

The Bible and Critical Theory, Special Issue:

Engaging with Katie B. Edwards' *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising* (The Bible in the Modern World, 48; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012)

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It is debatable as to whether or not Eve is the most well-known female biblical figure of all time (the Marys Magdalene and virgin-mother might pip her at the post), but without a doubt it is Eve who dominates the popularity and recognisability stakes when it comes to contemporary advertising in the West. She's everywhere. She sells, obviously. The question is why she sells so well, particularly since the early 1990s. As the title suggests, the usefulness of Eve in advertising is the focus of Katie Edwards' fascinating book *Admen and Eve: The Bible in Contemporary Advertising*. In this special issue of *BCT*, we have five commissioned (and peer-reviewed) essays. These are not book reviews; the authors were asked to produce critical essays that engage with Edwards' book in light of their own research interests.

Carolyn Blyth's "Lost in the 'Post': Rape Culture and Postfeminism in *Admen and Eve*" picks up on Edwards' exploration of the complicity between certain postfeminist ideas about power and sexuality, and the problematic replication of rape myths and culture. Blyth demonstrates how postfeminist advertising, including those that utilise an Eve figure, worryingly seem to condone heteronormative gender violence. Moreover, Blyth returns to the biblical text to show how what we now refer to as the mythologies of rape culture "can be discerned, at least implicitly, within the text of Genesis 2-3, particularly through its articulation of female sexuality and gender power dynamics" (p.1).

In "The Commodification of Biblical Texts in Advertising and Contemporary Capitalism," Robert Myles explores the function of advertising as a crucial instrument of the contemporary capitalist machinery, one which generates the mystique of the commodity. His point of departure is Edwards' insight concerning the relationship between postfeminist culture and Genesis 2-3. Myles develops this insight by focussing on the "intersections with class and capitalism that function within and beneath the layers of gendered ideology" (p.12). Rather than diminishing the importance of gender analysis (a rather tiresome, though monotonously frequent practice), Myles seeks instead to explore the intersections and divergences of feminist and Marxist thinking with respect to the commodification of the Bible through advertising.

Johanna Stiebert's work on the filmic Bathsheba ("The Eve-ing of Bathsheba in Twentieth Century Film") demonstrates that the depictions of Bathsheba in film have always relied upon the power (and danger) of her sexuality. By exploring the striking similarities between the postfeminist Eve of advertising and the pre-postfeminist Bathsheba of film, we realise that so-called progressive postfeminist

ideology is actually logically co-extensive with the rather well-worn anti-feminist mythologies of patriarchalism.

Ibrahim Abraham is a sociologist of religion and contemporary culture. In “Would you Adam and Eve it? Social Scientific Contributions to the Study of the Reception of Scripture in Consumer Society,” he recognises the value of work such as Edwards’, work that shows how biblical figures, tropes, motifs, etc., continue to influence popular culture and importantly (re)create the subjectivities of contemporary consumers. However, Abraham insists that biblical scholars who wish to study the reception of the Bible and popular culture need to move beyond the methodologies with which they are comfortable, namely methodologies suitable for the critical analysis of *literary* texts: “there must be meaningful engagement with the cultures of production and consumption of popular culture, and biblical scholars must be prepared to surrender their privileged interpretive position” (p.32).

Finally, George Aichele has long been associated with the study of Semiotics and the Bible. In “Connotations of Eve,” he begins with a discussion of John Crowley’s story “The Nightingale Sings at Night” (1989) and Umberto Eco’s “On the Possibility of generating Aesthetic Messages in an Edenic Language” (1979). For both Crowley and Eco, what the story of Eden reveals is the “god-like yet flawed power of naming and the potential for semiotic play that appears in language” (p.44). The idea that Eve is an original sinner and temptress is, of course, a Christian interpretation and it is this interpretation that, as Edwards’ analysis deftly shows, the postfeminist advertisements invert, such that Eve becomes a (sexually) powerful woman. As Aichele points out, though, this dominant Christian take on the story is not the only one possible, as Crowley and Eco make clear. Indeed, the “admen” are themselves making use of the “limitless possibilities of semiosis” (Eco), though in such a way as “to exploit the more mundane passions of female consumers: desires for happiness, success, or romance” (p.44). Aichele is, furthermore, concerned by Edwards’ insistence that the story is “unredeemably androcentric” (Edwards 2012, 33) and makes the fine suggestion that we might return to the text of Genesis 2-3 “and its critical tension with the ads” (p.49). I look forward to reading such an essay in the future (George)!



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