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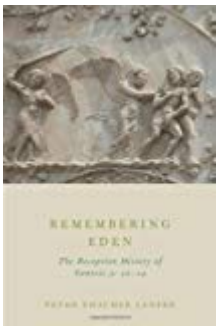

Peter Thacher Lanfer. *Remembering Eden: The Reception History of Genesis 3: 22-24.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. 272 pp. $74.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-992674-9.

Reviewed by Rhonda Burnette-Bletsch

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Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

In recent years many biblical scholars have turned their attention from traditional historical-critical and literary concerns to consider the ways in which interpretive communities through the ages have used and been influenced by biblical texts. This interest in the Bible's "afterlives" is rooted theoretically in both the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and the literary theory of Hans Robert Jauss.[1] Gadamer's principle of *Wirkungeschichte* (effective history, or impact history), often used interchangeably with the term *Rezeptionsgeschichte* (reception history), recognizes that interpreters are not autonomous, objective observers but rather are embedded in the history and culture that shaped them and constitutes their particular "horizon" of understanding.

According to Gadamer, understanding a text occurs through a "fusion" of two horizons--those of the interpreter and the text--wherein the interpreter discovers ways in which the text's history and internal discourses either cohere with or challenge his or her own prejudices or prejudgments, a process that results in the extension of the interpreter's horizon. In this way, Gadamer accomplished the rehabilitation of prejudice and, in the words of New Testament scholar Ulrich Luz, "gave us back to history" so that we now realize "[n]either history nor texts of the past are simply objects of research; rather they belong to the stream of history which also carries the boat of the interpreter."[2]

Building upon this theoretical foundation, Jauss argued that the meaning of a text was located neither in the text itself nor in the experience of the reader, but in the interaction of the two. He understood a work of literature not as a "fact" but as an "event," namely that moment in which it is perceived and interpreted by a situated reader. The meaning of a text then develops over time, in directions not necessarily anticipated by its original author(s), as it is realized in new ways through hermeneutical fusions of horizons with an endless succession of situated readers.

As reception history has continued to gain prominence within the theoretical toolbox of biblical studies, many traditionalists in the field have questioned the utility of this approach. In particular, many have wondered how cataloging the ways in which biblical texts were (mis)appropriated by later interpreters might contribute to our understanding of the texts themselves (i.e., their originating context, redaction history, and exegetically recovered meaning). As a result, much apologetic ink has been spilled on the value of reception studies to the field and its relationship to more traditional methods. Rather than insisting on the significance of the Bible's effective history as a subject worthy of study in its own right, it has become customary for biblical scholars interested in reception to respond to skeptics with reassurances of an exegetical payoff. Similarly, Peter Thacher Lanfer's recent work, a revision of his 2010 doctoral dissertation at UCLA, suggests that reception history might be fruitfully employed for exegetical purposes.

Combining traditional methodological approaches to the expulsion narrative (Gen. 3:9, 22-24) with an analysis of its reception in early Jewish and Christian literature, Lanfer attempts to situate the redaction of Genesis 2-3 in its historical context. In chapter 1, he discusses structural and thematic tensions that have long led scholars to view the Eden story as a composite text and concludes that it is essentially composed of two parts: an older core narrative concerning the Tree of Knowledge and a later editorial frame consisting of the expulsion narrative, which introduces the Tree of Life. While the older narrative stands in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern primordial myths, most of which focus on the pursuit of immortality, the later editorial insertion of the expulsion narrative refocuses the story on both wisdom and immortality. With the addition of Gen. 3:9, 22-24, Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden not simply because of the acquisition of illicit wisdom, but because that wisdom introduces the implicit threat that they might access immortality.

Lanfer suggests that the thematic tension evident in the final form of the Eden story might reflect cultural tensions during the Josianic reforms or early exilic period between emerging sapiential schools focused on the individual pursuit of wisdom and schools focused on covenant and cult. In short, against scholarly consensus attributing a late exilic or postexilic date to the final form of Genesis 2-3, he views the expulsion narrative as a relatively early antisapiential polemic aligned with Deuteronomic concerns. While an intriguing possibility, this thesis is far from conclusive. Lanfer himself admits that the condemnation of human hubris in the pursuit of wisdom also arises within Israel's wisdom tradition (see Job 15) and is indeed already present in the core narrative of Genesis 2-3. Yet, the editorial insertion of the expulsion narrative transforms a tale of hubris with negative consequences into a tale of disobedience punished by expulsion and the loss of possible immortality. In the final form of Genesis 2-3, the pursuit of wisdom leads to the loss of Eden and eventual death rather than blessings and long life.

The remainder of the book uses reception history to demonstrate the plausibility of Lanfer's thesis regarding the redaction history of Genesis 2-3. The next three chapters examine translations and interpretations of three dominant motifs within the expulsion narrative (the Tree of Life, wisdom, and immortality) in Jewish and Christian texts against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern myths and iconography. He convincingly argues that later translators and interpreters responded to thematic tensions in the Eden story by attempting to smooth over its contradictions while selectively privileging one motif over others. A fifth chapter examines the inclusion of explicit temple imagery in expansions of Genesis 2-3, which he argues is consistent with biblical depictions of Solomon's Temple and the common an-

cient Near Eastern conception of temples as sacred groves or gardens. He argues that these expansions derive mainly from temple-evocative elements within the expulsion narrative (e.g., the cherubim). Throughout Lanfer contends that this reception history of the expulsion narrative demonstrates "significant permeation of these motifs" to establish the plausibility of a pre-exilic or early exilic date for this text (p. 11).

In addition to examining the redaction history of Genesis 2-3, a second stated purpose of Lanfer's work is methodological. He intends to model a dialogical approach to biblical studies that avoids the pitfalls of traditional methods, such as historical criticism's tendency to search for a singular "meaning" of a text identified with "authorial intent," literary criticism's ahistorical privileging of a text's "final" form, and reader response's privileging of a text's reception as a vehicle for the generation of meaning. He proposes instead a pluralistic approach that draws upon a variety of mutually reinforcing methodologies. Lanfer distances himself from the problematic search for a singular authorial meaning and warns against viewing biblical texts as fixed compositions at any point in antiquity. Nevertheless, he argues with Pierre Bordieu that any text has limited interpretive possibilities constrained by its "cultural field"--the embedded symbols, themes, and motifs that provide the "symbolic capital" used by subsequent interpreters.[3] The deployment of these themes in a given text, he contends, allows scholars to recover information about the cultural world of the text's production.

Lanfer provides a rich intertextual reading of the expulsion narrative alongside biblical and extra-biblical literature. In doing so, he casts a wide net to identify allusions to this source text, sometimes including literature that presents extremely tenuous connections at best. In Lanfer's hands, almost any reference to a tree becomes a potential allusion to the Tree of Life, and what are more likely images of national restoration become metaphors of individual resurrection. Like many studies of reception history, Lanfer's presents a seemingly endless parade of translations and interpretive texts from a variety of literary genres and social locations. While one might wish for more contextualized analysis of individual receptions (outside of the book's admittedly extensive endnotes), he does an admirable job identifying and illustrating interpretive trajectories found across a wide range of texts. Yet, in any study of reception history, one must ask about the selection criteria that determine which interpretive texts are included. Lanfer withholds this information until the final pages of the book where it is revealed that he has excluded texts that he deems "incompatible with the dominant symbols and discourses of the source text...These texts may be interesting, insightful, and even useful for discerning social circumstances, but they are by nature ***eisegetical*** rather than exegetical, and often depart entirely from the dialogues inherent in the source text" (p. 165). The logic behind this selection criterion seems somewhat circular given that Lanfer undertakes his examination of the expulsion narrative's reception history for the expressed purpose of discovering its implications for our understanding of the received text.

Overall, this book is a welcome addition to scholarly discussion of the redaction history of Genesis 2-3 and the expulsion narrative's reception in early Jewish and Christian literature. While the discussion is at times necessarily tedious, interested readers will likely be drawn into Lanfer's presentation of particularly intriguing topics such as the treatment of godlikeness by the expulsion narrative and its later interpreters. Like many scholars, Lanfer appears to value the Bible's effective history, not as a scholarly pursuit in its own right, but to the degree that it preserves clues for unraveling the prehistory of a biblical source text. Many have suggested that the study of reception history raises questions in the mind of the interpreter, which return him or her to the received text with fresh eyes. Lanfer's study reverses this

process by using reception history to demonstrate the plausibility of a thesis derived through traditional historical-critical methods.

Notes

[1]. Hans-Georg Gadamer, ***Truth and Method*** (New York/London: Crossroad, 1982)--originally published in German in 1960 as ***Warheit und Methode***. Jauss developed his ideas concerning the "aesthetics of reception" in a series of essays from late 1960s to early 70s. See especially Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," ***New Literary History*** 1 (1970): 7-37. It has been reprinted and included with other essays in the collection ***Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,*** trans. T. Bahti, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

[2]. Ulrich Luz, "The Contribution of Reception History to a Theology of the New Testament," in C. Rowland, C. M. Tuckett, and R. Morgan, eds., ***The Nature of New Testament Theology: Essays in honor of Robert Morgan*** (Oxford University Press: Blackwell, 2006), 124-125.

[3]. Pierre Bordieu, "Thinking about Limits," ***Theory, Culture and Society*** 9 (1992): 37-49.