

en alternativ översättning för att den får en bibeltext att bättre passa i mässans kontext. Någon gång framhålls att en ”ordagrann” översättning skulle ha resulterat i en återgivning som möjliggör en kristologisk läsning av en viss passage i Gamla testamentet (till exempel Dan. 7:13–15 om ”människosonen”). Här går de katolska fotnoterna i dialog, eller ibland i direkt polemik, med Bibelkommissionens översättning. På detta sätt öppnas bibeltexterna upp på nytt, och läsaren blir medveten om att varje text alltid kan översättas på mer än ett sätt.

Jag har försökt att lyfta fram några olika kännetecken hos denna intressanta studie-bibel. Just läst i relation till Bibelkommissionens paratextuella material ger den upphov till återkommande reflektion och ett fördjupat studium av bibeltexterna, inte bara ur historisk utan även teologisk synpunkt. Att det är just den romersk-katolska kyrkan i Sverige som har det teologiska självförtroendet att ta fram en sådan här utgåva stämmer till eftertanke. När får vi se en liknande utgåva inom någon av de andra kyrkliga eller religiösa traditionerna i vårt land?

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Hanna Liljefors. *Hebreiska bibeln debatterad: En receptions-kritisk studie av diskurser om "Gamla testamentet" i svenska dagstidningar 1987–2017*. Skellefteå: Artos. 2022. 418 s.

Since coming to work in Sweden, I have frequently been told how secular the country is. But what secularization means, what it looks like, and how it plays out, is far from singular or straightforward. Hanna Liljefors's study, *Hebreiska bibeln debatterad: En receptions-kritisk studie av diskurser om "Gamla testamentet" i svenska dagstidningar 1987–2017* (which could be translated to "The Hebrew Bible Debated: A Reception-Critical Study of Discourses about the 'Old Testament' in

Swedish Newspapers 1987–2017"), is a superb scholarly contribution to understanding how religion surfaces in contemporary society. I had the pleasure of engaging with this well-written and clearly argued study as Liljefors's "opponent" in her PhD defence at Uppsala University in 2022.

Running to over 400 pages, Liljefors expertly examines the way references to the "Old Testament" come up in newspaper debates over a thirty-year period. The thesis exposes popular perceptions of the Hebrew Bible as violent and unmodern, with a problematic and primitive God. Along with detailed argumentation about the dominant discourses that appear in this period in relation to specific themes, Liljefors argues for the need to understand how a "mediatized Bible" functions.

Liljefors presents the media as a public space and information-sharing platform where people encounter religion. With major daily Swedish newspapers as her primary material, she focuses on what we might think of as the media mainstream. This focus helps her to seek out dominant discourses that reach large audiences across Sweden, regardless of faith. Two overarching questions guide the book. The first is: which discourses about the Hebrew Bible are expressed in debates in Swedish daily newspapers in the years 1987–2017? And second: what criticism can be directed at these discourses from a reception-critical perspective? The purpose of the research is to clarify and critique dominant representations of the Hebrew Bible in the given material.

Theoretically and methodologically, Liljefors draws particularly on the British linguist Norman Fairclough and his model of critical discourse analysis. Additionally, she engages with a number of key biblical reception theorists, allying herself particularly with Holly Morse's reception-critical perspective.

The newspaper material that is analyzed is narrowed down to three debates that have featured in Swedish daily newspapers between 1987 and 2017. Liljefors examines

120 debate articles relating to three distinct but in some ways overlapping themes: criticisms raised about the views of women in the Hebrew Bible, complaints about the violent and offensive nature of God in the Hebrew Bible, and views on homosexuality in the Hebrew Bible. The main chapters in the book are each dedicated to one of these themes, and each theme is oriented around a particular Swedish figure who has instigated or inspired the debate around the theme: Birgitta Onsell (1925–2012), Eva Moberg (1932–2011), and Åke Green.

Each chapter contains a critical discourse analysis of the relevant debate, determining which discourses about the Hebrew Bible are produced and become dominant, before moving to a reception-critical analysis. In this way, Liljefors shows how debates inspired by new Swedish translations of the Bible, for instance, have tended to insist on the problematic content of the Hebrew Bible in contrast to the New Testament. She names discourses such as “the Old Testament is the other”, “the Old Testament God is a perpetrator of violence”, “the Bible forbids homosexuality”, and “secular laws stand over the Bible’s laws”, as naturalized and hegemonic in these debates.

The book then moves to a broader reflection on social practice, drawing on Fairclough. Liljefors identifies ideological trends, underlying assumptions, and significant changes. She shows that it is the Hebrew Bible specifically that is perceived as the problem, not the Christian canon more generally. A clear pattern emerges wherein the Hebrew Bible and New Testament are continuously contrasted. She clarifies how those engaged in the newspaper debates build their arguments, both linguistically and conceptually. Along the way, she draws on theories of secularization and mediatization.

Between 1987 and 2017, Liljefors identifies historical continuities and changes in the order of discourse. She shows how Christianity’s dominance over Judaism is reproduced

with the help of stereotypical representations of the Old Testament. The representation of Jewish voices in these debates is almost non-existent. With clarity and critical force, Liljefors exposes the connections between the contemporary discourses and anti-Jewish perceptions, prejudices, and practices in (Christian) history. Vestiges of the authority of the “Old Testament” as a normative text fade over time, she indicates, as participants in the debates propose adding a preface to the Bible, cutting or editing the Hebrew Bible, and forbidding at least parts of the Hebrew Bible from being used for preaching. Closer to our current time, there is a shift towards writing more generally about “the Bible” as the Qur’an comes increasingly to the forefront of debates about religion in Sweden. The debates shift from referring to “us” Christians, to “them” in the church, to “us” in democratic society. The Hebrew Bible eventually gains some increased authority again, specifically in relation to discussions about religious freedom.

The more normative aspects of Liljefors’s analysis come through in three ways. First, in Liljefors’s use of Fairclough to not only describe how discourses operate but to critique modes of shoring up power linguistically and conceptually. Second, in the way she positions herself within biblical reception history by building on the idea of *reception criticism*. A crucial aim of reception criticism is to uncover problematic histories of interpretation that have become dominant. And third, by drawing on biblical scholarship as a resource to critique the debates. Although not exclusively, much of this critical bent is indebted to feminist biblical scholarship.

Altogether, Liljefors argues that the references to the Hebrew Bible she has highlighted can be usefully conceptualized as a “mediatized Bible”. The Mediatized Bible captures how traditional media treats the Bible as an Ur-text, assumes it is a Christian canon, and predominantly highlights a specific set of biblical texts that can be connected to sensational topics such as sex and violence.

More broadly, the debates Liljefors analyzes demonstrate the way religion becomes visible in a country such as seemingly secular Sweden.

Thankfully, Liljefors does not fall into the temptation to sniff at popular Bible-use and bemoan decreasing levels of biblical literacy. Instead, she seeks to understand the way references to the “Old Testament” function and to clarify key trends and tendencies. That does not mean, however, that she poses as a disinterested scholar. Liljefors critiques the trends and tendencies she uncovers with authority and sophistication. Given the long and violent history of anti-Judaism, and the minority status of Jews in Sweden, the critical edge to the book is particularly important, also to puncture fantasies of secular neutrality.

As Liljefors’s time period covers the rapid rise of social media, it could be argued that there are questions left unanswered about where debates about the Bible actually take place, who engages in such tussles, and what forms references to the Bible take in the media-sphere. Social media platforms might demonstrate similar trends to those Liljefors identifies, but they might also offer more humorous, marginal, and subversive representations of the Hebrew Bible that would never make it into major newspapers or take a “debate” format. Further, given the increased attention to affect in the humanities in recent years, I would be curious to understand better how affect theory helps to explain pervasive and deeply felt perceptions of the Bible.

Uncovering significant trends in the way the Hebrew Bible is referenced and represented in Swedish newspapers is not meant to debunk secularization theories. Instead, Liljefors demonstrates particular ways in which the Bible continues to feature in debates where it is assumed religious neutrality is operative. The influence of the Bible, and histories of interpretation, are overlooked because it is assumed they are defunct. The extent to which stereotypes about the “Old

Testament” persist and are contrasted with the New Testament as more humane and human-rights-friendly shows how problematic it is to imagine we have got over these histories and influences. With her characterization of the Mediatized Bible, Liljefors makes an important contribution to recent biblical scholarship that engages with the reception of the Bible in society. In this way she stands in line with scholars such as Yvonne Sherwood, James Crossley, Halvor Moxnes, Erin Runions, Nyasha Junior, and Holly Morse, who make abundantly clear that the Bible is not just an ancient archive. Rather, perceptions and uses of the Bible function in a variety of ways, not least to stabilize notions of normalcy and otherness, niceness and monstrosity.

I hope Liljefors – and readers of her book – will continue to ask questions about the way the Bible is referenced and represented in the contemporary world. While I understand and respect the decision to write the book in Swedish, I hope that it will be published also in English so that it can reach the larger audience it deserves.

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David Thurfjell. *En lockton i ödemarken: Om människans förmåga att besjåla världen*. Stockholm: Norstedts. 2023. 317 s.

Låt mig börja en bit bak i tiden. 2015 utkom David Thurfjells *Det gullösa folket*. Min reaktion var då: jaha, ännu en som vill visa hur ”religiösa” vi sekulariserade svenskar ”egentligen” är. Jag kom därför inte att läsa den förrän häromåret. Det visade sig att jag haft fel och att jag, mot min förväntan, kom att tycka mycket om boken. Graden av igenkänning var hög och jag smålog flera gånger då jag tydligt kunde identifiera mig som en typisk ”postkristen” medelklassvensk. De positiva förväntningarna var därför höga när jag