's wife who is entirely unmentioned in the text, or in the way that Reaves's reading, which engages with Sarah and Hagar, promotes self-engagement in biblical reading.[356]

I chose to analyse Ecclesiastes from the perspectives of affect, trauma, and the bystander. These terms or lenses do not appear explicitly in the text. In previous chapters, I have demonstrated how they can help to read the text. Although I pay little attention to the historical context of Ecclesiastes, the strategy I propose is never in opposition to the historical-critical approaches to studying the historical contexts of Ecclesiastes. On the contrary, the study of historical context can be one of the perspectives that provides insights into the living conditions of the people mentioned in the text. The proposed method does have the capacity to include a historical approach as one of multiple perspectives. Because the historical context of Ecclesiastes is unclear, I have not incorporated this perspective into the strategy I propose. For other biblical books, a historical perspective would probably aid this strategy. For example, the historical background of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah can provide information

[356] Makhosazana K. Nzimande, 'Reconfiguring Jezebel: A Postcolonial Imbokodo Reading of the Story of Naboth's Vineyard (I Kings 21:1–16),' in *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning*, ed. Gerald West and Hans de Wit, Studies of Religion in Africa 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 223–58, https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004166561.i-434; Reaves, 'Sarah as Victim and Perpetrator.'

about the Israelites' return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple after the edict of Cyrus (Ezra 1). This would help to compare strategies of colonisation in ancient and modern contexts, as well as to critically empathise with different patterns of colonial relations between coloniser and colonised. In addition to Ecclesiastes, this strategy can be applied to other biblical texts by developing the search for and examination of bystanders in texts, much like Lentz's survey, but moving beyond a focus on intervention. Instead, one might look for those who have not intervened or have no record of intervention. I suggest that this strategy can be applied to readings of various servants in the Hebrew Bible. These servants can be considered as bystanders of their masters' decisions. For example, Abraham's servants see their master Abraham binding his son Isaac (Gen 22:1–19); the steward of Joseph's house puts the silver cup in Benjamin's bag (Gen 44:1–13); Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives, refuse the Egyptian king's order to kill all the sons born to Hebrew women (Exod 1:15–22); Joab follows David's command and places Uriah in the front ranks of battle to be killed (2 Samuel 11); and the servants follow Amnon's command to leave Tamar alone with Amnon, and then return to cast her out after she is raped (2 Samuel 13). Applying this strategy, we might further ask: 'Are they compliant onlookers, or rebels? How are they affected? Why do they make and live with the decisions they make? Who might they be or represent in our own context?' Reading these servants with critical empathy may help us explore workplace ethics and compliance or whistleblowing in modern contexts, for instance.

Moreover, this strategy of considering the reader as bystander can contribute to a re-examination of the developing studies of biblical texts and violence. This strategy can include those who have no interest in or connection with terror and violence, inviting them to return and see the text as bystanders. This is akin to including those 'floating voters' (those whose voting is unpredictable) and deviant voters (those who have no strict voting patterns) in election surveys. Similar to studying the behaviours of these voters, examining readers' refusal to read or to acknowledge terror and violence in biblical texts can provide valuable insights for research. By focusing on how readers engage with or avoid recognising the terror in the text, researchers can gain insights into how readers perceive and respond to texts of terror in the Hebrew Bible, and they can investigate the broader social, cultural or psychological factors influencing the perception of trauma. Furthermore, this strategy provides researchers with a bystander

perspective to analyse the trauma suffered by the victim, rather than from the perspective of the self-imagined victim. This approach allows researchers to examine the trauma from an external viewpoint and better understand how the trauma is represented and processed from the perspectives of both those who experience the trauma and those who observe it as a bystander.

The thesis ultimately shows that there is more work to be done and yet more books to be written—there is no end.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Programme Units, Speakers, and Paper Titles Presented at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting 2023 that Included the Keyword 'Trauma'

Programme Unit	Speaker and Paper Title
Exile (Forced Migrations) in Biblical Literature	Mark W. Hamilton, Abilene Christian University, 'From Form Criticism to Trauma Studies: Forced Migration Since Ackroyd.'
Biblical Literature and the Hermeneutics of Trauma	Chun Luen Wu, China Graduate School of Theology, 'Language of Otherness as Rhetoric of Trauma in the Book of Job.' Michelle Keener, Liberty University, 'Shattered Theology: Trauma and De-Creation in the Book of Job.' Xi Li, Shandong University, 'Theodicy or Antitheodicy: Posttraumatic Reactions in the Book of Lamentations.' Brad E. Kelle, Point Loma Nazarene University, 'Is Hosea Also Among the Traumatized? The Book of Hosea and Trauma Hermeneuti[c]s of the Prophets.'
Pauline Theology	(The unit description contains the keyword 'trauma,' but paper titles do not.)
Writing/Reading Jeremiah	Mathilde Frey, Walla Walla University, 'Women's Bodies on the Side of the Road: Rhetoric and Metaphors of Trauma and Hope in Jeremiah 13 and 31.'
Historiography and the Hebrew Bible	Dominik Markl, Universität Innsbruck, 'Memory Versus Repression: Mass Violence, Trauma Theory, and Historiography.'
The Book of Isaiah / Biblical Literature and the Hermeneutics of Trauma (joint session)	Alphonso Groenewald, University of Pretoria, 'What Is the Significance of the Rape of the Babylonian Women? A Trauma and Resilience Reading of Isaiah 13:16.'
Metaphor Theory and the Hebrew Bible	Joseph Nnamdi Mokwe, KU Leuven, Belgium, 'Ephraim Has Become like a Rebellious Senseless Dove: The Bird Imagery of Hosea 7:11 in Light of Cultural Trauma Studies.'
Biblical Literature and the Hermeneutics of Trauma	Angela Sawyer, Sydney College of Divinity, 'A Case Study on Case Studies: Analyzing Trauma and Growth in Biblical Texts.'

Programme Unit	Speaker and Paper Title
	Christopher Jones, Washburn University, and Alexiana Fry, University of Copenhagen, 'Texts of Terror? Exploring Religious Trauma(s) with Tools in the Classroom.' Sonia Kwok WONG, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working through the Traumatic Loss of Homeland in the Deuteronomistic (Hi)Story.' Moyer Hubbard, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, 'Paul the Ektroma: Reappraising a Disturbing Metaphor of Death, Birth, and Trauma.'
Social Scientific Criticism of the New Testament	Ma. Marilou S. Ibita, De la Salle University, Manila, 'From Resilience to Sustainability: Exploring the Contributions of Social Science to a Combined Biblical Ecological and Trauma Hermeneutics.'

Appendix II: Affective Terms in Ecclesiastes

	Group	Hebrew	Meaning in *HOL*	Verses	Translations in NRSVue	Translations in RCUV
1.	Painful	מַכְאֹב	Noun 1. pain 2. suffering (p. 193)	1:18 2:23	sorrow pain	憂傷 憂慮
2.	Tired	יָגֵעַ	Adjective 1. tired, weary 2. wearisome (p. 127)	1:8	wearisome	令人厭倦
3.	Tired	יגע	Verb (piel) 1. tire, weary (someone) 2. trouble (someone) (p. 127)	10:15	wears them out	使自己困乏
4.	Fear	יְרֵא	Adjective 1. afraid of 2. fearful (p. 143)	7:18 8:12 8:13 9.2	the one who fears those who fear stand in fear shun	敬畏(上帝) 的 敬畏(上帝) 的 敬畏 怕
5.	Fear	ירא	Verb (Qal) 1. fear 2. fear (God, gods, sanctuary, father and mother) 3. be afraid (p. 143)	3:14 5:6 (Eng 5:7) 8:12 12:5 12:13	stand in awe fear (God) fear (God) afraid of fear (God)	敬畏 敬畏(上帝) 敬畏(上帝) 怕 敬畏(上帝)
6.	Folly	הוֹלֵלוֹת	Noun folly, delusion (p. 78)	1:17 2:12 7:25 9:3 10:13	madness madness madness madness madness	狂妄 狂妄 狂妄 狂妄 狂妄
7.	Folly	סִכְלוּת	Noun foolishness (p. 256)	1:17 2:3 2:12 2:13 7:25 10:1 10:13	folly folly folly folly foolishness folly foolishness	愚昧 愚昧 愚昧 愚昧 愚昧 愚昧 愚昧
8.	Scared	עָמָל	Noun 1. distress, trouble 2. what is gained by toil (i.e. land and produce) 3. toil, effort 4. misfortune 5. disaster, evil (p. 276)	1:3 2:10 (twice) 2:11 2:18 2:19 2:20 2:21 2:22 2:24 3:13	toil toil, toil toil toil (nil) toil toil (verb) toil toil toil	勞碌 勞碌, 勞碌 工 勞碌 (nil) 工作 勞碌工作 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌

	Group	Hebrew	Meaning in *HOL*	Verses	Translations in NRSVue	Translations in RCUV
				4:4 4:6 4:8 4:9 5:14 (Eng 5:15) 5:17 (Eng 5:18) 5:18 (Eng 5:19) 6:7 8:15 9:9 10:15	toil toil toil toil toil toil toil toil toil toil toil	勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 (nil) 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 (nil) 勞碌
9.	Scared	עמל	Verb (Qal) exert oneself, labour (p. 276)	1:3 2:11 2:18 2:19 2:20 2:21 2:22 3:9 4:8 5:15 (Eng 5:16) 5:17 (Eng 5:18) 8:17 9:9	toil spend in doing toil toil labours toil toil toil (noun) toil toiling toil toil toil	勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 勞碌 費多少力 勞碌
10.	Angry	כַּעַס	Noun irritation, anger, provocation (p. 162)	1:18 2:23 7:3 7:9b 11:10	vexation vexation sorrow anger anxiety	愁煩 愁煩 憂愁 惱怒 愁煩
11.	Angry	כעס	Verb (Qal) be irritated, angry (p. 162)	5:16 (Eng 5:17) 7:9a	anger anger	煩惱 惱怒
12.	Angry	קֶצֶף	Noun anger, rage (p. 322)	5:16 (Eng 5:17)	resentment	怒氣
13.	Angry	קצף	Verb (Qal) be(come) angry (p. 322)	5:5 (Eng 5:6)	angry	發怒
14.	Angry	שׂנא	Verb (Qal) 1. hate 2. be unable (or unwilling) to put up with, slight 3. enemy (p. 353)	2:17 2:18 3:8	hate hate hate	恨惡 恨惡 恨惡
15.	Angry	קלל	Verb (Piel) declare, curse	7:21 7:22 10:20 (twice)	curse curse curse, curse	詛咒 詛咒 詛咒, 詛咒

	Group	Hebrew	Meaning in *HOL*	Verses	Translations in NRSVue	Translations in RCUV
			Verb (Pilpel) 1. whet (edges of metal) 2. shake (arrows for casting lots) (p. 319)	10:10	whet the edge	磨快
16.	Sad	רַע	Noun 1. bad quality 2. ugliness 3. bad humor, crossness 4. perverseness, malice (p. 342)	7:3	sadness	愁
17.	Sad	בכה	Verb (Qal) 1. weep 2. bewail (p. 39)	3:4	weep	哭
18.	Sad	ספד	Verb (Qal) 1. beat the breast 2. sound a lament (p. 258)	3:4 12.5	mourn mourner	哀慟 弔喪的
19.	Evil	רַע	Adjective 1. of bad quality, inferior, ugly 2. disagreeable, unwholesome 3. bad, of no value, contemptible 4. bad-tempered, evil, morally depraved 5. bad (in the eyes): disagreeable, displeasing, undesirable, annoying, objectionable, disapproved of; annoying to (in Eccl 2:17) 6. bad, vicious, harmful 7. evil, adverse 8. bad, evil (in the absolute, ethical sense) 9. in a bad mood, cross, discontented 10. evil (as a noun) 11. prone to evil (p. 342)	1:13 2:17 4:3 4:8 4:17 (Eng 5:1) 5:13 (Eng 5:14) 6:2 8:3 8:5 8:11b 8:12 9:3 (twice) 9:12a 10:13 12:14	unhappy grievous evil unhappy evil bad grievous unpleasant harm evil evil evil, evil cruel wicked evil	沉重的 煩惱 惡 極沉重的 惡 不幸/不善 禍 惡 禍患 惡 惡 禍患, 惡 險惡的 邪惡的 惡
20.	Evil	רָעָה	Noun (difficult to distinguish from	2:21 5:12 (Eng 5:13)	evil grievous/ill?	不幸 憂傷的/禍患

	Group	Hebrew	Meaning in *HOL*	Verses	Translations in NRSVue	Translations in RCUV
			adjective in feminine form) 1. (intended) evil, harm (to someone) 2. wickedness, perverseness, crime 3. misery, trouble, disaster, evil (in a weakened sense) (p. 343)	5:15 (Eng 5:16) 6:1 7:14 7:15 8:6 8:9 8:11a 9:12b 10:5 11:2 11:10 12:1	grievous/ill? evil adversity evildoing troubles hurt evil calamity evil disaster pain trouble	憂傷的/禍患 禍患 患難 惡 苦難 受害 判罪 禍患的 禍患 災禍 痛苦 衰老的
21.	Joyful	שָׂמֵחַ	Adjective filled with joy (p. 353)	2:10[1]	find pleasure	快樂
22.	Joyful	שִׂמְחָה	Noun joy (both emotion and its manifestation) (p. 353)	2:1 2:2 2:10 2:26 5:19 (Eng 5:20) 7:4 8:15 9:7	pleasure pleasure pleasure joy joy mirth enjoyment enjoyment	喜樂 享樂 所樂的 喜樂 喜樂 快樂 快樂 快樂
23.	Joyful	שׂמח	Verb (Qal) 1. rejoice 2. be joyful, glad (Piel) 1. make someone or something glad 2. allow someone to rejoice (p. 353)	3:12 3:22 4:16 5:18 (Eng 5:19) 8:15 11:8 11:9 10:19	be happy enjoy rejoice find enjoyment enjoy rejoice rejoice gladden	喜樂 喜樂 喜歡 喜樂 快樂 快樂 當快樂 使人快活
24.	Joyful	שׁבח	Verb (Piel) praise, glorify, congratulate (p. 358)	4:2 8:15	commend commend	讚歎 稱讚
25.	Desire	חֵפֶץ	Noun 1. joy, pleasure 2. wish 3. costly jewels, treasure, jewel	3:1 3:17 5:3 (Eng 5:4) 5:7 (Eng 5:8) 8:6	matter matter pleasure matter matter	事務 事務 喜歡 (nil) 事務

[1] It is ambiguous whether שָׂמֵחַ is an adjective or a verb in 2:10.

	Group	Hebrew	Meaning in *HOL*	Verses	Translations in NRSVue	Translations in RCUV
			4. affair, business (p. 112)	12:1 12:10	pleasure pleasing	喜悅 喜悅
26.	Desire	חפץ	Verb (Qal) 1. want, desire 2. take pleasure 3. wish to 4. be willing, be inclined (p. 112)	8:3	please	隨(自己)心意
27.	Laugh	שׂחק	Verb (Qal) 1. play, act clumsy 2. laugh, smile at on someone (p. 350)	3:4	laugh	笑
28.	Satiation	שָׂבָע	Noun satiation, plenty (p. 348)	5:11 (Eng 5:12)	abundance	豐足
29.	To be satisfied	שׂבע	Verb (Qal) be satiated, have had enough 1. be satiated with food, have had enough to eat 2. be satiated with drink, have had enough to drink 3. satisfy one's hunger with, have had enough (food) 4. have had enough, can take no more (of something which becomes disgusting) 5. satisfy one's hunger with, have had enough, can take no more 6. get one's fill of, become satiated 7. see enough (p. 348)	1:8 4:8 5:9 (Eng 5:10) 6:3	be satisfied be satisfied be satisfied enjoy	飽 滿足 滿足 滿足

Appendix III: Studies on Select Affects in Ecclesiastes

Pain

A word for pain (מַכְאֹב) occurs in noun form sixteen times in the Hebrew Bible: Exod 3:7; 2 Chr 6:29; Job 33:19; Ps 32:10; 38:18; 69:27; Eccl 1:18; 2:23; Isa 53:3, 4; Jer 30:15; 45:3; 51:8; Lam 1:12 (twice), 18. It represents physical pain (Exod 3:7; 2 Chr 6:29; Job 33:19) or mental anguish (Ps 32:10; 38:18; 69:27; Eccl 1:18; 2:23; Isa 53:3, 4; Jer 30:15; 45:3; 51:8; Lam 1:12 [twice], 18).[2]

> What benefit to the man in all suffering which he suffers under the sun? (Eccl 1:3)

First, Ecclesiastes begins with a mood of despair over suffering. In the beginning of the book, Qoheleth asks a philosophical question after his typical proclamation of vanity: what do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun? (NRSV). In most English translations, the question is about profit (JPS, KJV) or gain (NRSV, NIV) for all his labour (JPS, KJV, NIV) or toil (NRSV). The related words in Hebrew are יִתְרוֹן and עָמָל, the precise meanings of which are ambiguous. The word עָמָל also appears in other biblical books, but the dominant meaning elsewhere is not the same as 'toil,' as commonly translated in Ecclesiastes. Among the seventy-five occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, thirty-five of these are in the book of Ecclesiastes: nearly half of the total occurrences. The next two most frequent occurrences are fourteen and ten in the Psalms and the book of Job, respectively. The word עָמָל also appears in other books: Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Judges, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jonah, and Habakkuk. In the NRSV, it is mainly translated as 'trouble' or 'mischief' in Psalms, and as 'trouble' or 'misery' in the book of Job. It is translated as 'toil' only three times outside of Ecclesiastes (Deut 26:7; Ps 90:10; Jer 20:18). Unlike the occurrences in Ecclesiastes, עָמָל appears alongside other words with a similar meaning in these three texts: לַחֲצֵנוּ ('oppression,' Deut 26:7), וָאָוֶן ('trouble,' Ps 90:10), and וְיָגוֹן ('sorrow,' Jer 20:18). The linkage with similar words, or synonyms, may assist in grasping the nuanced meaning of עָמָל. When עָמָל in those three verses is translated as 'toil,' the meaning of 'trouble/mischief/misery' is represented by another word. Therefore, in the absence of other words with a similar meaning to 'trouble,' the translation of עָמָל to 'toil'

[2] *BDB*, 456.

without referring to trouble and distress is rather peculiar in Ecclesiastes. This may match with other commercial terms and the unique commercial context in Ecclesiastes; however, it sacrifices the meanings of 'trouble,' 'mischief,' and 'misery.' In fact, the commercial trading context of Ecclesiastes is something of a circular proof of the translations of the word. The selection of translations of some words defines a context, which then feeds back to the selection of translations of other words.

Based on the linguistic evidence, Seow sets the date of Ecclesiastes in the Persian period, specifically between the second half of the fifth and the first half of the fourth centuries BCE (450–350 BCE).[3] He then delivers an account of the socioeconomic context of the Persian period, within which money plays a prominent role. Based on the date of the book and the socioeconomic context of the period, Seow suggests that the original audience were engaged in economic matters.[4] He also identifies that the development of the monetary economy during that period created a new world of money, as is reflected by the vocabularies used by Qoheleth: money, riches, rich, private possession, salary, reward, inheritance, success, surplus, advantage, deficit, account, assets, yield, abundance, wealth, business, toil, consumer, worker, and portion.[5] Therefore, the interpretation of the sayings in Ecclesiastes and the definitions of some vocabularies are heavily dependent on the date of the book and its implied socioeconomic context.

However, there are two possibilities that make this interpretation and definition of the vocabulary problematic. First, there is no consensus on the date of Ecclesiastes. Weeks suggests it could have been written between 500 and 150 BCE. The most probable range, he approximates, is between 300 and 150 BCE.[6] This inconsistency in dating makes it difficult to determine the implied context for interpreting and defining the vocabulary in Ecclesiastes. Second, even if some terms carry a strong commercial character, they do not only reflect something about economy. They can be used as a tool to set up a socioeconomic context and then refer to some other topics beyond the monetary economy of the context. This brings us back to the discussion of the meanings of the word עָמָל.

[3] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 21.
[4] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 21–23.
[5] Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 22.
[6] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1–5*, 78.

As I have listed, עָמָל can mean ‘trouble,’ ‘mischief,’ ‘misery,’ or ‘toil’ in the Hebrew Bible. Among these meanings, ‘mischief’ and ‘misery’ specify the sources of trouble; they represent trouble as done to others (mischief) and trouble as suffered by oneself (misery).[7] In Ecclesiastes, the choice of meaning (‘toil’) may reflect an assumed socioeconomic context, but it sacrifices the mood of misery and trouble. The word עמל also appears as a verb and an adjective; since there is no verb derived from ‘trouble,’ ‘mischief,’ or ‘misery’ in English, I would suggest the use of ‘suffering’ and ‘suffer,’ respectively, to translate the noun and verb forms of עמל. This is in line with עמל in its adjectival form because it is defined as ‘sufferer’ when the adjective is used as noun.[8] This expands the definition of ‘toil’ to include both the trouble done to others and the trouble one suffers oneself; meanwhile, this definition does not exclude the suffering caused by labouring or hard work. Therefore, Qoheleth is asking ‘What benefit to the man in all suffering which he suffers under the sun?’ (Eccl 1:3)

Qoheleth does not ask this question only once at the beginning of the book; he suffers continually, or his suffering is not eliminated. He asks again in chapters 2, 3 and 5:

כִּי מֶה־הָוֶה לָאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ וּבְרַעְיוֹן לִבּוֹ שֶׁהוּא עָמֵל תַּחַת הַשָּׁמֶשׁ׃	For what is there to a person in all his suffering and in the striving of his heart with which he suffers under the sun? (Eccl 2:22)
מַה־יִּתְרוֹן הָעוֹשֶׂה בַּאֲשֶׁר הוּא עָמֵל׃	What is the benefit of the worker in which he has suffered? (Eccl 3:9)
וְגַם־זֹה רָעָה חוֹלָה כָּל־עֲמַת שֶׁבָּא כֵּן יֵלֵךְ וּמַה־יִּתְרוֹן לוֹ שֶׁיַּעֲמֹל לָרוּחַ׃	This is also painfully bad, just as how he came then will he go; and what benefit does he have when he suffers in the wind? (Eccl 5:15 [Eng 5:16])

These questions seem to seek the benefit of one’s suffering, but the repeated and unanswered questions reflect that this issue keeps perplexing Qoheleth. He is struggling with these questions. They set up an either-or expectation: there should be benefit to one’s suffering, or, if there is no benefit, one should not suffer. There is no answer to this question, for neither expectation is fulfilled. As the last appearance of the question comes with an expression וְגַם־ זֹה רָעָה חוֹלָה (‘this is also painfully bad’), this unresolved situation maintains pain in the text.

[7] *BDB*, 765; *DCH* 6:481–2.
[8] *DCH* 6:481–2; an alternative meaning is ‘labourer.’

There is still no answer to the question about the benefit of suffering, but instead there is an 'answer' telling us that 'the person is not able to find out the work which is done under the sun' (Eccl 8:17). The mood of despair over suffering does not diminish; rather, it further expands when the fact is stated that there seems to be no benefit to one's suffering even while one cannot avoid suffering.

Sadness

Besides the pain maintained in the struggle over the meaning of suffering, there is another issue relating to sadness in Ecclesiastes. One of the famous quotes from the book—'there is nothing new under the sun' (Eccl 1:9)—is usually understood to mean 'it always turns out this way,' 'I have heard that before,' or 'I am not surprised, as the like has happened before.' If we read with this understanding, we might be left with the impression that repeat occurrences are to be expected. In his commentary, Crenshaw interprets the activities of nature (Eccl 1:4–7) as an 'endless round' and as 'pointless,' and he understands 'there is nothing new under the sun' to mean 'the past repeats itself ad infinitum.'[9] This kind of linkage between nature and human beings draws a connection not only in terms of monotony but also in relation to the 'endless round' and 'pointless' activities. However, the endless cyclical movement in nature does not signify drudgery and pointlessness. Scientifically, it is necessary to the ecosystem; it expresses the unexplainable occurrence of something that happens repeatedly and passively. It is meaningful and may be what Ecclesiastes is trying to capture. In terms of trauma, it is similar to the lingering traits of trauma. The memory of trauma can cause repeated flashbacks, just as the sun rises, goes down, and rises in the same place again. If we read the past as pointless repetition, what we will overlook is what had happened in the past, how Qoheleth describes and explains these happenings, and what impacts a person at the time as well as when it repeatedly happens.

The phrase 'there is nothing new under the sun' may sometimes imply a complaint about the dullness of living because of the monotony of life. However, the monotony of life may not imply a prosperous and stable life but a life with threat and oppression. If there is a pattern of a woman being brutally beaten when her husband gets drunk and loses his temper after a football match, then she is able to predict what will happen at home after a football match—there is nothing new after he gets drunk; there is nothing new under the sun. She

[9] Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 61–62.

lives a monotonous life that is filled with fear and pain. The fear and pain are not just the feelings induced by a single brutal event, but they are situated between the last injury and the next, and/or between flashbacks of traumatic memory. When Qoheleth says 'what has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun' (Eccl 1:9, NRSV), traumatised individuals, like the battered woman, will resonate with Qoheleth as though he understands their living with fear and pain. Qoheleth, the battered woman, and other traumatised individuals are trapped in fear and pain; they cannot escape from the repetition of suffering and flashbacks to have a new life.

It is sad when Ecclesiastes tells us that 'there is nothing new under the sun' if that implies that a bad situation remains the same. Fear and pain are sustained because there is no change to the situation.

Evil

I turn now to the term רַע. It is translated with different meanings in both English and Chinese translations of Ecclesiastes (Appendix II, 19). Some translations interpret the word using affective vocabulary; some do not. The comparison of these interpretations and translations provides a cultural perspective when studying trauma in Ecclesiastes.

רַע occurs sixteen times as adjective and fifteen times as noun in Ecclesiastes. According to *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (*HOL*), the meanings of רַע include: 1) bad quality, inferior; 2) disagreeable, unwholesome; 3) bad, of no value, contemptible; 4) bad-tempered, evil, morally depraved; 5) judgement of disagreeable, displeasing, undesirable, annoying, objectionable, disapproved of (when used with בְּעֵינֵי 'in the eyes of'); 6) vicious, harmful; 7) evil, adverse; 8) bad, evil (in the absolute, ethical sense); and 9) in a bad mood, cross, discontented.[10] Although these meanings may not indicate an explicit expression of feeling in every case, the description of something as 'bad' involves a judgement that connects implicitly with an expression of emotion. I will analyse the ways the term רַע is translated into English and Chinese and review the emotional charge of these judgements.

The adjective form of רַע in Ecclesiastes is translated into different English terms; for instance, the NRSV renders it as 'unhappy' (1:13; 4:8), 'grievous' (2:17; 6:2), 'evil' (4:3;

[10] *HOL*, 342.

4:17 [Eng 5:1]; 8:11, 12; 9:3 [twice]; 12:14), 'bad' (5:13 [Eng 5:14]), 'unpleasant' (8:3), 'harm' (8:5), and 'hurt' (8:9). Outside of Ecclesiastes, the word רַע is usually translated as 'evil' in the NRSV. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), the term 'evil' in English means the antithesis of 'good,' and it describes something that is 'bad' or 'no good.'[11]Some of the other terms used to translate רַע in the NRSV (e.g., 'grievous,' 'bad,' 'unhappy,' and 'unpleasant') infer that a standard is required for judging something to be either 'good' or 'bad.' However, these standards may not be clear and absolute in most cases, especially when they involve moral or cultural concerns. Taking these standards and cultural and moral concerns into account, it becomes more complicated to interpret the single word 'evil,' particularly as it occurs more than thirty times.

Comparing the seven occurrences of 'evil' in the English version (NRSV), six of them in the Chinese version (RCUV) carry a similar meaning of 'wicked' and 'bad.' The exception is found in 9:3a, where רַע is translated as 'misfortune and calamity.' This expression is also used in 5:13 (English and Chinese 5:14), 6:2, and 8:5, where 'bad,' 'grievous,' and 'harm' are used, respectively, in the English version. These two different expressions are found in the Chinese version: 'wicked and bad' and 'misfortune and calamity' carry different connotations. The connotations of the term 'wicked and bad' are as follows:

1. sinful thoughts and/or behaviours
2. ideas serving personal interests
3. ideas that are morally rejected and lead to punishment
4. ideas that make one feel guilty and shameful when made public

The connotations of the term 'misfortune and calamity' are as follows:

1. unpredictable events with horrendous suffering
2. events or accidents of which people have to accept and bear the consequences
3. events that require endurance to get through
4. events that no one is responsible for causing

[11] *OED Online*, s.v. 'Evil, Adj. and n.1,' accessed 23 March 2021, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/65386. Technically, the dictionary uses the term 'positive sense' for the definition 'bad' and the term 'privative sense' for the definition 'no good.' I am not going to discuss these technical terms used in linguistics. A brief explanation is that they are divided into the direct use of a word to express meaning and the addition of a negative word/prefix such as 'not' or 'un-' to express meaning.

These two different expressions in Chinese versions of Ecclesiastes suggest that there are both wicked deeds and calamities under the sun. On the one hand, a didactic story is delivered when 'wicked and bad' is presented in 4:3, 17 (English and Chinese 5:1); 8:3, 11, 12; 9:3b; and 12:14. For example, the phrase reminds people that wicked deeds are under the sun and in human hearts (4:3; 8:11; 9:3b), fools are doing bad things but they do not know (4: 17 [English and Chinese 5:1]), and people should not take a stand in wicked things (8:3). The phrase 'wicked and bad' also suggests there is a role played by people in perpetrating wicked deeds. A person does wicked deeds; one has sinful ideas in one's heart; one is advised to stand away from wicked things; and one will be brought to judgement if one has done wicked things. On the other hand, a more depressing story is portrayed when 'misfortune and calamity' is used in 5:13 (English and Chinese 5:14), 6:2, 8:5, and 9:3a in the Chinese version. Misfortune describes a person's failure to meet a standard. One loses money because of misfortune (5:13 [English and Chinese 5:14]); one cannot enjoy wealth, possessions, and honour given by God because of calamity (6:2); one may be free from calamity when obeying a command (8:5); but there is calamity under the sun (9:3a). On account of 'misfortune and calamity,' it is the environment, rather than the individual, that is at issue. This implies that, while a person can choose to act in either a good or bad way (thereby making them accountable), they cannot predict nor are they responsible for a negative environment.

Moreover, the decision whether to translate עִנְיַן רָע with reference to bad deeds or misfortune becomes difficult in 5:13 (English and Chinese 5:14):

וְאָבַד הָעֹשֶׁר הַהוּא בְּעִנְיַן רָע וְהוֹלִיד בֵּן וְאֵין בְּיָדוֹ מְאוּמָה׃

In the Chinese translation, what is translated as 'misfortune' causes the loss of money; meanwhile, there is a footnote providing an alternative translation referring to a person's poor management that results in money loss. Weeks translates עִנְיַן רָע as 'bad job' and considers the sense of 'bad' in 1:13, 4:8, and 5:13 (English and Chinese 5:14) to mean 'sub-standard' rather than 'evil' because he finds the context suggests that עִנְיַן רָע is a job that does not reach a goal and causes money loss.[12] The Chinese translation suggests a judgement that the money loss is due to either a personal fault of management or just a misfortune. In Weeks's

[12] Weeks, *Ecclesiastes 1-5*, 332–38. In this commentary, Weeks does not use the privative sense in his translations of רע; he uses the term 'bad' in most cases but also includes 'wrong' and 'wretched,' each on one occasion.

translation, the money loss can be due to the bad job itself, without specifying a further reason or indicating responsibility.

The analysis of adjectival forms of רַע shows that different translations of the term imply not only nuances of meaning but also various value judgments. Judgements about the cause of a bad situation—whether misfortune, calamity, or poor management—affect the interpretation of the resulting emotions and affects. This is because the cause of a bad situation determines who or what is responsible for it and whether it is possible to control or avoid it. There would be different emotions or affects if one found that the situation was impossible to predict, or its severity exceeded the ability to control it, or if it was solely the fault of someone making a mistake or a wrong judgement.

The feminine form of רַע, רָעָה, occurs as a noun in Ecclesiastes. The various meanings given in Chinese and English lexicons and translations illustrate the ambiguity of the meaning of this word and lead to arguable interpretations. According to *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, there are four meanings of this word: 1) (intended) evil, harm to someone; 2) wickedness, perverseness; 3) misery, trouble, disaster, evil; and 4) displeasure.[13]

Looking at the use of typical affective vocabulary in Ecclesiastes may suggest the range of situations to which the language of trauma refers. We have not yet discussed a chapter or a verse in Ecclesiastes that explicitly demonstrates traumatic experience. After my personal experience of bereavement and the recent and present situations in Hong Kong, I discern the elements of generation, relationship with neighbours, and death in Ecclesiastes. So, as a starting point, I attempt to examine whether the selected affects are associated with these elements.

[13] *HOL*, 343.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Afzal, Saima, and Johanna Stiebert. *Marriage, Bible, Violence: Intersections and Impacts*. Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible. Abingdon: Routledge, 2024.

Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014.

———. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Alford, C. Fred. *After the Holocaust: The Book of Job, Primo Levi, and the Path to Affliction*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New and rev. ed. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

———, ed. *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*. London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2018.

———. *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes; A Translation with Commentary*. London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011.

American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

———. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-III*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1980.

———. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-III-R*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1987.

———. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994.

———. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000.

Bach, Alice. *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Balaev, Michelle. 'Trends in Literary Trauma Theory.' *An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 41, no. 2 (2008): 149–66. ProQuest.

Balentine, Samuel E. 'Traumatizing Job.' In *'Look at Me and Be Appalled': Essays on Job, Theology, and Ethics, an Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, 194–205. Biblical Interpretation Series 190. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

———. 'Traumatizing Job.' *Review & Expositor* 105, no. 2 (2008): 213–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/003463730810500205.

Barbour, Jennie. *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Barnett, Victoria J. *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust*. Contributions to the Study of Religion 59. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999.

———. 'The Changing View of the "Bystander" in Holocaust Scholarship: Historical, Ethical, and Political Implications.' *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017): 633–47. https://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2017/iss4/1.

———. 'Reflections on the Concept of "Bystander".' In *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders. Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity*, edited by Henrik Edgren, 35–52. Stockholm: The Living History Forum, 2012.

Barton, George A. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*. International Critical Commentary 17. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908.

BBC News. 'China's New "Tang Ping" Trend Aims to Highlight Pressures of Work Culture.' 3 June 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57348406.

BBC News. 'Li Wenliang: Coronavirus Kills Chinese Whistleblower Doctor.' 7 February 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51403795.

Becker, Eve-Marie, Jan Dochhorn, and Else K. Holt, eds. *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*. Vol. 2. Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.

Berry, Michael. *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2008. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds/detail.action?docID=908478.

Bethune House Migrant Women's Refuge. 'Bethune House.' Accessed 31 December 2024. https://bethunehouse.org.

Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Black, Fiona C., and Jennifer L. Koosed, eds. *Reading with Feeling: Affect Theory and the Bible*. Semeia Studies 95. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvrs8z0d.

Blenkinsopp, Joseph. 'Ecclesiastes 3.1–15: Another Interpretation.' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 20, no. 66 (1995): 55–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/030908929502006603.

Bloom, Paul. *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*. London: Vintage, 2016.

Blyth, Caroline. *The Narrative of Rape in Genesis 34: Interpreting Dinah's Silence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199589456.001.0001.

Boase, Elizabeth, and Sarah Agnew. 'Traumatising the Book of Jonah.' *The Bible and Critical Theory* 12, no. 1 (2016): 4–22. https://bibleandcriticaltheory.com/issues/vol12-no1-2016/vol-12-no-1-2016-whispered-in-the-sound-of-silence-traumatising-the-book-of-jonah/.

Boase, Elizabeth, and Christopher G. Frechette, eds. *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*. Semeia Studies 86. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd.

Branch, Robin Gallaher. '"Your Humble Servant." Well, Maybe. Overlooked Onlookers in Deuteronomistic History.' *Old Testament Essays* 17, no. 2 (2004): 168–89. https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC85629.

Bray, Karen. *Grave Attending: A Political Theology for the Unredeemed*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020.

Bray, Karen, and Stephen D. Moore, eds. *Religion, Emotion, Sensation: Affect Theories and Theologies*. Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia. New York: Fordham University Press, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780823285693.

Briggs, Richard S. 'Review of *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, by David J. A. Clines.' *Themelios* 22, no. 3 (1997): 53–54.

British Transport Police. 'See It. Say It. Sorted.' Accessed 3 October 2023. https://www.btp.police.uk/police-forces/british-transport-police/areas/campaigns/see-it-say-it-sorted/.

Brock, Brian. *Wondrously Wounded: Theology, Disability, and the Body of Christ*. Studies in Religion, Theology, and Disability. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020.

Broome, Edwin C. 'Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality.' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65, no. 3 (1946): 277–92. https://doi.org/10.2307/3262666.

Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907.

Brown, William P. *Ecclesiastes*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000.

Brownsmith, Esther. '"Call Me by Your Name": Critical Fabulation and the Woman of Judges 19.' *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies* 4, no. 2 (2022): 5–27. https://jibs.hcommons.org/2022/11/02/4-2-brownsmith-call-me-by-your-name/.

Burstow, Bonnie. ‘A Critique of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the DSM.’ *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 45, no. 4 (2005): 429–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022167805280265.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex.’* New York: Routledge, 1993.

Byron, Gay L., and Vanessa Lovelace, eds. *Womanist Interpretations of the Bible: Expanding the Discourse*. Semeia Studies 85. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htgx.

Carroll, Robert P. *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*. London: SCM Press, 1979.

Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus Online. S.v. ‘Compassion, n.’ Accessed 2 June 2025. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/compassion.

———. S.v. ‘Empathy, n.’ Accessed 2 June 2025. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/empathy.

———. S.v. ‘Sympathy, n.’ Accessed 2 June 2025. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sympathy.

Caruth, Cathy, ed. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

———. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Cesarani, David, and Paul A. Levine, eds. *Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-Evaluation*. London: Frank Cass, 2002.

Charny, Israel W. ‘And Abraham Went to Slay Isaac: A Parable of Killer, Victim, and Bystander in the Family of Man.’ *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10, no. 2 (1973): 304–18.

Cherry, Frances E. *Stubborn Particulars of Social Psychology: Essays on the Research Process*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Chia, Philip P. 亂象中的上帝：約伯記的公共解讀 [God Amidst Chaos: Reading Job with a Public Sense]. Edited by Peng Lin. Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary Lecture Series. Hong Kong: Chinese Baptist Press, 2011.

———. 荒謬與真理：論傳道書之神學思想 [Truth and Absurdity: On the Thought of Qoheleth]. Edited by Fiona Y. Fu and Ann H. Cheng. 2nd ed. Jian Dao Supplement

Series—Bible and Hermeneutics Series 2. Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2000.

Chiba, Takuro. ‘While Migration to Tokyo Surges, Other Prefectures Dwindle.’ *The Asahi Shimbun*, 31 January 2024. https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15140199.

Christian-Brandt, Allison S., Diana E. Santacrose, and Miya L. Barnett. ‘In the Trauma-Informed Care Trenches: Teacher Compassion Satisfaction, Secondary Traumatic Stress, Burnout, and Intent to Leave Education Within Underserved Elementary Schools.’ *Child Abuse & Neglect* 110, no. 3 (December 2020): 104437. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104437.

Christianson, Eric S. ‘Qoheleth and the Existential Legacy of the Holocaust.’ *The Heythrop Journal* 38, no. 1 (1997): 35–50. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2265.00035.

———. *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 280. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

Claassens, L. Juliana. ‘Surfing with Jonah: Reading Jonah as a Postcolonial Trauma Narrative.’ *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45, no. 4 (2021): 576–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/03090892211001396.

———. ‘Trauma and Recovery: A New Hermeneutical Framework for the Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13).’ In *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, 177–92. Semeia Studies 86. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd.13.

———. *Writing and Reading to Survive: Biblical and Contemporary Trauma in Conversation*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020.

Clements, Chris, and Monica Whitlock. ‘Workers “Treated like Slaves” on Scottish Fishing Boats.’ BBC News, 19 August 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd9dnk34k41o.

Clines, David J. A. ‘The Arguments of Job’s Three Friends.’ In *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, edited by David J. A. Clines, David. M. Gunn, and Alan J. Hauser, 199–214. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 19. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982.

———. *The Bible and the Modern World*. Biblical Seminar 51. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997.

———, ed. *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001.

———. *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009.

———. *Job 1–20*. Word Biblical Commentary 17. Dallas: Word Books, 1989.

———. *Job 21–37*. Word Biblical Commentary 18A. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006.

———. *Joban Papers*. Hebrew Bible Monographs 102. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2023.

Collins, John J. *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible and Deutero-Canonical Books*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014.

de Coning, Alexis. 'Seven Theses on Critical Empathy: A Methodological Framework for "Unsavory" Populations.' *Qualitative Research* 23, no. 2 (2023): 217–33. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941211019563.

Coogan, Michael David, Marc Zvi Brettler, Carol A. Newsom, and Pheme Perkins, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: With the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Cooke, Caralie, ed. *Discovering the Religious Dimension of Trauma: Trauma Literature and the Joseph Story*. Biblical Interpretation Series 202. Leiden: Brill, 2022.

Corsini, Ray. 'Trauma.' In *The Dictionary of Psychology*, 1019. London: Taylor & Francis, 2001.

Cottrill, Amy C. 'A Reading of Ehud and Jael Through the Lens of Affect Theory.' *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 430–49. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02245p04.

Craps, Stef. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Crenshaw, James L. 'Ecclesiastes.' In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Ethics*, edited by Robert L. Brawley. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref:obso/9780199829910.001.0001/acref-9780199829910-e-74?rskey=3MDbOp&result=1.

———. *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987.

Crisp, Beth R. 'Jesus: A Critical Companion in the Journey to Moving on from Sexual Abuse.' In *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, edited by Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa, 249–59. London: SCM Press, 2021.

Crouch, C. L., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible and Ethics*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108562072.

Darley, John M., and Bibb Latané. 'Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility.' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8, no. 4 (1968): 377–83. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0025589.

Daschke, D. M. 'Desolate Among Them: Loss, Fantasy, and Recovery in the Book of Ezekiel.' *American Imago* 56, no. 2 (1999): 105–32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26304318.

Davidovic, Ivana. '"Lying Flat": Why Some Chinese Are Putting Work Second.' BBC News, 16 February 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/business-60353916.

Davidson, Steed Vernyl. 'Turns and Turning in Critical Theory and the Bible.' *Bible and Critical Theory* 20, no. 1 (2024): 1–6. https://bibleandcriticaltheory.com/vol-20-no-1-2024-steed-vernyl-davidson/.

Davis, Colin, and Hanna Meretoja, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*. Routledge Companions to Literature Series. London: Routledge, 2020. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351025225.

Day, Linda Marie, and Carolyn Pressler, eds. *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Translated by Paul Patton. London: Athlone, 1994. Originally published as *Différence et repetition* in 1968 by Presses universitaires de France.

Dell, Katharine J. *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New*. Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible 3. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013. https://doi.org/10.5325/j.ctv1bxgx4x.

———. 'Wisdom Literature.' In *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*. Edited by Leo G. Perdue, 418–31. John Wiley & Sons, 2017. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405166560.ch25.

Dell, Katharine J., and Will Kynes, eds. *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 587. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014.

———, eds. *Reading Job Intertextually*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 574. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012.

DiFransico, Lesley. 'Distinguishing Emotions of Guilt and Shame in Psalm 51.' *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 48, no. 4 (2018): 180–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107918801511.

Driver, Samuel Rolles. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job: Together with a New Translation.* International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921.

Dunn, Jennifer L. '"Victims" and "Survivors": Emerging Vocabularies of Motive for "Battered Women Who Stay".' *Sociological Inquiry* 75, no. 1 (2005): 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2005.00110.x.

Durkheim, Emile. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Edited by George Edward Gordon Catlin. Translated by S. A. Solovay and J. H. Mueller. 8th ed. New York: Free Press, 1966.

Edgren, Henrik, ed. *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity*. Stockholm: Living History Forum, 2012.

Erichsen, John Eric. *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System*. Philadelphia: H. C. Lea, 1867. https://name.umdl.umich.edu/aec8134.0001.001.

Erikson, Kai. *Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976. http://archive.org/details/everythinginitsp00erikrich.

———. 'Notes on Trauma and Community.' *American Imago* 48, no. 4 (1991): 455–72. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26303923.

Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 1986.

Felman, Shoshana, and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Fensham, F. Charles. 'Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature.' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 21, no. 2 (1962): 129–39. https://www.jstor.org/stable/543887.

Figley, Charles R., ed. *Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized*. Brunner/Mazel Psychosocial Stress Series 23. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Flowers, Michael. 'The Bystanders at the Cross and Their Expectations about Elijah.' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2018): 448–69. https://doi.org/10.1353/cbq.2018.0092.

Forest Hill Church, Presbyterian. 'Staff Archive.' Accessed 6 October 2023. https://fhcpresb.org/staff/.

Fox, Michael V. *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999.

———. 'Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet.' *Hebrew Union College Annual* 48 (1977): 83–106. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23506912.

———. *Qohelet and His Contradictions*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 71. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989.

———. 'The Meaning of Hebel for Qohelet.' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 3 (1986): 409–27. https://doi.org/10.2307/3260510.

Frank, Adam J., and Elizabeth A. Wilson. *A Silvan Tomkins Handbook: Foundations for Affect Theory*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

Frechette, Christopher G., and Elizabeth Boase. 'Defining "Trauma" as a Useful Lens for Biblical Interpretation.' In *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, 1–24. Semeia Studies 86. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd.4.

Fry, Alexiana. 'Rationalizing the Irrational: Trauma and Ecclesiastes 7:1–14.' Paper presented at the SBL Midwest Regional Meeting, Notre Dame, Indiana, 7–9 February 2020.

———. *Trauma Talks in the Hebrew Bible: Speech Act Theory and Trauma Hermeneutics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2023.

Garber, David G. '"I Went in Bitterness": Theological Implications of a Trauma Theory Reading of Ezekiel.' *Review & Expositor* 111, no. 4 (2014): 346–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637314557242.

———. 'Trauma Theory.' In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Steven L. McKenzie. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. https://doi.org/10.1093/acref:obso/9780199832262.001.0001.

———. 'Trauma Theory and Biblical Studies.' *Currents in Biblical Research* 14, no. 1 (2015): 24–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X14561176.

Goh Elaine Wei-Fun. 以敬以虔活在當下：傳道書析讀 [Rediscovering the Bible: Book of Ecclesiastes]. Hong Kong: Logos Publishers, 2019.

Goldberg, Robert A. 'The Bystander During the Holocaust.' *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017): 649–59. https://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2017/iss4/2.

Goldingay, John. *Ecclesiastes*. The Bible in God's World. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021.

———. ‘Qohelet’s Implied Author and Implied Readers.’ *The Expository Times* 132, no. 7 (2021): 297–301. https://doi.org/10.1177/0014524620983674.

Goodman, Nancy R., and Marilyn B. Meyers. ‘Bystandership—One Can Make a Difference: Interview with Ervin Staub.’ In *The Power of Witnessing: Reflections, Reverberations, and Traces of the Holocaust; Trauma, Psychoanalysis, and the Living Mind*, edited by Nancy R. Goodman and Marilyn B. Meyers, 333–48. New York: Routledge, 2012.

Gordon, Daniel, and Joshua Nevett. ‘Ervin Staub: A Holocaust Survivor’s Mission to Train “Heroic Bystanders”.’ BBC News, 5 October 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54339252.

Grant, Deena E. *A Prototype Approach to Hate and Anger in the Hebrew Bible: Conceiving Emotions*. Routledge Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Biblical Criticism. London: Routledge, 2023. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003348719.

Graybill, Rhiannon. *Texts After Terror: Rape, Sexual Violence, and the Hebrew Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

Graybill, Rhiannon, Meredith Minister, and Beatrice Lawrence. ‘Sexual Violence in and Around the Classroom.’ *Teaching Theology & Religion* 20, no. 1 (2017): 70–88. https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12369.

Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Guest, Deryn. ‘Hiding Behind the Naked Women in Lamentations: A Recriminative Response.’ *Biblical Interpretation* 7, no. 4 (1999): 413–48. https://doi.org/10.1163/156851599X00308.

Guiora, Amos N. *The Crime of Complicity: The Bystander in the Holocaust*. Chicago: Ankerwycke, 2017.

Habel, Norman C. *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. London: SCM Press, 1985.

Halperin, David J. *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.

Hammond, Meghan Marie, and Sue J. Kim, eds. *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Harrington, Ralph. ‘On the Tracks of Trauma: Railway Spine Reconsidered.’ *Social History of Medicine: The Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine* 16, no. 2 (2003): 209–23. https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/16.2.209.

Hawes, James, dir. *One Life*. Warner Bros. UK, 2023.

Hayes, Peter, and John K. Roth, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*. Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Helsel, Philip Browning. 'Shared Pleasure to Soothe the Broken Spirit: Collective Trauma and Qoheleth.' In *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, 85–104. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd.8.

Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. 4th ed. New York: Basic Books, 2022.

———. *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice*. London: Basic Books, 2023.

Hilberg, Raul. *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1993.

———. *The Destruction of the European Jews*. 3rd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002.

Hildebrandt, Samuel. *Vast as the Sea: Hebrew Poetry and the Human Condition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2023.

Hoffman, Martin L. *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Holladay, William Lee, Ludwig Köhler, and Walter Baumgartner. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner*. 12th corr. imp. Leiden: Brill; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991.

聖經──新廣東話 [The Holy Bible—New Cantonese Bible]. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Bible Society, 2006.

Hon, Lai Chu . '非人世界' [Inhuman world]. inmediahk.net, 2 March 2021. https://www.inmediahk.net/node/1081169.

Horowitz, Sara R. *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction*. SUNY Series in Modern Jewish Literature and Culture. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

Horrell, David G., Cherryl Hunt, Christopher Southgate, and Francesca Stavrakopoulou, eds. *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives*. London: T&T Clark, 2010.

Houen, Alex. *Affect and Literature*. Cambridge Critical Concepts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Hudson, Don Michael. 'Living in a Land of Epithets: Anonymity in Judges 19–21.' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 19, no. 62 (1994): 49–66. https://doi.org/10.1177/030908929401906204.

Information Services Department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. *Hong Kong 2023*. Hong Kong: Information Services Department, 2024. https://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2023/en/index.html.

Ingram, Doug. 'The Riddle of Qohelet and Qohelet the Riddler.' *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37, no. 4 (2013): 485–509. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089213483978.

'International Conference on Men's Issues 2019.' Accessed 6 May 2024. https://icmi2019.icmi.info/.

Iversen, Stine, and Noelle Robertson. 'Prevalence and Predictors of Secondary Trauma in the Legal Profession: A Systematic Review.' *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 28, no. 6 (2021): 802–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/13218719.2020.1855270.

Janzen, David. 'Claimed and Unclaimed Experience: Problematic Readings of Trauma in the Hebrew Bible.' *Biblical Interpretation* 27, no. 2 (2019): 163–85. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-00272P01.

Janzen, David. *The Liberation of Method: The Ethics of Emancipatory Biblical Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2021.

———. *The Violent Gift: Trauma's Subversion of the Deuteronomistic History's Narrative*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 561. New York: T&T Clark International, 2012.

———. *Trauma and the Failure of History: Kings, Lamentations, and the Destruction of Jerusalem*. Semeia Studies 94. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019. https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/j.ctvkwnn9p.

John, Eileen. 'Empathy in Literature.' In *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*, edited by Heidi L. Maibom, 306–16. Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Jones, Serene. *Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

Kan, Lawrence Kwan Chun, dir. 白日之下 [In Broad Daylight]. One Cool Pictures, 2023.

Kavusa, Kivatsi J. ‘Ecological Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Biblical Texts Yesterday, Today and Onwards: Critical Reflection and Assessment.’ *Old Testament Essays* 32, no. 1 (2019): 229–55. https://doi.org/10.17159/2312-3621/2019/v32n1a13.

Keefer, Arthur Jan. *Ecclesiastes and the Meaning of Life in the Ancient World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

Keller, Thomas. ‘Railway Spine Revisited: Traumatic Neurosis or Neurotrauma?’ *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 50, no. 4 (1995): 507–24. https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/50.4.507.

Kelly, Lesly. ‘Burnout, Compassion Fatigue, and Secondary Trauma in Nurses: Recognizing the Occupational Phenomenon and Personal Consequences of Caregiving.’ *Critical Care Nursing Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2020): 73–80. https://doi.org/10.1097/CNQ.0000000000000293.

Kennedy, Lindsey, Nathan Paul Southern, and Huang Yan. ‘Cambodia’s Modern Slavery Nightmare: The Human Trafficking Crisis Overlooked by Authorities.’ *The Guardian*, 2 November 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/03/cambodias-modern-slavery-nightmare-the-human-trafficking-crisis-overlooked-by-authorities.

Kim, Jimyung. *Reanimating Qohelet’s Contradictory Voices: Studies of Open-Ended Discourse on Wisdom in Ecclesiastes*. Biblical Interpretation Series 166. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

Knight, Lucy. ‘“Goblin Mode”: New Oxford Word of the Year Speaks to the Times.’ *The Guardian*, 5 December 2022. https://www.theguardian.com/science/2022/dec/05/goblin-mode-new-oxford-word-of-the-year.

Knowles, Elizabeth. ‘Lookers-on See Most of the Game.’ In *The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. Oxford University Press, 1 January 2006. https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198609810.001.0001/acref-9780198609810-e-4175.

Koosed, Jennifer L. ‘Moses: The Face of Fear,’ *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 414–29, https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02245p03.

Koosed, Jennifer L., and Stephen D. Moore. eds. *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 381–531. https://brill.com/view/journals/bi/22/4-5/bi.22.issue-4-5.xml.

———, ‘Introduction: From Affect to Exegesis.’ *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 381–87. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02245p01

Kotrosits, Maia. *How Things Feel: Affect Theory, Biblical Studies, and the (Im)Personal*. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

———. 'Seeing Is Feeling.' *Biblical Interpretation* 22, no. 4–5 (2014): 473–502. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02245p06.

Krüger, Thomas. *Qoheleth: A Commentary*. Edited by Klaus Baltzer. Translated by O. C. Dean Jr. Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

Kurtz, J. Roger. *Trauma and Literature*. Cambridge Critical Concepts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Kwok, Pui-lan, and Francis Ching-Wah Yip, eds. *The Hong Kong Protests and Political Theology*. Religion in the Modern World. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.

LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Parallax. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Lai, Kate Mei Lam, Teresa Wai See Ong, and Su-Hie Ting. 'Sign of the Times: Framing the Grievances of the 2019–2020 Hong Kong Protests.' *International Journal of Language Studies* 16, no. 3 (2022): 61–82. https://ijls.net/pages/volume/vol16no3.html.

Lanzmann, Claude. *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1985.

Latané, Bibb, and John M Darley. 'Bystander "Apathy".' *American Scientist* 57, no. 2 (1969): 244–68.

———. *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't He Help?* Century Psychology Series. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970.

Leake, Eric. *Difficult Empathy and Rhetorical Encounters*. Routledge Studies in Rhetoric and Communication. New York: Routledge, 2024.

———. 'Humanizing the Inhumane: The Value of Difficult Empathy.' In *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*, edited by Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim, 175–85. New York: Routledge, 2014.

———. 'The (Un)Knowable Self and Others: Critical Empathy and Expressivism.' In *Critical Expressivism: Theory and Practice in the Composition Classroom*, edited by Tara Roeder and Roseanne Gatto, 149–60. Fort Collins, CO: WAC Clearinghouse; Parlor Press, 2014. https://doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2014.0575.2.10.

Lee, [Archie] Chi Chung, and Lien Hwa Chow. 中文聖經註釋：傳道書・雅歌 [The Book of Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon]. Edited by Sau Chung Fung. 2nd ed. Chinese Bible Commentary 17. Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1999.

Lemos, T. M. 'Shame and Mutilation of Enemies in the Hebrew Bible.' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 2 (2006): 225–41. https://doi.org/10.2307/27638359.

———. 'Review of *Marriage by Capture in the Book of Judges: An Anthropological Approach*, by Katharine E. Southwood.' *Review of Biblical Literature*, 22 (2020): 123–27. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1xsm8rn.10.

Lentz, John C. 'The Bystander in the Bible.' *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017): 661–706. https://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2017/iss4/3.

———. John C. Lentz Interview, 11 June 2012. Interview by Heidi Fearing. *Cleveland Voices*, 11 June 2012. https://clevelandvoices.org/items/show/2270.

Lerner, Paul Frederick, and Mark S. Micale. 'Trauma, Psychiatry, and History: A Conceptual and Historiographical Introduction.' In *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930*, edited by Mark S. Micale and Paul Frederick Lerner, 1–27. Cambridge Studies in the History of Medicine. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Levine, Paul A. 'On-Lookers.' In *The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies*, edited by Peter Hayes and John K. Roth, 156–69. Oxford Handbooks in Religion and Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

———. *Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest: Myth, History and Holocaust, 1944–1945*. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010.

Levinson, Hanne Løland. *The Death Wish in the Hebrew Bible: Rhetorical Strategies for Survival*. Society for Old Testament Study Monographs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Lin, Yutang. *Lin Yutang's Chinese–English Dictionary of Modern Usage*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1972.

Linafelt, Tod. *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Lobb, Andrea. 'Critical Empathy.' *Constellations* 24, no. 4 (2017): 594–607. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12292.

Lohfink, Norbert. *Qoheleth: A Continental Commentary*. Translated by Sean McEvenue. Continental Commentaries. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

Longman, Tremper, III. *The Book of Ecclesiastes*. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998.

———. *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: A Generic and Comparative Study*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991.

———. 'Israelite Genres in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context'. In *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi, 177–95. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003.

Loughran, Tracey. 'Shell Shock, Trauma, and the First World War: The Making of a Diagnosis and Its Histories.' *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 67, no. 1 (2012): 94–119. https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/jrq052.

Magdalene, F. Rachel. 'Job's Wife as Hero: A Feminist-Forensic Reading of the Book of Job.' *Biblical Interpretation* 14, no. 3 (2006): 209–58. https://doi.org/10.1163/156851506776722985.

Maibom, Heidi L., ed. *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy*. Routledge Handbooks in Philosophy. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Marlow, Hilary, and Mark Harris, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology*. Oxford Handbooks. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022.

Marrus, Michael Robert, ed. *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews. Part 8: Bystanders to the Holocaust*. 3 vols. Berlin: De Gruyter Saur, 1989.

McFadyen, Alistair. '"I Breathe Him In with Every Breath I Take": Framing Domestic Victimisation as Trauma and Coercive Control in Feminist Trauma Theologies.' In *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective*, edited by Karen O'Donnell and Katie Cross, 80–111. London: SCM Press, 2020.

McKnight, Edgar V. 'Reader-Response Criticism.' In *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application*, edited by Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes, 197–219. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.

Meek, Russell L., and David J. H. Beldman. *A Classified Bibliography on Ecclesiastes*. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Meffert, Susan M., Clare Henn-Haase, Thomas J. Metzler, Meng Qian, Suzanne Best, Ayelet Hirschfeld, Shannon McCaslin, Sabra Inslicht, Thomas C. Neylan, and Charles R. Marmar. 'Prospective Study of Police Officer Spouse/Partners: A New Pathway to Secondary Trauma and Relationship Violence?' Edited by Alexander C. Tsai. *PLoS One* 9, no. 7 (2014): e100663. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0100663.

Melanchthon, Monica Jyotsna. ‘Reading for Justice, Dignity, and Life in South Asia: Illustrated with a Reading of Job’s Wife and Sati Savitri.’ In *Asian Feminist Biblical Studies: Perspectives and Methods*, edited by Maggie Low, 154–67. Hong Kong: Divinity School of Chung Chi College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2023.

Melanchthon, Monica J., and Robyn J. Whitaker, eds. *Terror in the Bible: Rhetoric, Gender, and Violence*. International Voices in Biblical Studies 14. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021.

Mémorial de la Shoah. ‘Histoire Du Mémorial de La Shoah.’ Accessed 17 March 2022. https://www.memorialdelashoah.org/en/the-memorial/presentation/the-history-of-the-shoah-memorial.html.

Micale, Mark S., and Paul Frederick Lerner, eds. *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930*. Cambridge Studies in the History of Medicine. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Miller, Douglas B. ‘Qohelet’s Symbolic Use of הבל.’ *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 3 (1998): 437–54. https://doi.org/10.2307/3266441.

———. ‘What the Preacher Forgot: The Rhetoric of Ecclesiastes.’ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2000): 215–35.

Minister, Meredith. *Rape Culture on Campus*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018.

Minow, Martha. ‘Upstanders, Whistle-Blowers, and Rescuers.’ *Utah Law Review* 2017, no. 4 (2017): 815–37. https://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2017/iss4/9/.

Mirguet, Françoise. ‘What Is an “Emotion” in the Hebrew Bible?’ *Biblical Interpretation* 24, no. 4–5 (2016): 442–65. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02445p02.

Mitchell, Rebecca N. ‘Empathy and the Unlikeable Character: On Flaubert’s Madame Bovary and Zola’s Thérèse Raquin.’ In *Rethinking Empathy Through Literature*, edited by Meghan Marie Hammond and Sue J. Kim, 121–34. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Mittal, Shalini, and Tushar Singh. ‘Victim or Survivor: Perceived Identity.’ *Psyber News* 9, no. 1 (2018): 48–52.

Morina, Christina, and Krijn Thijs, eds. *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*. War and Genocide 27. New York: Berghahn Books, 2019.

Motta, Robert W. ‘Secondary Trauma in Children and School Personnel.’ *Journal of Applied School Psychology* 28, no. 3 (2012): 256–69. https://doi.org/10.1080/15377903.2012.695767.

Murphy, Roland E. *Ecclesiastes*. Word Biblical Commentary 23A. Dallas: Word Books, 1992.

———. *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996.

———. *Wisdom Literature: Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*. Forms of the Old Testament Literature 13. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981.

Nathanson, Donald L. 'Prologue.' In *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition (Book 1)*, by Silvan Solomon Tomkins, xi–xxvi. New York: Springer, 2008.

Newsom, Carol Ann. *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

——— 'Reflections on Ideological Criticism and Postcritical Perspectives.' In *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen*, edited by Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards, 541–59. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009.

Ng, Yannis Wing Yan. 'Comfort or Cajole: Reading Elkanah's Response to Hannah with the Awareness of Coercive Control.' Paper presented at the Society for the Study of Theology Conference, University of Warwick, 19 April 2023.

———. 'Reading Lot's Wife with Marginalised Migrants: Promoting Critical Empathy in the Biblical Studies Classroom.' In *Activism, Bible, and Research-Based Teaching: Practical Approaches for the Global Biblical Studies Classroom*, edited by Johanna Stiebert, 53–66. Bible in the Modern World 85. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2024.

NHS. 'Symptoms—Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.' 17 February 2021. https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/symptoms/.

Ni, Michael Y., Xiaoxin I. Yao, Kathy S. M. Leung, Cynthia Yau, Candi M. C. Leung, Phyllis Lun, Francis P. Flores, Wing Chung Chang, Benjamin J. Cowling, and Gabriel M. Leung. 'Depression and Post-Traumatic Stress During Major Social Unrest in Hong Kong: A 10-Year Prospective Cohort Study.' *The Lancet* 395, no. 10220 (2020): 273–84. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)33160-5.

NICE. 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder NICE Guidance.' Accessed 5 July 2021. https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng116/chapter/Recommendations#recognition-of-post-traumatic-stress-disorder.

Nielsen, Kirsten. 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and the Book of Job.' In *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, vol. 2, edited by Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else K.

Holt. Translated by Edward Broadbridge, 62–70. Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.

Noll, Sonja. *The Semantics of Silence in Biblical Hebrew*. Boston: Brill, 2019.

Nzimande, Makhosazana K. 'Reconfiguring Jezebel: A Postcolonial Imbokodo Reading of The Story of Naboth's Vineyard (I Kings 21:1–16).' In *African and European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest of a Shared Meaning*, edited by Gerald West and Hans de Wit, 223–58. Studies of Religion in Africa 32. Leiden: Brill, 2008. https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004166561.i-434.

Oakley, Lisa. *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

O'Connor, Kathleen M. 'How Trauma Studies Can Contribute to Old Testament Studies.' In *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions: Insights from Biblical Studies and Beyond*, vol. 2, edited by Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn, and Else K. Holt, 210–22. Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014.

———. *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011.

———. 'Stammering Toward the Unsayable: Old Testament Theology, Trauma Theory, and Genesis.' *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 70, no. 3 (2016): 301–13.

Odell, Margaret S. 'Fragments of Traumatic Memory: Ṣalmê Zākār and Child Sacrifice in Ezekiel 16:15–22.' In *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, 107–24. Semeia Studies 86. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd.9.

O'Donnell, Karen. *Dark Womb: Re-Conceiving Theology Through Reproductive Loss*. London: SCM Press, 2022.

O'Donnell, Karen, and Katie Cross. *Bearing Witness: Intersectional Perspectives on Trauma Theology*. London: SCM Press, 2022.

———. *Feminist Trauma Theologies: Body, Scripture and Church in Critical Perspective*. London: SCM Press, 2020.

OED Online. S.v. 'Compassion, n.' Accessed 2 June 2025. https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4233362021.

———. S.v. 'Empathy, n.' Accessed 2 June 2025. https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4513297911.

———. S.v. 'Evil, Adj. and n.1.' Accessed 23 March 2021. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/65386.

———. S.v. ‘Trauma, n.’ Accessed 14 June 2021. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/205242.

Ogden, Graham S. *Qoheleth*. 2nd ed. Readings: A New Biblical Commentary. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007.

Palmer, David. ‘The Self, Ethics, Agency and Tragedy.’ In *The Routledge Companion to Theatre, Performance, and Cognitive Science*, edited by Rick Kemp and Bruce McConachie, 239–45. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315169927-26.

Papendick, Michael, and Gerd Bohner. ‘“Passive Victim—Strong Survivor”? Perceived Meaning of Labels Applied to Women Who Were Raped.’ *PLoS One* 12, no. 5 (2017): e0177550. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0177550.

Paynter, Helen. *Telling Terror in Judges 19: Rape and Reparation for the Levite’s Wife*. Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020.

Paynter, Helen, and Michael Spalione, eds. *The Bible on Violence: A Thick Description*. Bible in the Modern World 73. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2020.

Perdue, Leo G. *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008.

Pitman, Roger K., Landy F. Sparr, Linda S. Saunders, and Alexander C. McFarlane. ‘Legal Issues in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.’ In *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, edited by Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisæth, 378–97. New York: Guilford, 1996.

Poser, Ruth. ‘No Words: The Book of Ezekiel as Trauma Literature and a Response to Exile.’ In *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, 27–48. Semeia Studies 86. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd.5.

Rambo, Shelly. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Rape Crisis England and Wales. ‘The 5 Fs: Fight, Flight, Freeze, Flop and Friend.’ Accessed 16 June 2023. https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/tools-for-victims-and-survivors/understanding-your-response/fight-or-flight/.

Reaves, Jayme R. ‘Sarah as Victim and Perpetrator: Whiteness, Power, and Memory in the Matriarchal Narrative.’ *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 4 (2018): 483–99. https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637318806591.

Reaves, Jayme R., David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa, eds. *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*. London: SCM Press, 2021.

Rienks, Shauna L. ‘An Exploration of Child Welfare Caseworkers’ Experience of Secondary Trauma and Strategies for Coping.’ *Child Abuse & Neglect* 110, no. 3 (2020): 104355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104355.

Ritivoi, Andreea Deciu. ‘Affect.’ In *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, edited by Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja, 141–51. Routledge Companions to Literature Series. London: Routledge, 2020. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351025225.

Rivers, Matt, and Lily Lee. ‘Isolated and Abandoned: The Heartbreaking Reality of Old Age in Rural China.’ CNN, 8 February 2019. https://www.cnn.com/2019/02/07/asia/china-elderly-people-new-year-intl/index.html.

Ross, Ryan. ‘Between Shell Shock and PTSD? “Accident Neurosis” and Its Sequelae in Post-War Britain.’ *Social History of Medicine: The Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine* 32, no. 3 (2019): 565–85. https://doi.org/10.1093/shm/hkx118.

Van Ruiten, Jacques, and Koert van Bekkum, eds. *Violence in the Hebrew Bible: Between Text and Reception*. Old Testament Studies 79. Leiden: Brill, 2020. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004434684.

Sabin-Farrell, Rachel, and Graham Turpin. ‘Vicarious Traumatization: Implications for the Mental Health of Health Workers?’ *Clinical Psychology Review* 23, no. 3 (2003): 449–80. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0272-7358(03)00030-8.

Scholz, Susanne. *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2020. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1hqdhjv.

Schoors, Antoon. *Ecclesiastes*. Historical Commentary on the Old Testament. Leuven: Peeters, 2013.

———, ed. *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 136. Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998.

Schwark, Sandra, and Gerd Bohner. ‘Sexual Violence—“Victim” or “Survivor”: News Images Affect Explicit and Implicit Judgments of Blame.’ *Violence Against Women* 25, no. 12 (2019): 1491–509. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801218820202.

Seow, Choon-Leong. *Ecclesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Yale Bible 18C. London: Doubleday, 1997.

Shaw, Benjamin. *Ecclesiastes: Life in a Fallen World*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2019.

Shields, Martin A. ‘Review of *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory*, by Jennie Barbour.’ *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 13 (2013). https://doi.org/10.5508/jhs.2013.v13.r25.

Šiljak, Zilka Spahić. ‘Victim or Survivor? Choosing Identity After Wartime Sexual Violence.’ In *Healing and Peacebuilding After War: Transforming Trauma in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, edited by Julianne Funk, Nancy Good, and Marie E. Berry, 121–32. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020.

Smith, Mitzi J. ‘“He Never Said a Mumbalin’ Word”: A Womanist Perspective of Crucifixion, Sexual Violence and Sacralized Silence.’ In *When Did We See You Naked? Jesus as a Victim of Sexual Abuse*, edited by Jayme R. Reaves, David Tombs, and Rocio Figueroa, 46–66. London: SCM Press, 2021.

Smith-Christopher, Daniel L. *A Biblical Theology of Exile*. Overtures to Biblical Theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002.

So, Simon Siu-Hing, ed. *A Glossary of Common Cantonese Colloquial Expressions*. Translated by Simon Siu-Hing So. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2002.

Society of Biblical Literature. ‘SBL Meetings and Events—2023 Annual Meeting On-Line Program Book.’ Accessed 13 April 2024. https://www.sbl-site.org/meetings/Congresses_ProgramBook.aspx?MeetingId=43.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin, 2004.

Southwood, Katherine E. ‘Critical Empathy and Reading Judges 21: A Self-Critical Corrective.’ In *The Bible and Violence*, edited by Johanna Stiebert, Chris Greenough, Mmapula Kebaneilwe, and Johnathan Jodamus. London: Bloomsbury, forthcoming.

———. *Job’s Body and the Dramatised Comedy of Moralising*. Routledge Studies in the Biblical World. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021.

———. ‘“This Man Has Come into My House”: Hospitality in Genesis 19; 34; and Judges 19.’ *Biblical Interpretation* 26, no. 4–5 (2018): 469–84. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-02645P03.

Spalione, Michael, and Helen Paynter, eds. *Map or Compass? The Bible on Violence*. Bible in the Modern World 79. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022.

Spencer, Franklin Scott, ed. *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature*. Resources for Biblical Study 90. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017.

Spina-Matthews, Sarah. ‘Bolton Couple Jailed for Trafficking Hungarian Sex Workers to UK.’ BBC News, 18 December 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c05pe5e48epo.

Staub, Ervin. *Overcoming Evil: Genocide, Violent Conflict, and Terrorism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

———. *Positive Social Behavior and Morality: Social and Personal Influences*. Vol. 1. New York: Academic Press, 1978.

———. *The Psychology of Good and Evil: Why Children, Adults, and Groups Help and Harm Others*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

———. *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

———. *The Roots of Goodness and Resistance to Evil: Inclusive Caring, Moral Courage, Altruism Born of Suffering, Active Bystandership, and Heroism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Stedman, M. L. *The Light Between Oceans*. New York: Scribner, 2012.

Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011.

Stiebert, Johanna, ed. *Activism, Bible, and Research-Based Teaching: Practical Approaches for the Global Biblical Studies Classroom*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2024.

———. *The Construction of Shame in the Hebrew Bible: The Prophetic Contribution*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 346. London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.

———. 'Introducing the Contributors to "The Bible and Violence"—Katherine Southwood and Dominic Irudayaraj.' *The Shiloh Project* (blog), 11 May 2022. https://shilohproject.blog/introducing-contributors-to-the-bible-and-violence-katherine-southwood-and-dominic-irudayaraj/.

Stiebert, Johanna, and Musa W. Dube, eds. *The Bible, Centres, and Margins: Dialogues Between Postcolonial African and British Biblical Scholars*. London: T&T Clark, 2018.

Stulman, Louis. 'Reflections on the Prose Sermons in the Book of Jeremiah: Duhm's and Mowinckel's Contributions to Contemporary and Trauma Readings.' In *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, 125–39. Semeia Studies 86. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd.10.

Tan, Nancy Nam Hoon. *Resisting Rape Culture: The Hebrew Bible and Hong Kong Sex Workers*. Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021.

———. ‘Response: Between Resisting White and Reflecting Black: A Hong Kong Resident’s Response and Perspective.’ In *The Bible, Centres, and Margins: Dialogues Between Postcolonial African and British Biblical Scholars*, edited by Johanna Stiebert and Musa W. Dube, 57–75. London: T&T Clark, 2018.

Thiede, Barbara. *Rape Culture in the House of David: A Company of Men*. Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible. London: Routledge, 2022. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003014911.

———. ‘Taking Biblical Authors at Their Word: On Scholarly Ethics, Sexual Violence, and Rape Culture in the Hebrew Bible.’ *Journal of Biblical Literature* 143, no. 2 (2024): 185–205. https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1432.2024.1.

Thiede, Barbara, and Johanna Stiebert. ‘Feminism, Bible, Texts and Terror—A Feminist Reflection.’ *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 9, no. 1 (2025): 08. https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/16018.

Tiemeyer, Lena-Sofia. *Ezra-Nehemiah: An Introduction and Study Guide; Israel’s Quest for Identity*. T&T Clark Study Guides to the Old Testament. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017.

Tollerton, David C. *The Book of Job in Post-Holocaust Thought*. The Bible in the Modern World 44. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012.

Tombs, David. *The Crucifixion of Jesus: Torture, Sexual Abuse, and the Scandal of the Cross*. Rape Culture, Religion and the Bible. Abingdon: Routledge, 2023.

Tomkins, Silvan S. *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. 4 vols. New York: Springer, 1962–1992.

———. *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition (Book 1)*. New York: Springer, 2008.

———. *Affect Imagery Consciousness: The Complete Edition (Book 2)*. New York: Springer, 2008.

Trible, Phyllis. *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. Overtures to Biblical Theology 13. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

Tsing, Nam Kiu. *Hongkongers’ Fight for Freedom: Voices from the 2019 Anti-Extradition Movement*. Studies in Critical Social Sciences 255. Leiden: Brill, 2023.

Tupamahu, Ekaputra. ‘Disrupting the Master: Critical Theory Without Canonical Constraints.’ *The Bible and Critical Theory* 20, no. 1 (2024): 1–6. https://bibleandcriticaltheory.com/vol-20-no-1-2024-ekaputra-tupamuhu/.

Turner, Marie. *Ecclesiastes: An Earth Bible Commentary; Qoheleth’s Eternal Earth*. Earth Bible Commentary Series. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017.

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

Washington, Harold C. '"Lest He Die in Battle and Another Man Take Her": Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Laws of Deuteronomy 20–22.' In *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, edited by Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 185–213. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998.

Weeks, Stuart. *Ecclesiastes 1–5: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*. International Critical Commentary. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2020.

———. *Ecclesiastes 5–12: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*. International Critical Commentary. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022.

———. *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*. New York: T&T Clark International, 2012.

———. *The Making of Many Books: Printed Works on Ecclesiastes 1523–1875*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014.

———. 'Wisdom, Form and Genre.' In *Was There a Wisdom Tradition: New Prospects in Israelite Wisdom Studies*, edited by Mark R. Sneed, 161–77. Ancient Israel and Its Literature 23. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015.

West, Gerald O. *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*. Interventions 2. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999.

———. 'Between Text and Trauma: Reading Job with People Living with HIV.' In *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, edited by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, 209–30. Semeia Studies 86. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1h1htfd.15.

Whitters, Mark F. 'Why Did the Bystanders Think Jesus Called upon Elijah Before He Died (Mark 15:34–36)? The Markan Position.' *Harvard Theological Review* 95, no. 1 (2002): 119–24. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4150741.

Whybray, Roger N. *Ecclesiastes*. Old Testament Guides 10. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989.

Winter, Jim. *Opening Up Ecclesiastes*. Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005.

Wong, Yee-cheung. 傳道書的人生智慧 [Life Wisdom from the Book of Ecclesiastes]. 2nd ed. Studies on the Books of the Old Testament. Hong Kong: Yee-cheung Wong, 2010.

World Health Organization. *The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders: Diagnostic Criteria for Research*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 1993. https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241544554.

Yee, Gale A., ed. *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*. 2nd ed. New Approaches in Biblical Studies. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Yelin, Barbara. *Irmina*. Translated by Michael Waaler. English ed. London: SelfMadeHero, 2016.

Zehnder, Markus Philipp, and Hallvard Hagelia, eds. *Encountering Violence in the Bible*. The Bible in the Modern World 55. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013.

Zondervan. 'New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue)—Home.' Accessed 10 January 2025. https://www.zondervan.com/p/nrsvuebible/.

Zuckerman, Bruce. *Job the Silent: A Study in Historical Counterpoint*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.