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Graybill, Cristina Rhiannon

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Men in Travail:  
Masculinity and the Problems of the Body in the Hebrew Prophets

by  
Cristina Rhiannon Graybill

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Near Eastern Studies

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Critical Theory

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Robert Alter, Chair  
Professor Daniel Boyarin  
Professor Chana Kronfeld  
Professor Celeste Langan

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## Abstract

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by

Cristina Rhiannon Graybill

Doctor of Philosophy in Near Eastern Studies

with the Designated Emphasis in Critical Theory

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Robert Alter, Chair

This dissertation explores the representation of masculinity and the male body in the Hebrew prophets. Bringing together a close analysis of biblical prophetic texts with contemporary theoretical work on masculinity, embodiment, and prophecy, I argue that the male bodies of the Hebrew prophets subvert the normative representation of masculine embodiment in the biblical text. While the Hebrew Bible establishes a relatively rigid norm of hegemonic masculinity – emphasizing strength, military valor, beauty, and power over others in speech and action – the prophetic figures while clearly male, do not operate under these masculine constraints. Nor does the prophetic body, repeatedly represented as open, wounded, vulnerable, or otherwise non-masculine, conform to the norms of masculine embodiment that are elsewhere strongly enforced in the text. Instead, the prophetic body represents a site of resistance against the demands of hegemonic masculinity and affords the possibility, however, briefly, of alternate, multiple, and open organizations of masculinity not organized around the discipline of the body and the domination of the bodies of others.

The introduction establishes the body of Moses as a key site to investigate prophetic embodiment and its relationship to masculinity and prophetic power. While Moses is widely acclaimed in and beyond the text as a successful and even paradigmatic prophet, his body tells another story. Among other peculiarities of embodiment, Moses is afflicted with a stutter and a glowing face, both of which move him beyond the bounds of normative embodiment. Prophecy transforms the experience of the body and the prophetic performance of masculinity alike.

The bulk of the dissertation considers this dilemma with respect to the literary or latter prophets of the Hebrew Bible, with particular attention to three examples: Hosea, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. The body of the prophet is already a problem in the book of Hosea, a classical eighth-century prophetic text. This is particularly apparent within the paired accounts of Hosea's marriage to Gomer and Yahweh's marriage to the gynomorphized Israel in Hos. 1-3. In this text, the demands of the body are negotiated neither by Hosea nor upon his body, but instead are displaced onto the female bodies of Gomer and Israel. The female body provides the material ground to work through the difficulty and demands that prophecy places upon the male subject, in particular the demand for openness. The openness, here largely symbolic, that prophecy demands of the prophet results in the female body being torn open, exposed, and violated.

In the case of Ezekiel, the male prophetic body itself becomes the object of concern. But while Ezekiel's body, especially as represented in the theophany and "sign acts" of Ezek. 1-5, dramatically enacts the demands of prophecy, the message itself remains muddled. Like Kafka's hunger artist, Ezekiel's performance directs attention to the impossibility of meaningful communication and to the pain and mutability of the body. Ezekiel also experiences a crisis of masculinity, which escalates in the contrast between Ezekiel's suffering human form and the splendor of Yahweh's male body. The book of Ezekiel attempts to resolve the instabilities of the prophetic body by concluding with a vision of the restored Temple in chapters 40-48. However, the renewed temple body does not replace the suffering prophetic body and the challenge to prophetic masculinity it represents.

In Jeremiah, a similar disturbance of masculinity occurs. However, here the material form that the disturbance assumes is not the flesh, but rather the voice. The prophet's voice, at once in excess of his body and intimately a part of it, registers the prophet's failure to utter sounds culturally coded as masculine. Instead, Jeremiah's voice adapts the forms of sound traditionally marked in the ancient Near East as feminine. It also resembles the voice of the hysteric, a key figure in twentieth-century psychoanalytic discourse. As with hysteria, Jeremiah's vocal disturbances subvert both the performance of gender and the organization of meaning by offering the destabilizing cries of an alternate, non-masculine gender performance.

In addition, this dissertation considers the prophetic body and the representation of prophetic masculinity in the New Testament book of Revelation. While Revelation draws heavily from the Hebrew prophets and represents itself as a prophetic text, the prophetic body does not occupy a destabilizing role in the text. Instead, the bodies of prophets in Revelation – of which there are several – participate in and sustain the text's dominant ideology of masculinity. This ideology, adapted from Roman imperial gender ideals and enacted most dramatically by the messianic figures in Revelation, emphasizes violence against the body of the other as fundamental to masculine performance. The prophetic body, instead of resisting or challenging this gender ideology, contributes to it. The countertextual, subversive power of the prophetic body in the Hebrew Bible to challenge and transform masculinity is lost in the New Testament book of Revelation.

In the Hebrew prophetic writings, if not in the book of Revelation, the prophetic body breaks with the normative representations of biblical masculinity. Instead, the bodies of prophets offer the possibility of alternate forms of gender and embodiment in the text. These alternate masculinities are not built upon strength and violence and wholeness, but rather upon vulnerability and openness. The prophetic body exposes the instability of "masculinity" as a category in the Bible, and in the interpretive traditions that have emerged around it. This question of how masculinity is constructed in the Hebrew Bible is of great importance for understanding not just the Bible or the ancient Near East, but also contemporary controversies over gender and anxiety about bodies.

## **Dedication**

*To my parents, and in memory of my grandmother Christine.*

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## List of Abbreviations

### Books of the Bible

1 Sam.	1 Samuel
2 Chr.	2 Chronicles
2 Sam.	2 Samuel
Dan.	Daniel
Exod.	Exodus
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Gen.	Genesis
Hab.	Habakkuk
Hos.	Hosea
Isa.	Isaiah
Jer.	Jeremiah
Jud.	Judges
Lev.	Leviticus
Mal.	Malachi
Mic.	Micah
Neh.	Nehemiah
Qoh.	Qohelet (Ecclesiastes)
Ps.	Psalms
Rev.	Revelation
Sg.	Song of Songs
Zech.	Zechariah

### Other Abbreviations

ASV	American Standard Version
BDB	Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon
CAT	Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts
HALOT	Hebrew-Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (ed. Köhler and Baumgartner)
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
KJV	King James Version
KTU	Keilschrift Texte aus Ugarit
MT	Masoretic text
NETS	New English Translation of the Septuagint
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
LXX	Septuagint
V	Vulgate
TDOT	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (ed. Botterweck and Ringgren)
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (ed. Harris, Archer, and Waltke)

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## INTRODUCTION

### A Memorable Fancy

Of the many readers of the Hebrew prophets, William Blake is one of the few to imagine them as guests at a dinner party. In one of the sections of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* entitled “A Memorable Fancy,” Blake describes his meal with the prophets and the conversation that ensues. Blake’s first concern is with inspiration. The fancy opens,

The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert, that God spoke to them; and whether they did not think at the time, that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition.<sup>1</sup>

Foremost among Blake’s questions is this: how can his prophetic interlocutors possibly know that God has really spoken to them? How can they assert that their prophetic words are true and divine? And, most famously, “Does a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so?”<sup>2</sup> These questions, of course, are not simply inquiries about the particulars ancient prophecy, but also express Blake’s own anxieties over the nature of poetic inspiration. The answers that (Blake’s) Isaiah speaks do a great deal, in turn, to assuage these anxieties, arguing for the power of belief, of inspiration, and of arts poetic and prophetic alike. But inspiration is not Blake’s only concern, nor the only topic with which he wishes to confront his dinner companions. For all his fascination with firm persuasions, with inspiration, with poetry and prophecy, Blake also cannot help but ask (or dream of asking) his guests about a more earthly matter – the prophetic body.

As the dinner party continues, Blake turns his questions to his visitors’ more peculiar actions as prophets – Isaiah’s three years of nakedness (Isa. 20) and Ezekiel’s decision to use dung as cooking fuel and to lie on his side for more than a year (Ezek. 4):

I also asked Isaiah what made him go naked and barefoot three years? He answer'd: ‘The same that made our friend Diogenes, the Grecian.’

I then asked Ezekiel why he ate dung, & lay so long on his right & left side? he answer'd, ‘The desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite: this the North American tribes practise, & is he honest who resists his genius or conscience only for the sake of present ease or gratification?’<sup>3</sup>

Even as Blake begins the dinner with belief, faith, and reality, he cannot resist inquiring about the prophet’s body. If, as Isaiah assures him, “a firm persuasion that a thing is so” does indeed “make it so,” then why are the prophets themselves so invested in bodily peculiarities? Why must Isaiah refuse clothes for three years, and Ezekiel insist upon eating dung and lying, bound, upon the ground? What part of the “firm persuasion” does the flesh express?

Blake is not the only reader to ask such questions, or to blur the lines between the difficulty in understanding ancient texts and a contemporary anxiety over inspiration and art. He is perhaps bolder, however, in venturing to answer the questions that he raises. In *The Marriage*

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<sup>1</sup> William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Oxford University Press, 1975), xx. I am grateful to Celeste Langan for introducing me to Isaiah and Ezekiel in Blake.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

of *Heaven and Hell*, Blake's prophets have no shortage of explanations for their seemingly peculiar actions. Isaiah defers to Diogenes (conveniently positioning Hebrew prophecy in the intellectual and cultural genealogy of the Greeks), while Ezekiel appeals to the "perception of the infinite," with the "North American tribes" tossed in for good measure.<sup>4</sup> Blake's Ezekiel further attributes the true core of prophecy to "the Poetic Genius (as you now call it)." But while such answers fit the Hebrew prophets into a larger intellectual and artistic world while assuaging the contemporary anxiety over inspiration, they forget the very thing with which they began: the prophetic body. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, biblical prophecy is equal parts philosophy and poetry. What is missing is precisely that which made the first fancy, the Hebrew text itself, so memorable – the bodies of the prophets.

But Israel's prophets are not Blake's; they are not even Diogenes. Blake's reading of prophecy as attuned to the "perception of the infinite" tells us a great deal about Blake's own convictions, but very little about the prophets we find in the Hebrew Bible itself. Isaiah does indeed walk around naked for three years (Isa. 20:2-6). Ezekiel does "eat dung, & [lie] so long on his right & left side" – 390 days on the right, and another 40 on the left (Ezek. 4:4-8). But in the biblical text, unlike at Blake's dinner party, these actions pass largely unexplained.<sup>5</sup> In place of mindfulness and inspiration, the text offers us unspeaking bodies, unspeakable bodies, actions and refusals of action, dilemmas of embodiment and interpretive dilemmas. Furthermore, the peculiarities of the prophetic bodies in the Hebrew Bible fit uneasily against the dominant thrust of the prophetic texts. In the Bible, the prophet's body often acts as a sign, but also something much more than a sign, something that the explanations, often later textual glosses, provided in the text fail to grasp.<sup>6</sup>

In this dissertation, I begin with the questions Blake raises at his dinner party, but offer another set of answers. I argue that the prophetic body is an essential but under-conceptualized part of prophecy. The body – its constituent parts, its pains, its performances – is not secondary to the prophetic vocation. Nor is the body simply a dumb medium, transmitting a prophetic message from Yahweh to his (likely errant) people through a willing human conduit. Instead, prophecy depends upon the body, even as the body resists, refuses, and is marked by prophecy.

Further, and importantly, prophecy is never enacted upon a general or abstract body. Instead, the "prophetic body" is always the body of a particular prophet – Hosea, Isaiah,

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<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel tells his host, "The philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception: some nations held one principle for the origin and some another. We of Israel taught that the Poetic Genius (as you now call it) was the first principle and all other others merely derivative, which was the cause of our despising the Priests & Philosophers of other countries, and prophesying that all Gods would at last be proved to originate in ours & to be the tributaries of the Poetic Genius; it was this that our great poet King David desired so fervently and invokes so pathetic'ly, saying by this he conquers enemies & governs kingdoms; and we so loved our God, that we cursed in his name all deities of surrounding nations, and asserted that they had rebelled; from these opinions the vulgar came to think that all nations would at last be subject to the Jews." Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The biblical text does offer some formulaic editorializing comments, for example Isa. 20:3-6 and Ezek. 4:5,8, 13, 16-17. However, these comments do not adequately account for the strangeness of the text or exhaust its meaning. Instead, they have an ineffectual feel that calls to mind the well-intentioned spectators attempting to explain Kafka's hunger artist. On this point, see further my chapter 3.

<sup>6</sup> By way of example, consider Isaiah's nakedness in Isa. 20. While Yahweh's instructions to Isaiah include a basic justification, it fails to exhaust the significance of meaning and the excess of corporeality. The command to walk naked that opens Yahweh's speech is quickly eclipsed by a fantasy of coming punishment. In the excesses of this vision, however, the naked body that begins it all remains unremarked upon, and unthematized.

Jeremiah, Ezekiel, others. And this body is a sexed body, nearly always a male-sexed body.<sup>7</sup> Even as prophecy is marked in the text as a masculine practice, prophecy also places difficult demands upon the male body. In fact, the practice of prophecy dislocates the prophetic male body from normative masculine embodiment. The prophet thus moves – or is moved – outside the boundaries of hegemonic biblical masculinity. Prophecy does not offer a straightforward “unmanning” of the prophet, but it does bring with it necessary and painful transformations of the male body.

This dissertation tracks the shifting representations and significations of the male prophetic body in a range of biblical prophetic texts. I offer chapter-length studies of texts from Hosea, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, each of which highlights a particular mode of prophetic embodiment. These studies, which form the core of the dissertation, are bookended by a reading of the body of Moses (contained in this introduction) and an investigation of the prophetic body “after the prophets” – that is, the prophetic body as taken up and transformed in apocalyptic literature, specifically book of Revelation. Before turning to the texts, however, I want to offer a bit more background into the ideas of “biblical prophecy,” “the male biblical body” and “masculinity” that inform this dissertation as a whole. I will then consider the body of Moses as a model for my reading practice of the prophetic body.

## Hebrew Prophecy

In this dissertation, my primary interest lies in the prophets as represented in the literary text.<sup>8</sup> I will not pursue historical individuals behind the names recorded in the books of the Bible. I am not interested in taking up (or in refuting) historical claims about the existence of historical individuals; such questions seem to me specious and likely unsolvable. On this question of historical prophets, Robert Carroll’s rebuke to the quest for the historical Jeremiah offers a useful reminder. Carroll writes, “It is not clear that ‘historical’ prophets can be reconstructed from books associated with their names, nor is it established that such ‘historical’ figures are *not* the products or even the epiphenomena of the tradition in which they appear.”<sup>9</sup> My concern, instead, is with the literary representation of the prophets.

Reading for the literary representation of the prophets does not require us to ignore all questions of context, history, and social reality, only to remember that our conclusions concern textual *representations*, not historical ephemera. And from the literary texts of the Hebrew Bible, we can draw several conclusions about prophecy. First, to recall an argument that goes back most famously to Max Weber,<sup>10</sup> the Israelite prophets have an established social role in the world of the biblical text. The calling by Yahweh is only the first step in an ongoing societal relationship. While the prophets come from a range of backgrounds (Jeremiah is the son of a priest, Amos dresses sycamore trees (Jer. 1:1, Amos 7:14)), with prophecy comes social capital.

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<sup>7</sup> As Elizabeth Grosz argues in *Volatile Bodies*, the body is always sexed, never abstract. See Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), particularly chapter 8.

<sup>8</sup> On the literary study of the Bible, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Regina M. Schwartz, “Joseph’s Bones and the Resurrection of the Text: Remembering in the Bible,” *Pmla* 103, no. 2 (March 1, 1988): 114–124; *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 62–63

<sup>10</sup> Max Weber, “The Prophet,” in *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

Isaiah and Jeremiah are among the Hebrew prophets who advise (albeit contentiously) the Judean king; Hosea likewise speaks with familiarity about the royal intrigues that surround him (Hos. 7:1-7). Haggai and Zechariah are involved with the rebuilding of the Temple, another nexus of power in ancient Israel. The superscripts on the prophetic books likewise position the prophet in a specific historical moment and social position.<sup>11</sup>

The social role of prophecy is not simply a literary invention, of course, but accords with anthropological and comparative work on biblical prophecy.<sup>12</sup> Even as divisive a figure as Jeremiah, who repeatedly antagonizes the king and whose life is threatened multiple times, must have had followers.<sup>13</sup> As the similarities between the biblical literature and other ancient Near Eastern texts suggest, biblical prophecy is not a textual production, but rather offers a textual representation of a preexisting social institution. This representation, moreover, is undertaken in a culturally legible way. In other words, while prophecy may correspond to contemporary pathology (as David J. Halperin thinks it does<sup>14</sup>), it nevertheless is culturally meaningful and fits into an established, non-pathologized social category in ancient Israel.

Who belongs in this category of “prophet,” however, is a contentious question. There is a great deal of anxiety in the biblical text over false prophecy, and many of the canonical Hebrew prophets issue condemnations of the false prophets who are their rivals (these “false” prophets no doubt did the same). These discourses of false prophecy indicate not just an anxiety over the boundaries of the social category of prophecy but also a larger ideological struggle. As Carroll writes,

Prophecy was not simply about predicting events in the future but entailed a religious ideology. Behind the deuteronomistic handling of prophecy was an acceptance of such an ideology and an attempt to legitimate it by depicting Israelite history as the unfolding of the prophetic word.<sup>15</sup>

Prophecy is positioned not just in a specific social location, but also within a larger ideological milieu. Part of the task of the prophet is to uphold this ideology. In the biblical texts, this occurs both through the actions of the prophets and through the interventions of the Deuteronomistic editors.<sup>16</sup>

In the ancient Near East, one common criterion for distinguishing between real and false prophecy is success. If the prophecy comes true, the prophet must be a true prophet. There is even a prophetic genre, *vaticinium ex eventu* (prophecy after the fact) that exploits this criterion

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Isa. 1:1, *The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah* and Jer. 1:1

<sup>12</sup> R.R. Wilson’s work offers a useful model of the relationships of support between prophets and society in ancient Israel. Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> On peripheral prophets and society, see Ibid., 39. On Jeremiah as a peripheral prophet, see Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*, 242.

<sup>14</sup> David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State Press, 1993).

<sup>15</sup> Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 188.

<sup>16</sup> See also R. E Clements, “Jeremiah 1-25 and the Deuteronomistic History,” in *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 107–122.

to shore up the reputations of various prophets.<sup>17</sup> Despite this cultural emphasis on success, the Hebrew prophets, as represented in the text, are a strikingly unsuccessful lot, at least when it comes to persuading anyone with their prophecies. Only Jonah, after all, successfully convinces his audience to repent – and Jonah, with his repeated attempts to flee from prophecy (landing him in the belly of a fish) and his subsequent refusal to accept the repentance of the people of Nineveh he has brought about, is hardly a model prophet.<sup>18</sup> The recurrent narrative of the Hebrew prophets is a narrative, if not of straightforward failure (the Deuteronomistic editors, at least, forestalled such a possibility), then at least of great difficulty. Prophets do not simply speak the word of Yahweh to his people. They also stutter, complain, reject the preexisting laws, quarrel with kings, take up new careers, and, as Blake cautiously mentions at his dinner party, undertake perplexing performances.

In addition to social support and a lack of prophetic success, the Hebrew prophets share another important feature: they are nearly all male. There are just four women named as prophets in the Hebrew Bible: Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Deborah (Jud. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chr. 34:22), and Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), as well as the unnamed prophetess in Isaiah (Isa. 8:3).<sup>19</sup> None of these female prophets play important prophetic or literary roles.<sup>20</sup> Both Noadiah and Miriam, moreover, are chastised by male prophets (Nehemiah and Moses, respectively) for their prophecies.

This indicates a final feature that the Hebrew prophets share – they are not just men, but male-bodied individuals.<sup>21</sup> While the social performance of gender is an important (if often troubled) part of biblical prophecy, the specificity of sexed bodies also matters deeply.<sup>22</sup> This point is a double one: the prophetic body is always a sexed body, and the sexed body as *body* is an essential component of prophecy. Though this body, as male body or simply as fleshly materiality, often passes unmentioned upon in attempts to define prophecy, it is of vital importance. The body is where the prevailing textual representation of the prophet as a powerful, socially secure (if not always socially successful) individual – the dominant image of the prophet

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<sup>17</sup> Martti Nissinen, “Neither Prophecies nor Apocalypses: The Akkadian Literary Predictive Texts,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series* (2003): 134–148; Eva Osswald, “Zum Problem der Vaticinia Ex Eventu,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 75, no. 1 (1963): 27–44; Philip Mayerson, “‘P. Ness. 58’ and Two ‘Vaticinia Ex Eventu’ in Hebrew,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 77 (1989): 283–286.

<sup>18</sup> John A. Miles, “Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 65, no. 3 (1975): 168–181; John C. Holbert, “Deliverance Belongs to Yahweh!: Satire in the Book of Jonah,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 1981, no. 21 (1981): 59–81.

<sup>19</sup> According to Williamson, “The Talmud lists seven prophetesses, of which only three coincide with those explicitly so designated in the Hebrew Bible: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther; cf. *b. Meg.* 14a.” Hugh G. M. Williamson, “Prophetesses in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 65n1.

<sup>20</sup> Compare Williamson: “While prophetesses are mentioned only rarely in the Hebrew Bible, it seems probable both that this fact hides a more familiar social reality and that some, at least, of the biblical writers recognized that fact. It remains the case, however, that written prophecy remained a male preserve, and that this is itself a reminder that far more is at stake in the interpretation of the prophetic books than mere historical reconstruction.” While the “familiar social reality” of female prophecy remains, in my opinion, an open and likely undecidable question, Williamson’s point about the “male preserve” of written prophecy is an important one. *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>21</sup> Roland Boer, “Too Many Dicks at the Writing Desk, or How to Organize a Prophetic Sausage-Fest,” *Theology and Sexuality* 16, no. 1 (2010): 95–108.

<sup>22</sup> On this point, thought not in the biblical context, see Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*.



that we have received from the biblical text and from social scientific criticism alike – breaks down. The prophetic body rejects the dominant textual narrative of prophecy, offering instead a site of weakness. And without the body, at least within the literary world of Hebrew prophecy, there *is* no prophecy.

### **The Male Body in the Hebrew Bible**

The male prophetic body is positioned in a larger field of cultural and textual meanings surrounding the biblical body. Before continuing, I want, briefly, to consider the key features of the body, and the male body, in the Hebrew Bible. The mind-body problem is not a problem with much traction in the biblical text or its world. This lack of interest in parsing the relationship between body and soul (much commented upon by commentators) is matched by a lack of interest in theorizing the body as body. When the biblical body appears, it is most frequently in parts. This does not, however, represent the fragmentation of a lost bodily unity or wholeness (as so often in psychoanalysis), but rather suggests a tactical emphasis on the part of the body relevant to the text at hand. Thus we know of Leah's tender eyes (וְעֵינֵי לְאָה רַכּוֹת, *but Leah's eyes were tender*), Goliath's height (וְגָבָהּ שֵׁשׁ אַמּוֹת וְזֶרֶת, *his height was six cubits and a span*), Joseph's beauty (וַיְהִי יוֹסֵף יָסָף יְסָף יִסְפָּה יִסְפָּה יִסְפָּה יִסְפָּה, *and Joseph was handsome in form and handsome in appearance*<sup>23</sup>), and Moses' shining face (קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו, *the skin of his face radiated light*) (Gen. 29:17, 1 Sam. 17:14, Gen. 39:6, Exod. 34:29).<sup>24</sup> These details – not of bodies as a whole, but rather of specific bodily features – are what stand out in the text, and in the textual representation of bodies.

In the prophetic books, the bodies of specific characters appear less frequently than body parts themselves. The eyes and ears turn up frequently, metonymies for the perceptual system and the acquisition of knowledge. Sometimes, as in Isaiah 6 and 29, they are paired with the heart, understood as the seat of inclination, will and reason, but also associated with affect. The כְּלָיִת, *kidneys*, are a frequent poetic parallel with the לֵב or לֵבָב, *heart*, and are likewise used to describe both the faculty of judgment and physical and psychic interiority. Occasionally קָרַב, the *inward parts*, is also used, both to refer to the physical body and to qualities of affect and knowledge. In the case of Jeremiah, the unborn prophet's formation in the womb is mentioned, recalling Job's question to God, *did you not pour me out like milk, and curdle me like cheese?* (Job 10.10), with its suggestive milky metaphors of embryology. Sometimes, the body is the object of violence, as when Jeremiah complains that his enemies are trying to kill him or when Isaiah commands the people to blind themselves (Isa. 29). At times, the body is deeply invested in the categories of purity and impurity as defined by biblical law, particularly in the book of Ezekiel. Across the prophetic canon, the body also functions symbolically, particularly in

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<sup>23</sup> On the description of Joseph's beauty, see Stuart MacWilliam, "Ideologies of Male Beauty and the Hebrew Bible," *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 17, no. 3 (2009): 265–287.

<sup>24</sup> The Hebrew translations throughout are my own. I will note and adjudicate meaningful divergences between the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT) and the Greek Septuagint (LXX); occasionally, I will note a relevant translation in the Latin Vulgate or the Syriac text. Greek Translations from the New Testament are taken from the NRSV unless otherwise noted; important problems in the Greek are indicated in the footnotes. See further the abbreviations list on page v.

prophecies of the Eschaton, when the reversal of physical disability stands in for the utter transformation of the material order.<sup>25</sup>

Whether whole or in parts, ably bodied or extraordinary (in beauty, in strength, in disability), the biblical body is marked in another way as well – it is a sexed body. The biblical text repeatedly differentiates between male and female bodies. These bodies are distinguished in a number of laws.<sup>26</sup> The difference between male and female bodies is also generated socially, through the creation of specific gendered spaces and through interpersonal relations. A great deal of work has been done on the female body in the Hebrew Bible, as I will take up in greater detail in chapter 1. My dissertation instead engages the male body, which remains under-theorized in biblical studies, despite a growing body of scholarly work concerning biblical masculinity.<sup>27</sup>

There are a number of discourses in the Hebrew Bible surrounding the male body – or better, the male *bodies*, because biblical masculinity assumes multiple forms and produces multiple bodies. Indeed, while the female bodies in the prophetic texts, at least, sometimes seem to occupy a disappointingly narrow spectrum (haughty daughters, whorish daughters, mothers screaming in childbirth, old women crying in lamentation, and women of all sorts whoring around and then paying for it<sup>28</sup>), the range of male bodies and masculine experiences is far greater. Before taking up the specific experience of male prophetic embodiment, then, I want to consider some other, more normative masculine bodies – the royal body, the erotic body, and the

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<sup>25</sup> As Joseph Blenkinsopp writes, “It is an essential part of the restorationist eschatological view that people are not meant to be deaf, blind, lame, indigent, subject to violence, and deprived of access to judicial process...the removal of natural disabilities, the restoration and re-creation of the life of the individual and of society, are signs that the turning point in history is immanent.” Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (Yale University Press, 2000), 409. Already in first Isaiah, however, the idea is present (for example, Isa. 35:5-6).

<sup>26</sup> For example, a number of the laws contained in Lev. 12-20. See as well Cheryl B. Anderson, *Women, Ideology, and Violence: Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomic Law* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004); Victor H. Matthews, Bernard Malcolm Levinson Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, vol. 262, Library Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (New York: T&T Clark Ltd, 2004); Deborah L. Ellens, *Women in the Sex Texts of Leviticus and Deuteronomy: a Comparative Conceptual Analysis*, vol. 458 (New York: T&T Clark Ltd, 2008); Harold C. Washington, “Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Hebrew Bible: a New Historicist Approach 1,” *Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches* 5, no. 4 (1997): 324–363.

<sup>27</sup> For example, see the recent collection of essays edited by Ovidiu Creangă, *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010). See as well H.A. Hoffner, “Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85, no. 3 (1966): 326–334; Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus: and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon, 1995); Stephen Moore, *God’s Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1996); D. Seeman, “‘Where Is Sarah Your Wife?’ Cultural Poetics of Gender and Nationhood in the Hebrew Bible,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 91, no. 2 (1998): 103–125; Stephen Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible*, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 2002); Roland Boer, *Knocking on Heaven’s Door* (Psychology Press, 1999); *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, Biblical limits (London: Routledge, 1997); Ken Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex and Bible in Queer Perspective*, Queering theology series (London: T & T Clark International, 2004); David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1995), 212–243; S.D. Moore and J.C. Anderson, *New Testament Masculinities*, vol. 45 (Society of Biblical Lit, 2003); C.M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2008); *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, Biblical interpretation series 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> See David J. A. Clines, “He-Prophets: Masculinity as a Problem for the Hebrew Prophets and Their Interpreters,” in *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in Memory of Robert Carroll*, ed. Robert P. Carroll, Alastair G. Hunter, and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 322.

priestly body – as well as the disabled body and foreign body, both of which “fail” at hegemonic biblical masculinities.

The male body has become a topic of increasing importance in biblical studies, though in this point scholarship on the Hebrew Bible lags behind its New Testament counterpart. Ovidiu Creangă’s 2008 *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond* is the first edited volume focused on the topic, though scholars including Stephen Moore, Roland Boer, and David Clines have published in the topic elsewhere. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz’ *God’s Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*, offers a book-length treatment of the male body in the Bible and its consequences for notions of masculinity. His concern, however, is not so much with the human bodies of prophets or other men in the biblical texts, but rather with the body of God – and with a particular part, the divine genitals.<sup>29</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz’s careful efforts to trace the contours of this body in the Hebrew Bible and later texts are positioned in a larger therapeutic and theological reading of masculine subjectivity. Moore’s work sustains a similar interest in the divine male body, though he is more inclined to dwell on spectacular divine violence than to contemplate the restoration of bodies and subjects alike.

The body of God is indeed a striking male body, and one that will appear in the pages that follow. However, my own central concern lies not in the dazzling, hypermasculine form of the deity, but in the other male bodies that fill the textual spaces around it. And this is the human male body. From Adam onward, the male human bodies of the text have been positioned in struggles over sex, gender, and sexuality; Adam’s own supposed giant body, giant penis, and so on have been an object of much discussion and post-biblical interpretation from *Midrash Rabbah* onwards.<sup>30</sup> The body I want to consider here, however, is not the body of Adam, who begins the text curiously unsexed,<sup>31</sup> but rather of David. This is because David offers a model of biblical masculinity. As David J.A. Clines writes,

The myth of masculinity inscribed in the David story was a very potent influence upon Israelite men, and I am quite sure that the construction of masculinity in the David story was not invented by its author—or by some historical David—but reflects the cultural norms of men of the author’s time.<sup>32</sup>

In considering the masculinity of David, Clines offers a concise analysis of the key components

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<sup>29</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz argues that “discomfort with the idea of God’s penis that has generated the idea of an incorporeal God,” and that his discomfort has its source in “the contradictions inherent in men’s relationship with a God who is explicitly male.” Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon, 1995), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *God’s Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1996), 89.

<sup>31</sup> Famously, in the Genesis 1 account, humans (אָדָם) are created in the (plural) image of God: בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ (Gen 1:26; *Let us make a human being [Adam] in our image and according to our likeness*); the creation is later explained as זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם (Gen. 1:27; *male and female he created them*). In Genesis 3, Adam appears as a male figure from the beginning, though it can be argued that gender is socially produced and oppositional and thus masculinity is only meaningful following the creation of Eve. See Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 118. The existence in Hebrew of the separate words (*human being*; grammatically masculine but not strongly sexed) and (*man*) supports this reading. In any case, David’s masculinity develops over a longer textual arc and in a richer social context.

<sup>32</sup> David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 216.

of hegemonic masculinity (the term is borrowed from sociology<sup>33</sup>) in the world of the Hebrew Bible. He highlights six features: military prowess, persuasive speech, beauty, close male friendship, separation from women (though not abstinence from heterosexual sex), and musical skill, especially with stringed instruments. David exemplifies each of these axes of hegemonic masculinity.<sup>34</sup> And just as David offers a paradigm of biblical masculinity, so too, more specifically, does David's body present a successful model of male embodiment. Like the king's gender performance, the textual representation of his body offers a clear example of an ideal and idealized male body.<sup>35</sup> And yet in Clines' study, only two of the six features of David's masculinity identified pertain specifically to the form of the body: strength and beauty.

The strength that Clines describes as a feature of David's masculinity is intimately linked to military valor; as he notes, "Hebrew has no words for courage or bravery as distinct from strength."<sup>36</sup> Instead, courage, like masculinity, is proved through strength. And indeed, "The essential male characteristic in the David story is to be a warrior, a man of war (אִישׁ מִלְחָמָה) or mighty man of valour (גִּבּוֹר הַיָּל)."<sup>37</sup> This valor and might, moreover, depends upon a particular form of embodiment: the strong and powerful body. As Clines, Stephen Moore, and other scholars of biblical masculinity acknowledge, strength is associated with particular forms of embodiment, in the case of both humans and Yahweh himself. Clines elsewhere describes Yahweh as follows: "The accouterments of power surround this divine figure: he is kitted out with a hard and great and strong sword (Isa. 27.1), his arm is strong (Isa. 51.9; Jer. 21.5) and so is his hand..."<sup>38</sup> Moore goes further, setting the gigantic and powerful body of Yahweh against the contemporary figure of the bodybuilder, with bulging muscles and accompanying rage.<sup>39</sup> The body of David is likewise imagined as powerful, perfect, and physically undefeatable. Against the giant Goliath, David eschews armor before killing his Philistine foe with a single stone from his slingshot (1 Sam. 17.) While David's refusal of armor can be read as heightening the contrast between the agile, vulnerable youth, filled with Yahweh's power, and the lumbering, doomed giant, his outfit also serves to place the male body on display. The perfection of David's form is displayed as well when he dances in the streets before the people, earning the reproach of Michal, his wife. Though I will argue in chapter 1 that David's self-exposure breaks with the acceptable cultural performance of kingship and masculinity, here I want to note as well that the dance represents a scene where David's body is exposed to the admiring (if not approving) gaze of the text.

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<sup>33</sup> See Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee, "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 5 (1985): 551–604; R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 1, 2005): 829–859.

<sup>34</sup> Clines, *Interested Parties*, 212–243.

<sup>35</sup> On this point, cf Hamilton: "The study of the royal body sheds new light on what we might call 'normative maleness' in Israel, that is, on what Israelites took to be admirable in a king and by extension all males who aspired to high status as well as rank. The successful kings, most notably David, can display their bodies in ways that serve higher purposes, ultimately divine ones, and these displays deserve the emulation of Israelites" Mark W Hamilton, *The Body Royal: The Social Poetics of Kingship in Ancient Israel*, Biblical Interpretation Series 78 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2005), 31.

<sup>36</sup> Clines, *Interested Parties*, 218.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>38</sup> Clines, "He-Prophets: Masculinity as a Problem for the Hebrew Prophets and Their Interpreters," 313.

<sup>39</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*.

This visual interest in the body of the king is linked to another of the key features of biblical masculinity: male beauty.<sup>40</sup> In a later study of biblical masculinity, Clines writes, “Beauty is a masculine ideal in the ancient world; the evidence is unassailable.”<sup>41</sup> And David, we know, is a beautiful man. In the case of the David story, he elaborates,

Obviously it is very desirable, in the world of the David story, for a man to be beautiful. Beauty is to be seen, at the least, in bodily shape, in the eyes, in the skin colour, and in the height. The language used here is not of some diffused notion of ‘good looks’, but reflects some quite precise and analytical thought about what makes a man beautiful.<sup>42</sup>

Beauty makes the man. Unlike a large strain of western thought, in which beauty is associated with femininity, the Hebrew text presents beauty as a basic masculine feature.<sup>43</sup> While beauty can be used to narrative effect in the text in a variety of ways,<sup>44</sup> to describe a man as beautiful is not to un-man him.

The other features of masculinity that Clines discusses in the context of David – verbal persuasion, close bonding with other men, a relative lack of interest in women (Bathsheba is of course the most notable exception), and musical skill, particularly with stringed instruments – bear a less obvious relation to the body. Taken together, however, they suggest that the ideal male body is at once skillful, socially constructed in relation to other men (an insight mirrored frequently in contemporary theoretical writings), and symbolically if not physically separate from women and women’s bodies. This is not to say that David does not have sex with women – Clines notes the king’s many wives – but rather to emphasize that these sexual encounters with women occur against a larger background of male friendship, sociability, and competition.<sup>45</sup> This socially constructed male body is constituted not just by sexual encounters (and the boasting that follows – consider Gilgamesh, as well as Absalom’s exploits with his father’s prostitutes (2 Sam. 16:20-23)) – but also through friendship,<sup>46</sup> combat, military discipline, and even in grief after death, as in David’s lament for Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:17-27).

The body of King David, like other royal bodies of the ancient, late antique, and medieval worlds, is at once exemplary and exceptional.<sup>47</sup> As Mark Hamilton writes, “The study of the royal body sheds new light on what we might call ‘normative maleness’ in Israel, that is, on what

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<sup>40</sup> Compare Macwilliam, “Ideologies of Male Beauty and the Hebrew Bible.”

<sup>41</sup> David J. A. Clines, “Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34,” in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creanga, *The Bible in the Modern World* 33 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 59.

<sup>42</sup> Clines, *Interested Parties*, 222–223.

<sup>43</sup> This is not to deny that beauty is also an important part of the characterization of a number of female figures, including Rebecca, Rachel, and Absalom’s daughter, as well as the Shulamite in the Song of Songs.

<sup>44</sup> Macwilliam, “Ideologies of Male Beauty and the Hebrew Bible.”

<sup>45</sup> This same structure occurs in the Epic of Gilgamesh. Consider Enkidu’s sexual relations with Shamhat in relation to his intimacy with Gilgamesh.

<sup>46</sup> Gilgamesh’s masculinity is constructed to a large degree through his relationship with Enkidu. See Andrew George, tran., *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003), tablets I–VIII; David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality: And Other Essays on Greek Love* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 75–87.

<sup>47</sup> See Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997); Hamilton, *The Body Royal*.

Israelites took to be admirable in a king and by extension all males who aspired to high status.”<sup>48</sup> Bodily strength, bodily beauty, and bodily wholeness are important parts of masculine embodiment across the Hebrew Bible. The Song of Songs, for example, offers an extended celebration of the beauty of the male form. The Shulamite praises her lover’s body from head to feet. The beginning and ending verses (Sg. 5:10 and 15-16) praise the lover’s beauty more generally, forming an inclusion, while the middle verses offer specific descriptions of his hair, eyes, cheeks, arms, and legs –a bodily description almost unmatched in its detail,<sup>49</sup> as most biblical bodies are described only with a single, exemplary feature. Male beauty likewise figures in the Joseph story (where Joseph’s beauty draws the jealousy of first of his brothers, then of Potiphar’s wife (Gen. 37:1-4; 39:6)). Absalom, too, is beautiful (2 Sam. 14:24-25). Though he comes to a painful end, his beauty is nevertheless, as with Joseph, a key part of his attractiveness as a leader, even as he is forced, tragically, to pay for his own father’s shortcomings.<sup>50</sup>

The ideal biblical male body is thus a strong body, a beautiful body, and a body negotiated between men. This negotiation takes the form not just of combat, or of friendship. Instead, masculine embodiment is also negotiated through a series of rules concerning the body, its openness, and its place in the world. Mary Douglas has argued that purity laws, such as those found in the Torah, encode cultural notions about body and society alike, an insight that has had a great deal of traction in biblical studies. The laws concerning the body delineate specific forms of culturally acceptable and culturally legible male embodiment. As Mark K. George writes in the case of Deuteronomy, “Classificatory systems, in other words, encode social preferences into them, even if they profess to be the word of Yhwh...Articulated within the laws, commandments, and ordinances of this book is Deuteronomy’s representation of Israelite men and, by extension, masculinity.”<sup>51</sup> A major aim of the classificatory logic of Deuteronomy – and of the priestly texts and the holiness code as well – is to classify and thus create an “Israelite” masculinity.

The body is an important part of this construction of masculinity. George notes that the Israelite body is constituted over and against the bodies of resident aliens and foreigners through its practices.<sup>52</sup> These areas of textual concern include eating, sexual activity, conduct in battle, and dress (it is forbidden for a man to dress as a woman); by regulating the body in these ways, Deuteronomy produces an Israelite body that is differentiated (through dress, culinary, sexual, and other practices) from other Levantine and Near Eastern bodies. And as George observes, the implied audience of the rules is an Israelite man or group of men (the number of parties addressed fluctuates, but the grammatical gender does not). Masculinity is taken as normative and as default.

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<sup>48</sup> Hamilton, *The Body Royal*, 31.

<sup>49</sup> The body of the Shulamite is also described in detail in the Song of Songs. Elsewhere in the text, significant attention is paid to the bodies of various improper women (for example, Ezek. 16 and 23) and of hybrid anthropomorphic or technological figures such as Yahweh’s chariot assemblage (Ezek. 1) and the statue in Daniel (Dan. 2).

<sup>50</sup> See further Macwilliam, “Ideologies of Male Beauty and the Hebrew Bible.”

<sup>51</sup> Mark K. George, “Masculinity and Its Regimentation in Deuteronomy,” in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 64, 66. See also Anderson, *Women, Ideology, and Violence*.

<sup>52</sup> According to George, “The Israelite male body does not engage in the same behaviors or practices as those bodies” of resident aliens or foreigners. George, “Masculinity and Its Regimentation in Deuteronomy,” 68.

## Bodies that Fail: Masculinity, Disability, and Alterity

The regulation of sexual activity and accompanying concern with purity seems linked to two discourses of the body: the investment in bodily wholeness, which is breached by fluids and discharges, and the concern to avoid association with the female body, which is leaky, unstable, and contaminating. First, bodily wholeness is a major concern of the purity laws. Not just sexual discharges but leprosy and other diseases that interfere with the margins of the body are strictly regulated. In the case of leprosy (to use the conventional translation of the unidentified biblical skin disease), the lapse in the boundaries of the body requires the commensurate temporary strengthening of the body politic as the afflicted party is temporarily expelled. Men with damaged or otherwise un-whole bodies are likewise excluded from the temple<sup>53</sup> (2. Sam. 5:6-8, Lev. 21:17-23).<sup>54</sup>

But while the male body, at least the non-disabled male body, can maintain a relatively high degree of bodily integrity, wholeness, and thus purity, the female body is forever falling into impurity. Women's bodies are altogether too open, too fluid, too sexual, too much in flux. Feminist criticism has done a great deal to document the manifold indignities to which the female body in the Hebrew Bible is subjected; I myself will return to the topic in my reading of Hosea in the following chapter. For now I want only to note that while masculinity is socially constructed and articulated in relation to other men, the male body is also constituted in opposition to the leaky, sexual, dangerous female body. This is particularly true in the prophetic literature, where the female characters are forever being sexualized, raped, forced into childbirth, driven to lament, and expelled from the city.

The use of the female body to represent deviant, failed, or foreign masculinities is common. The female body is used, for example, to describe the bodies of non-Israelite men in relation to Israelite male bodies. Carol Fontaine draws on ancient Near Eastern visual culture to trace the representation of the Other. Of Egyptian art, she writes, "The canonical treatment of the 'Other' as female, whether in overt moves such as using the female color to portray them, or in more subtle ways such as treatment of hair, position of legs, and genitalia, becomes standardized within Egyptian art."<sup>55</sup> This motif is not simply Egyptian, but Levantine as well, occurring in

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<sup>53</sup> Compare also the exclusion of Saul's disabled son Mephibosheth from the line of succession.

<sup>54</sup> Hentrich argues that the restrictions in Lev. 21 describe the exclusion of men with crushed testicles from the Temple: "Considering the rather crude medical circumstances of how circumcisions were performed in the ancient Near East, it becomes clear that there may have been a fairly high rate in 'unsuccessful tries' or 'accidents.'...Even though testicles and foreskin are indeed not the same organ, they are nevertheless closely enough related. I am suggesting that the 'crushed testicle' in Lev. 21:20 may be interpreted as an 'imperfect circumcision.'" Thomas Hentrich, "Masculinity and Disability in the Bible," in *This Aabled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper, Semeia Studies no. 55 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 85.

<sup>55</sup> Carole R. Fontaine, "'Be Men, O Philistines' (1 Samuel 4:9): Iconographic Representations and Reflections on Female Gender as Disability in the Ancient World," in *This Aabled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 65. Fontaine also describes figures from execration rituals: "The figures in terra-cotta have been given huge incised pubic triangles, a familiar form of gendering the female figure in ancient Levantine and Mesopotamian sculpture, but have no penis. The painted wood figure shows an even more ominous form of gendering: standing in the female position, arms pulled back, face alive with horror, this enemy has an ominous absence where his penis should be—perhaps representing its having been hacked off, inferred from the exceptionally rough condition of the wood where his legs meet the torso" (66).

Philistine rhetoric and the biblical text alike. According to Fontaine, “The key action motifs are giving up, hiding weakness—all forms of feminization that lead to destruction and increased vulnerability for the population. The message (and hope) is clear: men can be disabled as warriors simply by regendering them.”<sup>56</sup> The virility and strength of the male body are thus intimately tied up in its gender codes. Against the emasculated body of the enemy combatant and the deficient body of the disabled or disfigured stands the Israelite bodily ideal of masculinity: “The average and therefore normative Israelite in the eyes of the Old Testament editors was an able-bodied male, who was the head of the family and could sufficiently contribute to Israelite society. This would apply to Israelite cultic life as well.”<sup>57</sup> The able-bodied Israelite male body represents normative male embodiment.

### **The Male Body and The Constitution of Biblical Masculinity**

I have already suggested several of the ways in which the form and actions of the male body are implicated in the larger project of biblical masculinity. Strength and beauty, two key features of biblical masculinity, are situated in the body. Similarly, the actions of the body – engaging in sex, cultic practice, even food – are important components of biblical masculinity, even as masculinity is articulated in larger social, cultural, and religious dynamics. Biblical masculinity, like other forms of masculinity, consists of both a hegemonic masculinity – the culturally dominant form, represented in the Bible, for example, by King David – and other subordinate and minority masculinities. In the case of the David story, we might think of Mephibosheth, Jonathan, and Goliath as each representing a different subordinate masculinity, with Mephibosheth disabled, Jonathan positioned as the companion or perhaps “pal” of David, and Goliath as giant, brutish, and foreign, not to mention (though David does) uncircumcised.<sup>58</sup> One important aim of this dissertation is to address the ways in which the representation of the prophetic body relates to and complicates hegemonic biblical masculinities. Achieving this aim, however, requires at least a basic working description of biblical masculinity beyond the norms it places upon the male body.

A useful description of hegemonic biblical masculinity appears – before sociologists have even coined the phrase “hegemonic masculinity” – in the work of Harry Hoffner. Situating the Hebrew Bible in the context of the ancient Near Eastern world, Hoffner claims, “The masculinity of the ancient was measured by two criteria: (1) his prowess in battle, and (2) his ability to sire children.”<sup>59</sup> Instead of examining the body, Hoffner traces biblical masculinity through its symbols, chief among them the mighty bow and quiver filled with arrows. He writes,

The ideal male, the true “man’s man” of ancient Canaan, was skilled with the bow. He used his bow and arrows either to slay the enemies of his people or to procure game for his table. When a true man is celebrated in song, his many children (the visible proof of his sexual potency) are compared to arrows in the quiver of a mighty man. The ideal man piously boasts that Yahweh gives him such strength of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>57</sup> Hentrich, “Masculinity and Disability in the Bible,” 78.

<sup>58</sup> On Mephibosheth, see further Jeremy Schipper, *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* (London: T & T Clark, 2009). On “Heroes and their Pals,” see Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, 75–87.

<sup>59</sup> Harry A. Hoffner, “Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85, no. 3 (1966): 327.



arm, that he can bend a bow of bronze. When a paragon of manhood is tragically cut off in the midst of his youth, his weapons of war (and his bow in particular) will receive special attention in his funeral lament.<sup>60</sup>

Hoffner describes biblical masculinity as ruled by the idea of potency. Fertility, virility, and valor in combat are mapped upon each other. The bow and arrows function not simply as phallic symbols, but rather as metonymic extensions of the body that serve as guarantors of its masculinity. Masculinity is performed through the accouterments of battle – and through dress. As Hoffner and scholars of masculinity following him note, the biblical text clearly forbids men from dressing in women’s clothes. Dress does not simply reflect gender, but rather is part of a process of constructing it.<sup>61</sup>

More recent studies of biblical masculinity have largely followed Hoffner’s lead, placing emphasis on sexual and military prowess. I have already made reference to Clines’ six-part assessment of David’s masculinity, emphasizing strength in violence, persuasion, beauty, male friendship, disinterest in women, and musical skill. In later work on other biblical figures, Clines largely sticks to these categories, though his study of the prophets shifts from military prowess to a more general violence.<sup>62</sup> Still, the form of masculinity modeled by David – like David’s royal body – remains a hegemonic ideal for ancient Israelite masculinity.

That David offers a successful performance of masculinity does not mean that his is the only sort of masculine performance found in the text, or even acclaimed by it. Susan Haddox, for example, argues that the conflicts between men – primarily brothers – in the book of Genesis represent the favoring of a subordinate masculinity over and against the sort of masculine performance represented by David. According to Haddox, “The subordinate masculinities critique hegemonic masculinity as the way to approach God.”<sup>63</sup> Haddox’s larger argument, however, reinscribes the same hegemonic masculinity that she seems to reject. She writes, “While the biblical text in many ways reflects and supports the categories of hegemonic masculinity, in the realm of the relation with God, these norms are frequently subverted, because no human can assume the position of ultimate power. That position is left to God.”<sup>64</sup> This pattern

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>61</sup> Michelle I. Marcus, “Dressed to Kill: Women and Pins in Early Iran,” *Oxford Art Journal* 17, no. 2 (January 1, 1994): 3–15.

<sup>62</sup> In a study of masculinity in Exod. 32-34, for example, Clines writes, “These have been some notes for a gendered reading of the narrative of Exodus 32-34. I tried to keep out of my mind as I read the profiles of masculinity I had drawn for other biblical texts, and to let the contours of this narrative shape themselves in my mind. In the event, however, I found myself categorizing the evidence in much the same way as I had done in previous papers. It could be that I have let myself become locked into a grid of my own devising, or it could be that the image of masculinity in the biblical literature is really rather uniform.” At points, however, Clines seems too taken in by his own schema, and should generally be followed with discretion, as well as interest. Clines, “Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34,” 61. His categories have been taken up by a number of other biblical scholars, for examples the essays by Susan E. Haddox and Brian C. DiPalma contained in the same volume as Clines’ study of Exodus. See Susan E. Haddox, “Favoured Sons and Subordinate Masculinities,” in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 2–19; Brian C. DiPalma, “Deconstructing Masculinity in Exodus 1-4,” in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 36–53; Clines, “He-Prophets: Masculinity as a Problem for the Hebrew Prophets and Their Interpreters.”

<sup>63</sup> Haddox, “Favoured Sons and Subordinate Masculinities,” 15.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

she identifies is not a critique of hegemonic masculinity, but rather a substitution of the key players in the masculine dynamic. Virility, dominance, military prowess, persuasive speech, and separation from the realm of women – these characteristics are not displaced as desirable, but rather are attributed solely to Yahweh. They reflect, furthermore, a warrior culture, not so different, fundamentally, from the world of the *Iliad*, where masculinity through military prowess is the rule of the day.<sup>65</sup>

But while the figure of Yahweh is altogether the wrong place to look for a disruption or rejection of hegemonic masculinity,<sup>66</sup> Haddox is right to draw attention to the tensions and ruptures in the concept of “masculinity” in the text. In the same volume, Boer makes the point even more strongly. Drawing on Gramsci to challenge the calcification of “hegemony” into “hegemonic masculinity,” he observes,

Despite the effort in the Bible to present a series of overlapping ruling and dominating perspectives, all the way from social organization to sexuality, not to mention religion, they are very shaky indeed. Or to put it even more forcefully, the very act of asserting dominance is inherently unstable. Subversion lurks in every murky doorway and under every bed. In fact, hegemony is continually undermined from within and without.<sup>67</sup>

As Boer indicates, the instabilities to the “ruling and dominating perspectives” in the Bible are already present in the text. The alternatives to hegemonic masculinity are to be found not outside the text, but rather in the representations of human masculinity. Masculinity in the Bible, even hegemonic masculinity, is unstable – “shaky indeed.” This shakiness is particularly apparent in the prophets, for reasons that will unfold throughout this dissertation. But it is not limited to them. Instead, such shakiness can be found even on the level of a single figure – a single male body. To demonstrate this point, and to introduce some of the key motivating questions for this study, I will turn to a single, exemplary prophetic body (though not a body found in the writings of the Latter Prophets): the body of Moses.

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<sup>65</sup> I thank Robert Alter for reminding me of this important point.

<sup>66</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, Stephen Moore, and others have written about the ways in which Yahweh is represented as male, embodied, and sexual, with wide-reaching consequences for both the biblical texts and the religious communities that struggle to interpret them.<sup>66</sup> Moore argues that Yahweh’s overwhelming virility, violence, and size make him akin to a contemporary bodybuilder, while Eilberg-Schwartz’s concern is the titular *God’s Phallus* (or more accurately, Yahweh’s penis) and the discomfort that a sexed male deity engenders in the Bible and beyond it. When the mortal male body appears in these texts, it is frequently contemporary (Moore draws upon his own experiences bodybuilding; Eilberg-Schwartz has is concerned with contemporary Jewish and Judeo-Christian masculinity) and even more frequently constituted in critical relationship to the divine body. Eilberg-Schwartz and Moore are undoubtedly correct that the hypermasculinity and materiality of the divine body in the Hebrew Bible have powerful effects on the constitution of the human male body. I will engage with a number of their arguments throughout this dissertation, particularly in the chapter on Ezekiel (chapter 3). See Moore, *God’s Gym*, particularly chapter 3, “Resurrection”; Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*.

<sup>67</sup> Roland Boer, “Of Fine Wine, Incense, and Spices: The Unstable Masculine Hegemony of the Book of Chronicles,” in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 21.

## The Body of Moses: Three Moments in Prophetic Embodiment<sup>68</sup>

In the whole of the Hebrew Bible, Moses is almost certainly its most important prophet. From his birth and concealment from Pharaoh to his death on the edge of the Promised Land, Moses and his exploits occupy four of the five books of the Torah. The figure of Moses also has great influence over the construction of other prophetic figures. Though the Book of Deuteronomy insists that “there was never again a prophet like Moses” (Deut. 34:10), biblical scholars have traced a complex negotiation of identity formation linking Moses and the latter “writing prophets” (especially but by no means exclusively Jeremiah).<sup>69</sup> The other prophets, too, make reference to Moses and the Mosaic traditions. Hosea, for example, reminds his audience, *With a prophet, Yahweh brought up Israel from Egypt, and with a prophet, he was preserved* (Hos. 12:14), while Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, and Malachi all mention Moses by name in exhorting the people to remembrance (Isa. 63:11-12, Jer. 15:1, Mic. 6:4, Mal. 3:22).

The relationship between Moses and the prophets who follow him is not a straightforward relation of influence, imitation, or modeling; all of the “prophets” in the Hebrew text are artful literary creations, composites from a range of texts, traditions, and time periods. With this in mind, I am less interested in reconstructing the historical personage of “Moses” or the other prophets discussed in this dissertation than in understanding the workings of the literary texts and the representations of the prophetic characters within it. I have chosen to begin with Moses because his case offers a clear example of the ways that the prophetic *body* complicates the practice of prophetic *masculinity*.

Moses is often taken as an exemplar of successful biblical masculinity; Clines, for example, examines the masculinity of the prophet in Exod. 32-34 and the Moses story in general and finds four of his key features of biblical masculinity – violence/military prowess, persuasive speech, and beauty.<sup>70</sup> The repeated references and allusions to Moses throughout the biblical text, like the references to David, likewise mark his position as an exemplary masculine figure. However, despite Moses’ seeming mastery of hegemonic biblical masculinity, his body does some very strange things in the course of the text. Some of these bodily peculiarities are events staged on Moses’ body, while others are ongoing conditions. I will here consider three specific features of the prophetic body: (1) Moses’ problem speaking, described in the book of Exodus as “heavy speech and heavy tongue;” (2) the “bridegroom of blood” story, a difficult text involving blood, mortal danger, and feet that may perhaps represent genitals<sup>71</sup> (Exodus 4:24-26); and (3) the radiant transformation of Moses’ face (Exodus 34), which begins to shine after he speaks with Yahweh. These three stories – the heavy tongue, the bloody penis, and the radiant face –

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<sup>68</sup> An earlier version of this section was presented at the Body and Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, 2011. I appreciate the feedback my presentation received.

<sup>69</sup> See for example Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 13–16, 46–50; Christopher R. Seitz, “The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 101, no. 1 (1989): 3–27; William L. Holladay, “Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85, no. 1 (1966): 17–27; A.G. Auld, “Prophets Through the Looking Glass: Between Writings and Moses,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 8, no. 27 (1983).

<sup>70</sup> Clines, “Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34.” DiPalma also offers a reading of Moses’ masculinity; see DiPalma, “Deconstructing Masculinity in Exodus 1-4.”

<sup>71</sup> This association is common in biblical Hebrew. See my discussion on pages 19-20, below.

suggest a more complicated relationship between prophecy, embodiment, and masculinity than Moses' hegemonic masculine performance otherwise suggests.

### *A Heavy Tongue and Uncircumcised Lips*

From the beginning, Moses' body is implicated in his prophecy – not simply as a medium, but also as a site of difficulty. When Moses is born, his mother looks upon him and pronounces what she sees טוב, *good*, though her reasons are never given (Exod. 2:2).<sup>72</sup> Whatever her meaning or intention, the body of the prophet-to-be is considered worthy of description; no other baby in the Hebrew Bible is pronounced טוב upon arrival.<sup>73</sup> While Moses' body remains relatively unthematized during his time in Pharaoh's household, it comes into prominence almost immediately when Moses is called as a prophet. In a famous scene, Yahweh appears to Moses in a burning bush and summons him to lead his people out of Israel. Moses responds with a series of objections.<sup>74</sup> The first three concern Moses' authority (Exod. 3:11), Yahweh's identity (3:13), and the elders' skepticism (4:1). And then Moses turns to his body, pleading, *O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue*, (פִּי כִבֵּד-פֶּה וּכְבֵד לְשׁוֹן אֲנֹכִי); the Hebrew literally means *heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue*. Yahweh responds, first by claiming his own authority over speech and other human faculties; then by providing Moses with a kind of prosthetic mouth in the form of his brother, Aaron.<sup>75</sup> Moses' complaint recurs, however, often with the slightly alternate formulation of *uncircumcised lips* (עֲרַל שְׁפָתַיִם).<sup>76</sup>

What does it mean to have a heavy mouth and tongue (כִּבֵּד-פֶּה וּכְבֵד לְשׁוֹן), or uncircumcised lips (עֲרַל שְׁפָתַיִם)? The Hebrew terms do not give a clear answer. *Mouth* and *tongue* (לְשׁוֹן and פֶּה) are a common pair in Hebrew poetry;<sup>77</sup> *heavy* (כִּבֵּד) refers to some sort of malfunction,<sup>78</sup> though it remains unclear whether the problem is enunciatory (a stutter<sup>79</sup>), physical (a cleft palate or other physical problem<sup>80</sup>), or even metaphorical (meaning that Moses is

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<sup>72</sup> While we can read טוב as a mark of male beauty or a sign of divine favor, Levin argues that טוב means not *good* but rather *viable*, suggesting that something about the appearance of the baby created doubt. S. Levin, "The Speech Defect of Moses," *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 85, no. 10 (1992): 632–633. He further argues that Moses' problem is not a stutter but a cleft lip and perhaps cleft palate as well.

<sup>73</sup> Information given at the time of birth often plays an important role in the narrative later, such as in the description of Esau as hairy (Gen. 25:25).

<sup>74</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 142.

<sup>75</sup> Yahweh tells Moses that Aaron *shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him* (Exod. 4:16).

<sup>76</sup> Moses uses the same phrase in Exod. 6:30. Isaiah describes himself as having impure lips (טִמְאָה-שְׁפָתַיִם) in Isa. 6:5.

<sup>77</sup> As Propp writes, "The pairing of 'mouth' and 'tongue' is formulaic in Canaanite and Hebrew literature (*KTU* 1.93.2-3; Isa. 57:4; Ps 10:7; 37:30; 6:17, etc.)" William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 210.

<sup>78</sup> For a good overview of the theories, see Jeffrey Tigay, "'Heavy of Mouth' and 'Heavy of Tongue' on Moses' Speech Difficulty," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 231 (1978): 57–67. Tigay notes as well that "heavy of tongue" occurs as a medical description in the Akkadian texts.

<sup>79</sup> This is the most common explanation. It occurs in LXX, the Syriac text, and a number of ancient and modern interpretations (Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 210–211.) For a contemporary example, see Marc Shell, *Stutter* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005), 102–136.

<sup>80</sup> For example, Levin, "The Speech Defect of Moses." Propp argues that "Moses really has a physical problem," but adds, "The precise nature of Moses' impairment could be almost anything, from a soft voice to severely slurred

either unable to speak Hebrew<sup>81</sup> or at least unable to communicate eloquently.<sup>82</sup>) In any case, we are left with the peculiar situation that the prophet, the man selected over all others to argue with Pharaoh, to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and to bring down the Torah from Sinai, cannot *speak*, or at least cannot speak properly.<sup>83</sup>

It is likely impossible, at least from the remaining textual evidence, to determine whether the authors of the text intended to represent Moses as stuttering or with physical disability (the metaphorical explanation lacks any real support and vacillates confusingly between an inability to speak Hebrew and an inability to speak Egyptian<sup>84</sup>). In either case, however, the end result is the same: the body interferes with and even stages a protest against the transmission that prophecy demands. The workings of the prophet's mouth mark him as other. Because proper speech is a way of policing identity (as in the Shibboleth story (Judg. 12:5-6), the stutterer, who cannot speak clearly, always fails to belong. In Moses, the son of Hebrews, raised by Pharaoh's daughter, expelled from Egypt, returning to free the Israelites, we see this tension of unbelonging, of always-otherness, which corresponds to his vocal production.<sup>85</sup> This problem of the prophetic body is not lost if we read *heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue* as suggesting a physical disability or disfigurement such as a cleft palate.<sup>86</sup> An affliction such as a cleft palate physically sets Moses off from the other Israelites and from ordinary corporeality. It also would disqualify Moses from the priesthood, which is open only to men with "whole," undisfigured bodies, as discussed above.<sup>87</sup> Even as Moses is called as a prophet, his body sets him apart. Moreover, the differentiation of his body is not beneficial, but rather a mark of otherness and a

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speech. At least it is clear that, while his kinsman Aaron understands him sufficiently, Moses is ineffective as a public speaker." Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 211.

<sup>81</sup> Tigay writes, "The extension of terms for speech impediment to describe foreign languages and accents is a widely attested semantic development, both among the Semitic languages and elsewhere. Best known is Greek *barbaros*, 'speaking in a foreign or unintelligible tongue,'" though Tigay himself prefers a medical explanation.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, S. D. Luzzatto, *Commentary to the Pentateuch* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1965), in Tigay Tigay, "'Heavy of Mouth' and 'Heavy of Tongue' on Moses' Speech Difficulty," 63n4.. This position also occurs in Philo, Ignatius, and Cyprian, among other ancient sources. See Tigay, "'Heavy of Mouth' and 'Heavy of Tongue' on Moses' Speech Difficulty," 63n4.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. also Propp: "There is a tragic aspect to Moses' plight. The man closest to God is the least able to communicate his experience." Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 210.

<sup>84</sup> Propp criticizes the reading from a source-critical perspective: "For pre-critical scholars, this was a reasonable surmise. I would carefully distinguish, however, between E and P. In E, Moses' heavy mouth and tongue hinder him from talking with the *people*, not necessarily with Pharaoh (4:1, 29-31). Thus, if foreign languages are at issue, in P Moses cannot speak *Egyptian*, but in E he cannot speak *Hebrew*—either because of his long absence or because, as in J, he was raised apart from his people." Ibid., 211. On the eloquence argument, see Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 211; Tigay, "'Heavy of Mouth' and 'Heavy of Tongue' on Moses' Speech Difficulty," 57.

<sup>85</sup> This troubled vocality also perhaps suggests the impossible difference between the limited human prophet and the infinity of the divine call; thus Herbert Marks has suggested that the fundamental prophetic speech act is the stammer. Herbert Marks, "On Prophetic Stammering," in *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory*, ed. Regina M Schwartz (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990), 60–80.

<sup>86</sup> In his study of the stutter, Mark Shell points out that the stutter, an enunciatory problem with speech, is often matched by a corporeal stutter, such as a limp. In his account of Moses, Shell also directs attention to the prophet's inability to hold up his arms without assistance – another thematization of the prophetic body. Shell, *Stutter*, 109–112.

<sup>87</sup> Levin, "The Speech Defect of Moses," 634.

cause of personal suffering. The prophet is no priest; to be a prophet requires a damaged body, and a body marked as different.

### *The Bloody Penis*

Moses' heavy tongue is with him from the beginning of his prophecy. The second problem of the body I want to address, however, involves a specific event. The text, Exodus 4:24-26 is short but strange:

וַיְהִי בַדְרֹךְ בַּמְּלֹךְ וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ יְהוָה וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הַמִּיתוֹ<sup>24</sup>  
וַתִּקַּח צִפּוֹרָה צֶרֶר וַתְּכַרֵת אֶת־עֶרְלַת בְּנֶהּ וַתַּגַּע לְרַגְלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי חֲתַן־דָּמִים אַתָּה לִּי<sup>25</sup>  
וַיֵּרָף מִמֶּנּוּ אִזְ אָמְרָה חֲתַן דָּמִים לְמוֹלַת<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *On the way, at a place where they spent the night, Yahweh met him and tried to kill him.* <sup>25</sup> *But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched his 'feet' with it, and said, 'Truly you are a bridegroom/son-in-law<sup>88</sup> of blood to me!'* <sup>89</sup> *So he let him alone. It was then she said, 'A bridegroom/son in law of blood by circumcision' (חתן-דמים למולת).* (Exod. 4:24-26)

The text, despite its terrific brevity, is fraught with textual difficulties. The masculine pronouns and object suffixes are particularly complicated. The first instance, "Yahweh met *him* and sought to kill *him*" seems fairly clearly to refer to Moses, who is the object of Yahweh's address in the previous verse. The foreskin in question likewise clearly belongs to Zipporah's son. But who does Zipporah touch with the foreskin, and where? Whose "feet" are these – Moses', Yahweh's, or the son's? And are they really the feet, or rather the genitals, for which feet are a frequent biblical euphemism? The confusion is longstanding; the Talmud takes up the question of the feet:

One said, "It was at the feet of Moses."  
Another said, "It was at the feet of the angel."  
The third said, "It was at the feet of the child."<sup>90</sup>

Following William Propp (and the first Talmudic interlocutor), I will assume the feet belong to Moses,<sup>91</sup> though it is worth noting the ways in which the bodies of father and son are mapped onto and implicated in each other (recall Clines' comments about the production of masculinity through male relationships). There is also a textual problem with the dual noun רַגְלָיִם, which I have translated as *'feet'* but which can also refer to the legs, and which are furthermore a

<sup>88</sup> חֲתַן means *male relative by marriage*; hence, either bridegroom or son-in-law.

<sup>89</sup> In the Septuagint, Zipporah says, Εστη το αιμα της περιτομης του παιδιου μου, *May the blood of my son's circumcision stand*. According to Propp, "The basis for this last rendering is uncertain;" perhaps the translator "read a passive participle of *hṭm*, 'seal,' which in Syriac and Arabic can describe the healing of wounds (cf. Lev 15:3), and which for later Judaism connotes circumcision." Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 189.

<sup>90</sup> Ned. 3:9, quoted in Christopher B. Hays, "'Lest Ye Perish in the Way': Ritual and Kinship in Exodus 4: 24-26," *Hebrew Studies* 48 (2011): 40.

<sup>91</sup> For a fully developed textual argument, see Propp. For counterarguments that the feet belong to Yahweh, see Hays, "'Lest Ye Perish in the Way.'" For the feet of Moses' son, see Hans Kosmala, "The 'Bloody Husband'," *Vetus Testamentum* 12, no. 1 (1962): 14-28.

common euphemism for the genitals.<sup>92</sup> Given the strong association between virility and fertility, as well as virility and violence, the sexual overtones are strongly present here. In addition, the text contains the Near Eastern motif of violence done to the male rival's genitals, as when Kumarbi bites off Anu's penis in the Hittite Kumarbi cycle, a myth with parallels in the Greek Cronus-Uranus rivalry.<sup>93</sup>

With the text thus tentatively fixed, what do we have? A story of divine violence staved off only by reciprocal violence against the body of the father/son, mixing blood, sex, and fertility.<sup>94</sup> Further, this anxiety centers upon the body. The threat is a threat directed against the prophet's body; it is likewise the blood from the body of the son that stays off this threat. Prophetic commission brings with it real bodily danger and bodily transformation, altering the body both in its symbolic dimension and in its lived reality. Zipporah's flint cuts her son's foreskin, and there is blood; as a result, Moses is allowed to live. Even with the ambiguities of the text, these details are incontrovertible. Further, the significance of Zipporah's actions is not exhausted by reference to circumcision as a cultural practice in ancient Israel and the surrounding nations.<sup>95</sup> Circumcision, to be sure, is the "fertile cut" that remembers the covenant with Yahweh on the body. And yet the body of the prophet in this story is the recipient not of the cut itself – this is exercised upon the son – but the *blood* of the cut.

While this blood has been read as expiatory or prophylactic,<sup>96</sup> I propose that in this story, the blood signifies bodily openness and bodily wounding. The fact that Zipporah performs the action on her son, while Moses is the passive recipient of the shed blood, reinforces the passivity of the prophet and his body. This passivity, moreover, is a reversal of the ordinary expectations of biblical masculinity.<sup>97</sup> The play with fluidity, openness, and wounding also suggests the possibility of imagining alternate forms of masculine bodies.<sup>98</sup> If the stutter and/or cleft palate suggested a body outside the domains of the "normal," then the bloody penis in this story of the bridegroom of blood further pushes the body out of the ordinary organization of bodily masculinity.

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<sup>92</sup> Isa. 6:2, Jud.3:24, 1 Sam. 24:3. Perhaps compare also Ruth lying at Boaz's feet in Rut. 3:8.

<sup>93</sup> Harry A. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths, Second Edition*, ed. Gary M. Beckman, 2nd ed. (Scholars Press, 1991), 39. Compare as well the story of Horus' penis eaten by a fish after he is killed and cut into pieces by Seth.

<sup>94</sup> Cf also Propp: "After all, a Freudian psychoanalyst would not puzzle long over a patient's dream wherein God tried to kill his father (see below), the patient's mother cut off the end of his penis to save the father's life and seemingly said to both son and father, 'You are my bridegroom.' While this is not the 'point' of the episode, the narrative's power is enhanced by its dramatization of the anxieties Freud called 'Oedipal.'" William H. C. Propp, "That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus IV 24-6)," *Vetus Testamentum* 43, no. 4 (1993): 497–498.

<sup>95</sup> Circumcision was widely practiced in the ancient Near East; the Philistines provide an exception to this rule. J.M. Sasson, "Circumcision in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85, no. 4 (1966): 473–476.

<sup>96</sup> Propp, "That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus IV 24-6)." Propp, "That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus IV 24-6)"; Kosmala, "The 'Bloody Husband'." Kosmala argues, however, the blood is spread on the legs of the *son*.

<sup>97</sup> Hentrich, "Masculinity and Disability in the Bible." See also my forthcoming *Men in Travail: The Problem of the Body in the Hebrew Prophets*.

<sup>98</sup> See Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 187–210. Grosz writes, "It seems clear that it is only when men take responsibility for and pleasure in the forms of seepage that are their own, when they cease to reduce it to its products, when they accept the sexual specificity, particularity, and limit that is their own, that they will respect women's bodily autonomy and sexual specificity as well" (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 202.)

## *The Radiant Face*

The final situation of Moses' body to consider concerns Moses' face. When Moses descends from Mount Sinai, where he has been speaking with Yahweh, beams of light stream from his face, frightening the people until they hear his voice and recognize him:

<sup>29</sup>*As Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the covenant in his hand coming down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face radiated light from speaking with him* (וּמִלְּפָנָיו לְאֵי־יָדַע פִּי קָרַן עוֹר פְּנָיו בְּדַבְּרוֹ אִתּוֹ).

<sup>30</sup>*When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was radiating light* (וַהֲיָה קָרַן עוֹר פְּנָיו) *and they were afraid to come near him.* <sup>31</sup>*But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them.* <sup>32</sup>*Afterward all the Israelites approached, and he instructed them in all that Yahweh had said to him on Mount Sinai.*

Clines argues that Moses' transformed visage is a mark of male beauty that underscores his successful masculine performance, further arguing that this beauty engenders sexual desire among the Israelites.<sup>99</sup> Without rejecting Clines' reading, I want to complicate it, suggesting that the biblical text presents not so much the pull of beauty and desire, as a scene of terror, as well as bodily transformation. To translate עוֹר פְּנָיו קָרַן וַהֲיָה as *and behold, Moses' face shone* is not enough; the Hebrew verb קָרַן is used elsewhere to mean *to sprout horns*.<sup>100</sup> *To sprout horns* is not right here either, but it does emphasize the sense, present in the biblical text, that the light beaming from Moses' visage has some kind of solidity and heft to it. This materiality of light occurs in other ancient Near Eastern texts, as in the *melammu*, a blinding mask of light possessed by the Akkadian gods, "a somatic mark of divine rulership."<sup>101</sup> As Seth Sanders argues, these conceptual categories hold for ancient Israel as well.<sup>102</sup> Thus the light that streams from Moses' face also has a body, and is a part of his prophetic body. Where the stutter and circumcision each remove something from the body, in this account of radiant light, bodily transformation is additive.

The radiance of Moses' face at once distances him from the other Israelites (who find him terrifying, if perhaps sexually desirable) and makes him more like Yahweh.<sup>103</sup> Moses and Yahweh speak face to face; it is fitting that it is Moses' face that is transformed. And yet Moses'

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<sup>99</sup> "As a powerful male, who has had the supreme distinction of personal converse with God, Moses acquires astonishing beauty that not only dazzles his earthly conversation partners but perhaps also stirs in them unhealthy lusts. If the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53 had no beauty that males should desire (המֵד) him, we may assume that if Moses has outstanding beauty of face he will be desired by other males." Clines, "Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34," 60.

<sup>100</sup> In V, 33:29 reads *cumque descenderet Moses de monte Sinai tenebat duas tabulas testimonii et ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies sua ex consortio sermonis Dei*. Jerome translated this passage literally, giving rise to the idea that Moses had horns.

<sup>101</sup> Seth L. Sanders, "Old Light on Moses' Shining Face," *Vetus Testamentum* (2002): 404. Compare also the older English meaning of "glory," as in Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." I am grateful to Robert Alter for this reference.

<sup>102</sup> Sanders writes, "Moses' face could, quite literally, radiate horns, and the need to translate the term as either divine radiance or physical protuberance is merely a side-effect of our conceptual categories, irrelevant to ancient Israelite ideas." *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>103</sup> Dozeman writes, "Moses' shining skin indicates Moses' transformation, concealing his profane identity in order to reveal the presence of God in him during cultic mediation." Dozeman, *Exodus*, 753.



face does not merely stand as a marker of Yahweh's presence among the Israelites. Instead, the prophet chooses to veil<sup>104</sup> his face, covering it whenever he is among the people:

*<sup>33</sup>When Moses had finished speaking with them, he placed a veil (מַסְוֵה) on his face. <sup>34</sup>Whenever Moses went in before Yahweh to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. When he came out, he told the Israelites what he had been commanded. <sup>35</sup>The Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was radiating light; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.*

This veiling further sets Moses apart. No longer able to inhabit his own face, neither can he display the radiant face of Yahweh in their midst. Moses' facial concealment also suggests a displacement of gender. In the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East, veiling is a feminine practice. The significant narrative moments involving veiling or covering the head or face nearly always concern female characters: Tamar disguising herself as a prostitute (Gen. 38:14), Rebecca veiling herself upon meeting her future husband Isaac (Gen. 24:65), women veiled in mourning. While head coverings are not explicitly required of women in the Hebrew Bible (as, for example, in the Middle Assyrian laws<sup>105</sup>), the act of covering the head is culturally legible as feminine.<sup>106</sup> Moses' self-veiling is likewise feminizing because of the biblical association of concealment and interiority with the feminine, even as the inside of the tents is spatially coded as feminine space.<sup>107</sup>

In the radiance of Moses' face, we thus have two forms of transformation: the divine glow of the prophet's face and the opacity of the covering he places over it. The first moves the prophet closer to Yahweh, almost blurring the divine-human boundary with its radiance (even as this blurring comes at the expense of Moses' human identity and appearance). The second moves the prophet away from the category of the normatively masculine. In covering his face, Moses further erases the specificity of his identity. He also makes his body into a concealed, private interiority, thereby suggesting a possible move outside of ordinary masculine performance and self-presentation. And yet this veiling face also serves as the sign of an intimacy of voice, shared between Moses and Yahweh.

### **Reading the Prophetic Body**

With these stories in mind, what can we say about the importance of the prophetic body of Moses? First, the prophetic body is the nexus in which other issues related to prophecy are negotiated: ethnic and linguistic identity, circumcision, the human relation to the divine, the question of prophetic power and prophetic weakness.

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<sup>104</sup> Linguistically, the word used for veil is of little help, since it is a *hapax legomenon*. See *Ibid.*, 752–753.

<sup>105</sup> While Middle Assyrian laws require women to cover their heads; however in other periods, no evidence of such a law exists. See Marcus, "Dressed to Kill," 7–8; M. Stol, "Women in Mesopotamia," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 38, no. 2 (1995): 123.

<sup>106</sup> The requirement for women to cover their heads comes later, appearing in the New Testament and the Talmud. See Alicia J. Batten, "Clothing and Adornment," *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 40, no. 3 (2010): 153, 155–156.

<sup>107</sup> Don Seeman, "'Where Is Sarah Your Wife?' Cultural Poetics of Gender and Nationhood in the Hebrew Bible," *The Harvard Theological Review* 91, no. 2 (1998): 103–125.

Second, the centrality of the prophetic body is matched by its mutability. Moses' body is temporarily and permanently altered through the prophetic encounter with the divine. This body, already outside the normal, becomes further transformed and estranged from the category of ordinary humanity by its experience of prophecy.

Third, the body is not just a necessary part of the scene of prophecy: more specifically, the body suffers. Prophecy demands from Moses that which he lacks – a light tongue. Prophecy threatens Moses' life, as Yahweh seeks to kill him and is staved off only with blood – blood from Moses' own son. And prophecy, in the final stages, renders Moses' face terrible and terrifying to the very people to whom he has devoted his life.

Fourth, the volatility and transmutability of the prophetic body have consequences, in particular, for Moses' masculinity. The alteration of Moses' body, whether in speech or by light, excludes it from the category of wholeness upon which religious leadership and hegemonic biblical masculinity depend. Moses is also threatened by the wounding of his son, as Zipporah's actions with the knife threaten to cut off the line of Moses' descent, thereby placing the prophet in a position of vulnerability and passivity. And the radiant transformation and subsequent veiling of the prophet's face complete his movement outside the bounds of normative biblical masculinity.

Understanding Moses' body opens new ways of understanding Moses as a biblical figure. It also opens a new way of understanding prophecy – through prophetic embodiment. *There was never another prophet like Moses*, Deuteronomy insists (34:10), and yet when we look at other prophetic bodies, we will find them not so different from Moses' prophetic body. Why else does Isaiah imagine his *impure lips* as purified with a fiery coal? Why else is Ezekiel's first prophetic act to lie on his side, unspeaking, the 430-day long performance of an ancient Hunger Artist? Prophecy is a practice that depends upon and alters the body. Biblical prophecy comes at the price of bodily wholeness, bringing in its place pain, shattered masculinity, and corporeal transformation.

### **Bodies, Prophets, *Men in Travail***

Moses is not the only biblical prophet to find the body at once an obstacle, a symptom, and a mode of prophecy. The “writing prophets,” whose books (or the books that share their names) make up the second half of the Prophets (נְבִיאִים) section of the Hebrew Bible,<sup>108</sup> bear a complicated relationship to the figure of Moses and Mosaic prophecy. However, the latter prophets share with Moses a range of experiences of the prophetic body as a rupture in the scene of prophecy. The prophetic body at once counters the smooth transmission of the prophetic message and illuminates the complexity and even paradox of “prophet” as a subject position. This complexity comes at a cost, as the transformations of the prophetic body push it outside ordinary masculine embodiment. Prophecy, if not strictly emasculating, nevertheless displaces the prophet from normative embodiment and a position of hegemonic biblical masculinity. This

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<sup>108</sup> The Jewish tradition divides the Hebrew Bible into three sections, *Torah* (תּוֹרָה), *Nevi'im* (נְבִיאִים), and *Ketuvim* (כְּתוּבִים), in English *Pentateuch*, *Prophets*, and *Writings*; *Nevi'im* consists of the “former prophets” or historical books (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings) and the “latter prophets,” subsequently divided into “major” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel) and “minor” (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) sometimes known as the Book of the Twelve.) The Christian Bible contains the same books but organizes them somewhat differently, placing the prophets last in the Old Testament canon, thereby offering a bridge to the New Testament.

dissertation explores the prophetic body and the challenge to (and critique of) masculinity it poses. My study, while focused on the latter prophets, extends as well into the apocalyptic literature of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament (particularly Zechariah and Revelation), charting the legacy and transformation of the biblical representation of the prophetic body.

The first chapter, “The God, the Prophet, his Wife, her Lovers,” begins with the prophet Hosea. The longest of the twelve “minor prophets,” the book of Hosea is a key pre-exilic prophetic text. The opening three chapters of the book intertwine a narrative of Hosea’s marriage to a “wife of whoredom,” Gomer, with a poetic account of Yahweh’s marriage to the unfaithful Israel. While the critical reception of the text has emphasized questions of the female body, feminine sexuality, and the eroticization of sexual violence against women, I will argue that the narrative treatment of Gomer and the poetic representation of Israel conceal a deeper male anxiety about male embodiment and sexuality. The text uses the feminine to “think through” the problems raised by the male prophetic body. In the process, the metaphor of *woman as land* and its inverse, *land as woman*, provide the ground for negotiating anxiety over male embodiment in general, and male prophetic embodiment in particular – for Moses is not the only prophet to find his experience of masculinity challenged by the prophetic call. Prophecy at once promises and threatens an opening of the body and of the self, an opening that can only be negotiated through the female characters of Gomer and Israel.

In the book of Hosea, the female body provides a tangible, material ground to negotiate the problem of the body. There is no such displacement in the book of Ezekiel, set during the Babylonian exile and written later still. Instead of negotiating masculinity through the female body – Ezekiel’s wife is killed by Yahweh, and the prophet is forbidden to mourn her death (Ezek. 24:15-18) – Ezekiel’s own body becomes degree zero in the working through of prophetic masculinity. My second chapter, “The Prophet as Hunger Artist,” will investigate the key bodily texts of the book of Ezekiel. I begin with the “sign acts” (Ezek. 1-5), a series of bizarre somatic performances, including lying on the ground for 430 days, eating extremely limited and disgusting food, and prophesying against a brick model of Jerusalem. These scenes present Ezekiel’s body as tortured and abject, and this suffering is intimately linked to a crisis of prophetic masculinity. In Ezekiel, prophetic male embodiment is multiply constituted – through the sign acts, through a comparison between the prophetic body and the divine body, and (like Hosea) in relation to violent and sexual fantasies of the female body. I further argue that while the text attempts to “heal” the prophetic body by imagining the restoration of the Temple, this substitution of communal religious space for intimate bodily space is not fully successful. The book, in the final analysis, offers a compelling critique of the demands prophecy places upon hegemonic masculinity. This critique, moreover, is staged on the body. While the text attempts to resolve the problem of prophetic masculine embodiment, the solution fails to match the power of the critique itself.

The failure of the prophetic body to conform to hegemonic biblical masculinity is not simply negotiated through women or displayed on the prophet’s own flesh. Instead, the voice offers another site of transgressive prophetic masculinity. This is the topic of my third chapter, “Jeremiah and the Gender of Prophetic Sound.” While voices are sometimes understood as disembodied, I will follow a line of recent theoretical work that positions the voice as *of*, if not precisely *in*, the body.<sup>109</sup> The specific biblical example here is the prophet Jeremiah, and in

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<sup>109</sup> See Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2006).

particular his Confessions, a loose collection of laments and exclamations of outrage found in the first half of the book of Jeremiah.<sup>110</sup> I will argue that while the Hebrew Bible presents a normative division between masculine sound and feminine sounds (ordered, reasonable speech and chaotic, affective, and passionate noise, respectively), Jeremiah’s use of sound in the Confessions aligns with feminine vocality. At the same time, Jeremiah’s voice is also displaced onto his body, which speaks without words in a process Freud terms ‘somatic compliance.’<sup>111</sup> Jeremiah’s feminine sounds thus destabilize the text’s representation of masculine vocality and prophetic subjectivity. Positioned between Hosea and Ezekiel, temporally and in his corporeal response to the crisis of prophetic masculinity, Jeremiah models an alternate form of masculinity, this one based not in bodily form, appearance, or action, but rather in vocality.

The prophetic body in the Hebrew prophets fails, even more than the body of Moses, to perform hegemonic biblical masculinity. But what happens to the prophetic body when prophecy itself changes? This is the question of my final chapter, “The Prophetic Body after the Prophets.” I chart the consequences of the shift from prophecy to apocalyptic on the figure of the male prophetic body.<sup>112</sup> I will argue that the spectacular economy of violence and bodily pain in Revelation draws credibility from its imitation of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible. However, the prophetic bodies in Revelation do not disrupt the formations of hegemonic masculinity and normative embodiment in the text, as the prophetic bodies in the Hebrew Bible sometimes do. Instead, the prophetic bodies in Revelation fix the prophetic body into a larger textual ideology of violent masculinity. Though Revelation makes use of the figure of the prophetic body, adopted from the Hebrew prophets, the discourses of masculinity that surround this body represent an intensification of Roman ideas of gender performance. Across the biblical corpus, the shifting representations and significance of the male prophetic body inform textual and religious understandings of embodiment in both ancient literature and the modern period.

### On Men in Travail

In the middle of the book of Jeremiah, in what becomes known as the “Book of Consolation,” Jeremiah asks his listeners a question:

שְׁאֵלוּ-נָא וְרֵאוּ אִם-יֵלֵד זָכָר מְדוּעַ  
 רָאִיתִי כָל-גֹּבֵר יָדָיו עַל-חֻצְצָיו כִּי-יֵלֵד  
 וְנָהֲפֹכוּ כָל-פָּנִים לְיִרְקוֹן

The King James Version translates the passage, Jer. 30:6, as follows:

*Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? Wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness?*

<sup>110</sup> Following Diamond, I identify the Confessions as Jer. 11:18-23, 12:1-6, 15:10-14, 15:15-21, 17:14-18, 18:18-23, 20:7-13, and 20:14-18. A. R. Pete Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context: Scenes of Prophetic Drama* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987). See further my chapter 3, “Jeremiah and the Gender of Prophetic Sound,” below.

<sup>111</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (‘Dora’),” in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 193. See further note 87 in my chapter 3, below.

<sup>112</sup> Robert R. Wilson, “From Prophecy to Apocalyptic: Reflections on the Shape of Israelite Religion,” *Semeia* 21 (1982): 79–95; Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); Wilson, “From Prophecy to Apocalyptic.” See further my chapter 4, below.

*Travail*, which the King James often uses to translate forms of the Hebrew root  $\text{לָד}$  (now more commonly, if prosaically, rendered *to give birth* or *to beget*<sup>113</sup>) has largely fallen out of contemporary English, just as it has fallen out of contemporary translations of the Bible. And more modern *give birth* is perfectly sufficient for translating  $\text{לָד}$ , both here (*Ask! Have you ever seen a male giving birth?*) and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. But *travail*, which the King James uses seven times in translating the Book of Jeremiah, also has a certain resonance with the prophets. *Travail*, after all, suggests not just giving birth, but also suffering.<sup>114</sup> This double meaning is not found in Hebrew on the level of the single word, where the two activities are represented with unrelated terms. There is, however, a thematic overlap between the language of suffering and the vocabulary of birth – an overlap not limited to the literal pains of childbirth. Instead, giving birth becomes a privileged metaphor for all suffering. This is particularly true in the prophets, where, moreover, the suffering of the prophets destabilizes gender performance.

Jeremiah's question is intended as a counterfactual, a set-up for the coming promise of consolation. And yet this question also speaks more about the prophets than Jeremiah perhaps intends. Mark Brummitt has described the book of Jeremiah as haunted by the figure of failed birth, by the woman with birth pangs who gives birth only to wind.<sup>115</sup> This image of failed birth is intertwined with the repeated use of birth as a synecdoche for all physical pain, as in the second half of the verse, where pain turns the face of every man pale. This overlapping of suffering and of sexed bodies, an agony that brings with it the hint of gender transgression, is a repeated theme of prophetic experience. While Jeremiah frames his question in a discourse of punishment and consolation, directed at his listeners, what he really speaks is the prophetic experience. Thus even Moses demands of God,

*<sup>11</sup>Moses said to Yahweh, "Why do you treat your servant so badly? Why can I not find favor in your eyes, that you put the burden this entire people upon me. <sup>12</sup>Did I conceive of this entire people? Did I give birth to them, that you say to me, 'Carry them on your breast like a nurse carries a nursing child, to the land which I have promised to their fathers'? <sup>13</sup>Where will I get meat to give to this people, because they cry to me, 'Give us meat and we will eat!' <sup>14</sup>I cannot carry this entire people alone, for they are too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup>If this is how you are going to treat me, just kill me – if I have found favor in your eyes – so I will not see my misery!* (Num. 11:11-15)

In Moses' complaint, as in Jeremiah's exhortation, we see the same theme emerge: the male body that paradoxically is to serve as female (giving birth, nursing children), positioned in a larger discourse of suffering. There is also a second theme that, while missing in Jer. 30:6, appears frequently in Jeremiah – the complaint of the prophet over the suffering and pain

<sup>113</sup> See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 Volume Set, Stg. (Brill Academic Pub, 2002),  $\text{לָד}$ . The NRSV translation of Jer. 30:6, for example, reads *Ask now, and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his loins like a woman in labor? Why has every face turned pale?*

<sup>114</sup> The OED gives as its first definition "Bodily or mental labour or toil, especially of a painful or oppressive nature; exertion; trouble; hardship; suffering." Oxford University Press, "Travail, N.1," *OED Online* (<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/205252?rskey=4hFQFU&result=1&isAdvanced=false>, January 5, 2012).

<sup>115</sup> Mark Brummitt, "The Sublime Art of Prophetic Seeing: Aesthetics and the Word in the Book of Jeremiah" (presented at the "Violence and Aesthetics in Jeremiah," Writing/Reading Jeremiah, Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA, November 20, 2011).

demanded of him. Prophecy is difficult and painful, an almost impossible imposition that forces transformation.

The prophet is – must be – a man “in travail,” suffering, pained, emasculated, pushed beyond the limits of ordinary embodiment and masculinity. The forms that this travail takes – the flesh, the voice, even the bodies of others – varies. The basic disturbance, however, remains, paining the body, challenging the norms of sexed embodiment, and forcing us to consider the prophetic body. And it is these bodies, in their pained embodiment and vexed masculinity, that I will take up in the pages that follow.

## Chapter 1

### THE GOD, THE PROPHET, HIS WIFE, HER LOVERS: FEMALE BODIES AND MASCULINE ANXIETIES IN HOSEA 1-3

Not male but female bodies receive the majority of textual attention in the Hebrew prophetic books. This chapter approaches the problem of prophetic masculinity through one of the most famous of these female bodies: the body of Gomer. Gomer bat Diblaim becomes Hosea's wife after he receives the divine command to marry an אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים, a *wife of whoredom* (or an adulteress, or a prostitute, or perhaps an ordinary woman of loose morals.<sup>1</sup>) The first three chapters of Hosea describe this marriage with a series of complicated and sometimes contradictory texts that have long fascinated critics. The account of Hosea's marriage is interwoven with a poetic text describing Yahweh's marriage to Israel, a character who is represented, like Gomer, as a promiscuous or adulterous woman. In the opening three chapters of Hosea, Gomer and Israel are defined almost exclusively through the actions of their bodies. They bear children, seek other lovers, suffer pain, are stripped bare and hedged with thorns, and are eventually "sown in the land," rendered more agricultural than human. But while the opening chapters of Hosea seem fascinated by female embodiment, the underlying concern of the text is with masculinity. The female body provides a compelling textual location for thinking through masculinity, and prophetic masculinity in particular. Interrogating the representation of the female body in Hosea 1-3 reveals a suppressed discourse about masculinity and its attendant anxieties.

The negotiation of masculinity through the female body in Hosea assumes multiple forms. In Hosea 2 in particular, the female body is repeatedly associated with the land. While this metaphor occurs elsewhere in biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature, in Hosea it represents not just a general attempt to exert masculine power over the bodies of women, but also a specific anxiety over control of fertility, reflected both in Yahweh's choice of language and in his repeated assertions of dominance. This anxiety exists not just in relation to Ba'al, Yahweh's rival male god, but also in relation to the female body and the feminized land.<sup>2</sup> The fecundity and generativity of body and land alike suggest the dangerous possibility of a reproductive power not under the control of Yahweh. In response, the text works to rewrite the basic metaphor of *woman as fertile land* into *woman as cultivated field* – a reconfiguration that reveals a male anxiety over fertility that threatens the masculine economies of power.

The biblical understanding of the female body as "open" also helps sustain the text's negotiation of masculinity. While the law codes do regulate the male body and its discharges, bodily openness is primarily associated with the female body in the Hebrew Bible, including Hosea.<sup>3</sup> Female bodies drip and bleed; they are messily fluid and must be contained. Biblical ideals of masculinity idealize the whole, complete, and unopened body. Against these ideals of

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<sup>1</sup> I will take up the meaning of the specific Hebrew term אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים subsequently in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Ba'al is the Northwest Semitic storm god and is found, for example, in the Ugaritic pantheon. See further Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), especially chapter 7.

<sup>3</sup> See the subsequent discussion in this chapter.

the whole, unopened body, prophecy demands openness from its prophets, who are nearly always male.<sup>4</sup> Prophecy thus instigates a paradoxical masculine relationship to the body. This openness is sometimes metaphorical (the prophet as open conduit), at other points literal (as when Ezekiel swallows the scroll). In either case, openness marks the prophetic body as non-masculine. Instead of embracing the opened male body, as in Ezekiel, the Book of Hosea takes a more circuitous approach, employing the opened bodies of Gomer and Israel to conceptualize and work through the openness of the prophetic body.

The theme of openness, even when suggested obliquely through the female body, presents both danger and promise to the stable categories of the text, including masculinity. While the text of Hosea never fully embraces a new organization of prophetic masculinity, it does make the contemplation of alternative orderings of gender possible. This promise of openness comes with a price, however: the intense suffering of the female body. In order for Hosea to be able to question the demands of masculine prophecy and prophetic embodiment, Gomer and Israel must be subjected to shame and suffering, denounced as whores and then buried in the land. For Hosea, thinking through prophetic masculinity depends upon the sexualized and suffering female body.<sup>5</sup>

This study of Hosea's marriage is an exemplary starting point for a study of the problems of the male body in the Hebrew prophets. Already in the book of Hosea, an eighth century text and *locus classicus* of pre-exilic prophecy, the male body of the prophet is the site of ideological and discursive anxiety. This anxiety spirals into near crisis in the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. And in the late prophetic and apocalyptic texts we find the body of the male prophet, while still a source of anxiety, beginning to assume the dramatic contours of the apocalyptic body. It is my intention in these first chapters of the dissertation, and in this study of Hosea in particular, to chart the early articulations of this anxiety, and to explore the instabilities of masculinity in the prophetic texts before taking up the more stylized and pronounced forms of the masculine body in the later prophetic and apocalyptic literature. And this construction of masculinity in Hosea depends upon the female body.

## I. THE BOOK OF HOSEA AND THE PROPHET HOSEA

### Reading Hosea

The book of Hosea is an undeniably difficult text. Hosea ben Beerī, the prophet called in the opening verses of the book, is presented as living in the Northern Kingdom shortly before its fall. Whether a man named Hosea ever lived and prophesied for the god Yahweh is, of course, impossible to determine, as is the relationship between an individual named "Hosea" and the text that shares his name. Traditional scholarship accepts the historicity of the text's claims and dates

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<sup>4</sup> These points are discussed in greater detail in the introduction to the dissertation. See also Hentrich, "Masculinity and Disability in the Bible."

<sup>5</sup> This is a point made, in varying ways, by Luce Irigaray and Carol Clover. I will take up these theoretical engagements in greater detail in the body of the chapter.



Hosea's period of prophetic activity to 750-725 BCE;<sup>6</sup> more recent scholarly work has begun to challenge the historical positioning of the text and its acceptance by interpreters.<sup>7</sup>

Turning from the life of the prophet Hosea to the text, things are hardly clearer. The book of Hosea, it seems, is most consistent in its ambivalence and its positioning “in-between.” At 14 chapters, it is the longest of the Minor Prophets, yet still much shorter than the works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. As the words of a northern (Israelite) prophet edited and gathered together into a southern (Judean) book, the text occupies an uneasy position in space and history alike.<sup>8</sup> The jarring interludes – for example, of verses promising deliverance for Judah (Hos. 1:7) and eternal hope for a Davidic monarchy (Hos. 3:5) – are only the most obvious markers of this politico-literary ambivalence. This ambivalence itself mirrors the fraught relationship of the text to the historical event that defines it: the fall of the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians in 722 BCE. The Book of Hosea presents itself as a collection of prophecies *before* the fall of Israel, even though it is completed (or perhaps even written for the first time) *after* the historical trauma.<sup>9</sup> This ambivalent relationship to history creates a literary effect that Francis Landy terms “proleptic mourning” and has a deeply destabilizing effect on the text as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

The book of Hosea is broadly accepted to consist of two parts, the marriage accounts of chapters 1-3 (of Hosea in chapters 1 and 3 and of Yahweh in 2) and the prophecies of 4-14. Chapter 1 begins with the divine command for the prophet:

לך קח־לך אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים וְיִלְדֵי זְנוּנִים כִּי־זָנְהָ תִזְנֶה הָאָרֶץ מֵאֱהָרַי יְהוָה

*Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom, for the land is whoring away from Yahweh.* (Hos. 1:2)

Hosea's marriage to Gomer follows. Gomer subsequently becomes pregnant and gives birth to three children, whom Hosea, still following Yahweh's commands, names יִזְרְעֵאל (*Jezreel*, the name of a valley; the Hebrew also means *God sows*), לֹא־רַחֲמָה (*Lo-Ruḥāmâ*, *No-Mercy*), and

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<sup>6</sup> For example, see Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Hosea* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1973), 34–37.

<sup>7</sup> Brad E. Kelle, “Hosea 1–3 in Twentieth-Century Scholarship,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 7, no. 2 (2009): 179.

<sup>8</sup> While the prophet Hosea lived, according to the text, in the northern kingdom of Israel, the final form of the text seems to have been edited and compiled in the southern kingdom of Judah. This is most obvious in the occasional interludes guaranteeing safety for Judah and praising the Davidic monarchy. On the question of Israel and Judah in the composition of Hosea, see Grace I. Emmerson, *Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, Dept. of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> This, in turn, complicates the question of authorship, even within in the imagined world of the text. As Francis Landy writes, “Instead of authorship, we have a play of mirrors: the prophet speaks and/or writes for and about a future, including those listeners who write the script of the prophet who writes about them. Analogously, the book is set, extremely realistically, in a world that is about to disappear, but it speaks also of that world from the other side of its disappearance, from the perspective of the survivors.” Francis Landy, *Hosea, Readings, a New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 11–12.

<sup>10</sup> The instability characterizes not just the text as a whole, but also its smaller literary units. Not just the book but also the *text* of Hosea is difficult; Andersen and Freedman warn that it “competes with Job for the distinction of containing more unintelligible passages than any other book of the Hebrew Bible.” Already at the time of the translation of the Septuagint, the text seemed to pose a great deal of difficulty, as the struggles of the Greek translators suggest. Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea, The Anchor Bible 24* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1996), 66.

עַמִּי לֹא עַמִּי (Lo-‘amî, *Not-My-People*). The second chapter shifts from narrative prose to poetry and recounts another marriage, this time between Yahweh and his unfaithful bride Israel. The poem details Israel’s sexual and commercial transgressions, her punishment, and her eventual reunion with Yahweh. In the third chapter, the text returns to the prophet, who is again commanded,

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי עוֹד לְךָ אֵהֵב-אִשָּׁה אֲהַבֶּתָּ רַע וּמְנַאֲפֶתָ.

*Go, love again a woman who is loved by another and who commits adultery.*<sup>11</sup>

The remainder of the book, chapter 4-14, contains a series of Hosea’s prophecies; Gomer, the children, and the marriage never again appear. Instead, in densely metaphorical language, Hosea describes the coming judgment of Yahweh.

This chapter addresses Hosea 1-3, the “marriage” texts of Hosea and Yahweh. While Hosea 1 and 3 are narratives about the prophet and Hosea 2 is poetry concerning Israel, the texts nevertheless have a larger degree of cohesiveness than the remainder of the book. More importantly, in these chapters of Hosea, the questions of gender, sexuality, self-construction, and anxiety that motivate this dissertation appear most strongly. To this end, I will consider Hosea 4-14 only peripherally.<sup>12</sup> Instead of taking up the ways in which language stages, in Landy’s words, “the disintegration of the order of the world,”<sup>13</sup> this chapter considers the strategies the text employs to organize and order the world – and specifically the male body – through the metaphors of wild femininity and the grotesque representation of the female body in Hosea 1, 3, and especially 2. These features of the text represent a sophisticated way of speaking about masculinity and male embodiment. For Yahweh and even more for Hosea, masculinity is articulated both *in relation to* and *through* the feminine.

## The Marriage

Hosea’s marriage has long been the subject of intense scholarly (and not-so-scholarly) interest.<sup>14</sup> Of all the prophets, only Hosea’s marriage and family life are described with any degree of detail, though the text raises far more questions than it answers.<sup>15</sup> Even the basic term

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<sup>11</sup> Whether the עוֹד (*again*) pertains to *Yahweh said to me* or to *Go, love a woman* is ambiguous.

<sup>12</sup> What do we make of the relation between these two sections of the text, the marriage metaphor in chapters 1-3 and the poetic prophecies in 4-14? Andersen and Freedman suggest that the relationship between the texts is best understood as an “anthology” (Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 52). Wolff describes the marriage narrative as a *memorable*, with the first person narrative in chapter 3 supplemented by eyewitness accounts in chapter 1 and the closely related poem in chapter 2; he adopts the term *memorable* from Jolles. (Wolff, *Hosea*, 10–12, 57–58.) Other critics argue for reading the two parts of the book together, taking a more holistic approach to the text. Landy, for example, proposes that the fragmentary appearance of the text is itself a metaphorical enactment of “the disintegration of the order of the world,” such that in each fissure of language there is an intimation of ultimate silence and incommunicability” (Francis Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 281. See also “Hosea: A Poetics of Violence” in Harold Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose : Biblical Poetics and Interpretation*, 1st Midland Book ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).).

<sup>13</sup> Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma*, 281.

<sup>14</sup> For a good overview, see Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea’s Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Kelle, “Hosea 1–3 in Twentieth-Century Scholarship.”

<sup>15</sup> Ezekiel’s wife is killed by Yahweh (Ezek. 24:15-27), while Jeremiah is forbidden to have a wife or children, or to participate in communal activities such as mourning the dead (Jer. 16:1-5). Isaiah has two sons, *A-Remnant-Will-Return* (Isa. 7:3) and *Pillage-Hastens-Looting-Speeds* (Isa. 8:1-4), the latter conceived with “the prophetess,” who

used to describe Gomer, אִשֶׁת זְנוּנִים (*ēšet zəḥūnîm*) *wife of whoredom*, is never fully explained, either within Hosea 1 or elsewhere in the biblical corpus. אִשָּׁה, the ordinary biblical word for *woman* or *wife*, is straightforward. In a *smiḥut* (genitive) construction, as it is used here, it can mean both *wife of X* and *member of the class of women who X*. זְנוּנִים, *whoredom, fornication, sexual impropriety*, is an abstract noun from the root זָנָה, which refers to sexual acts and which the standard biblical dictionaries all define, heavily, as *to commit fornication*.<sup>16</sup> As a root, moreover, זָנָה is only ever used to describe female characters and their sexual actions; a man, it seems, cannot fornicate, or at least cannot זָנָה.<sup>17</sup> The reticence of the text to expand upon the meaning of this term has not been matched by a similar reticence among biblical scholars, who have displayed an almost prurient interest in Gomer and her sexual activities.<sup>18</sup> To offer only a few examples from the classic scholarship: James Luther Mays argues that Gomer was involved in cultic prostitution, while Hans Walter Wolff theorizes the existence of a Canaanite sex cult involving the ritual defloration of virgins.<sup>19</sup> Andersen and Freedman, meanwhile, take a broader view, suggesting that זְנוּנִים covers a wide range of sexual transgressions, including, in the case of Gomer, good old-fashioned adultery. They are insistent, moreover, that Gomer’s promiscuity began only after Hosea’s marriage, even against the seemingly clear meaning of the text (*Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom* is not particularly ambiguous about the sort of wife to be sought.)<sup>20</sup>

None of these readings, however, are either really useful or convincing. Andersen and Freedman seem motivated by a desire to protect Hosea, at least for a little while, from the sexual exploits of his wife. However, their appeal to reasonableness in explaining Hosea’s marriage (i.e., *Gomer must not have been a prostitute when Hosea married her, because marrying a prostitute is unreasonable*) is unconvincing, not the least because the prophet’s biography is impossible to reconstruct. Nor is there any reason to treat the Book of Hosea as a stable text describing rational actors; as Yvonne Sherwood has shown in her study *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, Hosea 1-3 is a destabilized and destabilizing text; its aim may well be to shock and to disorient us as readers.<sup>21</sup> And marrying a prostitute, of course, is a fine way of doing this.

Returning to Wolff (the sex cult) and Mays (cultic prostitution) we do not find ourselves on much firmer ground. Evidence for a Canaanite sex cult is sorely lacking, and tells us more about the fantasies of a certain scholarly moment than about the historical era it purports to

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may or may not be his wife. While Isaiah’s children, like Hosea’s, bear symbolic names, they play only a minor role in the overall book.

<sup>16</sup> Thus BDB, HALOT, and TDOT.

<sup>17</sup> Bird writes, “As a general term for extramarital sexual intercourse, *znh* [זָנָה] is limited in its primary usage to female subjects, since it is only for women that marriage is the primary determinant of legal status and obligation.” Phyllis Bird, “‘To Play the Harlot’: An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 77.

<sup>18</sup> On this “prurient” interest in Gomer, see Carole R. Fontaine, “A Response to ‘Hosea,’” in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 60–69.

<sup>19</sup> James Luther Mays, *Hosea, a Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969); Wolff, *Hosea*, 14–16, especially “The Sex Cult” on 14.

<sup>20</sup> They write, “1.2 must be understood proleptically...the original call must have been simply: ‘Go, take for yourself a wife and build a family with her.’” Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 162.

<sup>21</sup> Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, especially chapter 1.

describe.<sup>22</sup> The idea of ritual prostitution, moreover, has been soundly criticized with respect to the Hebrew Bible. As Phyllis Bird writes, “the concept expressed by combining words for ‘sacred’ (or ‘cultic’) and ‘prostitution’ is not found in the Hebrew Bible or in any ancient Semitic language.”<sup>23</sup> Sacred prostitutes, however endlessly interesting to write about, are simply not a significant part of the ancient Northwest Semitic world.

Wolf, Mays, and Andersen and Freedman are, of course, only three interpretations, but they offer a good introduction to the sort of problems that have plagued readings of Hosea 1-3. In response, feminist criticisms of the prophets have emerged, offering an alternative to these reading strategies.<sup>24</sup> This feminist criticism has been particularly strong in identifying and analyzing the implicit discourses of gender and power in scholarship on Hosea’s marriage. Sherwood’s work, in particular, presents an excellent meta-analysis of the dynamics of this body of scholarship. In an article on the interpretation of Hosea entitled “Boxing Gomer,” she writes,

Like the text, commentary shapes Gomer according to the desires of a violent and stringent purism: remade according to narrow definitions, she must either become a woman in white with golden ‘halo’, the subservient female icon of patriarchy, or she must fit the only alternative definition, as completely depraved whore.<sup>25</sup>

Like Sherwood, I am deeply skeptical of biblical scholarship’s claims to neutrality, particularly when the object of inquiry is a sexed-up *wife of whoredom*. I am also in full agreement with Sherwood’s assessment of the ways in which this same scholarship forces Gomer into a rigid, preexisting ideology of gender, which often relies on a rigid Madonna/whore complex. Sherwood and other recent scholars have done much both to expose the ideology implicit in dominant reading practices and to offer new alternatives.<sup>26</sup> In the section that follows, I will take up several recent trends in interpretation before articulating my own argument. My aim is not to be comprehensive (several excellent literature reviews already exist, most recently the work of Brad Kelle<sup>27</sup>), but rather to articulate the foundations upon which my reading is built.

### **Feminist Critique: The Silenced Voice and the Pornographic Body**

The Book of Hosea has long been an important site of feminist criticism of the Hebrew Bible. The first edition of *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, for example, devotes nearly half its text to feminist responses to Hosea.<sup>28</sup> In its earlier articulations, the feminist critique of Hosea often undertook two critical moves: recovering the silenced voice and

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<sup>22</sup> Jo Ann Hackett, “Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us? Ancient Near Eastern ‘Fertility’ Goddesses,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5, no. 1 (1989): 65–76; Fontaine, “A Response to ‘Hosea’.”

<sup>23</sup> Bird, “‘To Play the Harlot’: An Inquiry into an Old Testament Metaphor,” 76.

<sup>24</sup> The feminist criticism of the Bible of course goes back further. Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s nineteenth century commentary is a classic example. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman’s Bible: A Classic Feminist Perspective* (Dover Publications, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Yvonne Sherwood, “Boxing Gomer: Controlling the Deviant Woman in Hosea 1-3,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 118.

<sup>26</sup> Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*; Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), particularly 34–44, “Contemporary Biblical Literary Criticism: The Objective Phallacy.”

<sup>27</sup> Kelle, “Hosea 1—3 in Twentieth-Century Scholarship.”

<sup>28</sup> Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

documenting the pornographic body. Confronted with the seemingly overwhelming misogyny of Hosea 1-3 – and the collusion of biblical scholarship – one feminist critical approach to Hosea 1-3 and similar texts is the attempt to reconstruct or recover a silenced female voice.<sup>29</sup> This interpretive gesture of *recovering the female voice* is familiar from a number of strands of non-biblical literary criticism, as well as creative responses to the representation of women in the canon.<sup>30</sup> In some readings, the attempt to recover Gomer's voice is primarily metaphorical, part of a strategy of refusing alliance with the patriarchal orientation of the text.<sup>31</sup> At other points, the strategy is baldly literal, as when Fontaine offers an "alternate testimony," a poetic response on behalf of Gomer.<sup>32</sup>

A second, related feminist response, also borrowed from larger trends in feminist theory, is *documenting the pornographic body*. Shortly after Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon published their groundbreaking and controversial work on pornography,<sup>33</sup> Drorah Setel argued for the use of pornography as an analytical category to understand the excessive sexualized violence against women in the Hebrew prophets.<sup>34</sup> The equation of prophetic attitudes toward women with pornography had immediate interpretive traction, and a number of articles were published taking up the theme. Renita Weems and Athalya Brenner, among others, have argued that the portrayal of women in the prophets is "pornographic" in its constellation of sex, violence, and masculine fantasy. The violence of the representations of female characters and sexuality are matched by rhetoric of violence toward real women, aligning the text with discourse not just of pornographic sexual pleasure but also of sexual and domestic violence.<sup>35</sup>

The pornographic body and the silenced voice together offer an important corrective to the subtle misogyny of traditional biblical criticism, as well as to the open misogyny of the biblical text. The silenced voice serves as a (unfortunately necessary) reminder that it is not only men who have voices (though these male voices may achieve total or near total dominance), and that reading for and from silence can be an important and powerful interpretive tool. This is particularly the case for readers with theological or other ideological commitments to the text.

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<sup>29</sup> In chapter 3, "Jeremiah and the Gender of Prophetic Sound," I will return to the question of voice, including the repeated insistence to present the opposition to dominant power structures using metaphors of speech and sound instead of writing.

<sup>30</sup> Jean Rhys' *The Wide Sargasso Sea*, told in the voice of Bertha from *Jane Eyre*, is a classic example.

<sup>31</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Fontaine, "A Response to 'Hosea.'"

<sup>32</sup> For an account of these varied feminist reading strategies, as well as an insightful critique, see Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, particularly chapter 4, "Gomer's Marriage: A Feminist Analysis of Hosea 1-3."

<sup>33</sup> Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Perigee Books, 1981); Andrea Dworkin and Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women's Equality* (Minneapolis: Organizing Against Pornography, 1988). On the issue of pornography and feminism more generally, see Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (Univ of California Press, 1999); Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, Third ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2008), 111-122; Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> T. Drorah Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 85-95.

<sup>35</sup> See Renita J. Weems, "Gomer: Victim of Violence or Victim of Metaphor?," *Semeia* 47 (1989): 87-104; Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea"; Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Brill, 1996).

While the hermeneutics of the silenced voice work to recover a lost or repressed feminine narrative in the text, the pornographic body, for its part, serves as a documentation of the costs of the present order. It is not just that feminine voices are silenced – female bodies are violated, tortured, humiliated. These two interpretive approaches also document the ways in which the enterprise of biblical criticism participates in the silencing of feminine narratives and the exposure of female bodies. Revealing the complicity of scholarship in such practices is among the greatest accomplishments of a previous generation of feminist biblical criticism.

And yet there is also a risk in the hermeneutic strategies of the silenced voice and the pornographic body. Reading in these ways risks assuming that there is a “reality” of some sort that underlies the representations of feminine, that the text somehow permits access to a suppressed or subaltern counter-narrative. Treating the text as a representation, however perverse, of feminine reality is hazardous business. Despite all critical efforts to the contrary, *Gomer as representative of the feminine* remains as unreachable as *Gomer (or Hosea) as historical individual*. Neither is accessible in any meaningful way through the text. Reading as “decoding” or “uncovering” a truth – here, a truth about gender – ultimately shortchanges the complexity of the text as an intentional literary production.<sup>36</sup> It is not just the text that suffers from a reading organized around excavating the “truth” of the “feminine” – gender, too, fares badly. This is because in the Hebrew prophetic literature, there *is no* “authentic” feminine. Instead, when the feminine does occur in the text, it is without a meaningful relation to a feminine voice, experience, or subjectivity.

### The Specular Feminine

There is no reason to suspect or believe that the text of Hosea harbors a suppressed or subaltern feminine voice that is anything other than specular. Instead, as feminist critics have aptly shown us, the book of Hosea is a text organized by and around a male fantasy of the feminine.<sup>37</sup> This fantasy depends upon the feminine – in particular the female bodies of Gomer and the gynomorphized Israel – but it does not tell us *about* it. Instead, the feminine in Hosea is what Luce Irigaray names the “specular” feminine.<sup>38</sup> Woman is “specular,” in Irigaray’s terms, because her presence serves to reflect and constitute the male subject. Her textual presence does not speak to the female subject, but rather to a male fantasy that works to uphold specific ideas of masculine subjectivity. Whether Irigaray’s argument is in fact true of all text and all orders of representation is of course an open (and fraught) question; her work has inspired ample debate.<sup>39</sup> It is less controversial as a claim, however, in the case of the biblical text.

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<sup>36</sup> For an insightful critique of ideological reading, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s essay “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You.” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2002), 123–152.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Francis Landy, “Fantasy and the Displacement of Pleasure: Hosea 2.4–17,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 146–160.

<sup>38</sup> Irigaray writes of the production of male subjectivity, “Now, if this [male] ego is to be valuable, some ‘mirror’ is needed to reassure it and re-insure it of its value. Woman will be the foundation for this specular duplication, giving man back ‘his’ image and repeating it as the ‘same.’” Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 3rd Printing. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 54.

<sup>39</sup> For some recent responses to Irigaray, see Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*; Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell, “The Future of Sexual Difference: An Interview with Judith Butler and Drucilla Cornell,” ed. Pheng Cheah and Elizabeth A.

What do we gain from dissociating the feminine in the text from any real or authentic feminine? First, acknowledging the specularity of the feminine in the text counters the hermeneutic obligation to read the text in a narrow range of ways understood as “liberating.”<sup>40</sup> Put another way, there are other possibilities for troubling texts such as Hosea beyond condemning their misogyny or endeavoring to save them from themselves. Second, accepting the feminine as a construction or a fantasy opens the possibility (indeed, necessity) of critically considering *masculinity* in the text. This sexing of the masculine is a part of Irigaray’s project as well.<sup>41</sup> She criticizes discourses of the neuter and neutrality as erasing the specificity of the female body and of female experience, proposing instead a false universal.<sup>42</sup> One strategic response is re-sexualizing male bodies and masculinity.<sup>43</sup> The critical response that Irigaray offers is to first direct attention to the sexed specificity of the “universal” discourse, and then to expose the instabilities of this representation. The archetype, Irigaray tells us, is an archetype with a male sex organ, and this male sex organ, moreover, is a point of instability, anxiety – and openness to critique.

More recent feminist readings of Hosea 1-3 have adopted a more complicated understanding of gender and its workings in the text, moving beyond the silenced female voice and the sexualized female body to explore metaphorical,<sup>44</sup> materialist,<sup>45</sup> and deconstructive readings.<sup>46</sup> These readings are part of a larger shift from documenting, condemning, or recovering the representations of women in the text to understanding the *work* that these representations accomplish. Such readings take a critical approach, often complementary to the *specular feminine*, that we might term *thinking with women*.

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Grosz, *Diacritics* 28, no. 1 (1998): 19–42; Tamsin Lorraine, *Irigaray & Deleuze: Experiments in Visceral Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999). On the specular feminine in the prophets, as well as the use of Irigaray, see Rhiannon Graybill, “Uncanny Bodies, Impossible Knowledge and Somatic Excess in Isaiah 29,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 7, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>40</sup> As Shoshana Felman makes clear in her critique of Judith Fetterly’s “resisting reader,” the experience of reading cannot and should not be contained to a narrow attitude of either suspicion or salvation. Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?: Reading and Sexual Difference* (John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 4–6.

<sup>41</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*.

<sup>42</sup> Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, especially “The Female Gender” and “The Universal as Mediation.” For a different understanding of the neutral and the neuter, see Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the College De France (1977-1978)*, First ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Thus Irigaray writes of Freud’s idea of penis envy, “Therefore let us turn the question around again. Is the primitive, or most primitive, character of ‘penis-envy’ not an essential factor in establishing the *primacy of the male organ*? In making the phallus necessarily the archetype for sex? The primal sex? And making the penis the best representational equivalent to the Idea of sex? There can only be one desire: the desire to ensue domination by greed, by appetite for appropriation. If anything were to contradict this desire—the little girl’s pleasures, for example—the whole economy of sexual affects, and affectations, would have to be reinterpreted.” Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 58.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma*, In the Wilderness of Speech: Problems of Metaphor in Hosea; Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective*, 20 (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> For example Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2003); Alice A. Keefe, *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001). See as well the discussion below.

<sup>46</sup> Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*.

## Thinking with Women

By *thinking with women*, I mean treating woman, female characters, and the feminine in the text not as accurate representations of women or female experience, but rather as figures of thought for the working through of other problems, often involving masculinity or masculine subjectivity. While this approach bears definite similarities to Irigaray's idea of specularity, it moves beyond the metaphor of the mirror to consider more complex and dynamic ways of using the feminine to negotiate problems with the masculine. As an interpretive technique, *thinking with women* has had a great deal of traction in classical and early Christian studies. In *The Body and Society*, for example, Peter Brown argues that early Christian men often "think with" women. Brown writes,

There is no doubt that women played an important role in the imaginative economy of the Church. Their presence condensed the deep preoccupation of male Christians with their own relations with the 'world,' with the ever present reality of a tainted and seductive pagan society that pressed up against the doors of their houses and abutted the closed spaces of their new meeting places. Throughout this period, Christian men used women "to think with."<sup>47</sup>

According to Brown, late antique texts use the figures of women to explore the "imaginative economy of the Church." Thinking about women becomes a mode of thinking about other questions – the problem of religious identity, the question of otherness, the needs of the community.

Ancient (and modern) people had access, of course, to a large number of figures "to think with" – not just women, but martyrs, saints, eunuchs, demons, foreigners, slaves, virgins, and any number of others. The selection of women, then, is not a neutral choice. Instead, women become a particularly productive figure for thinking about problems of gender and sex. This is true not just in early Christian texts, but in the pre-Christian world as well. David Halperin makes this point vis-à-vis Diotima, the woman who instructs Socrates in the *Symposium*, in an essay entitled "Why is Diotima a Woman?" Halperin concludes,

Woman is that pseudo-Other who both makes good what men want and exempts men from wanting anything at all; she is an alternate male identity whose constant accessibility to men lends men a fullness and totality that enables them to dispense (supposedly) with otherness all together....we find that from the perspective of the male world, at least, there is no such thing as authentic

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<sup>47</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity; Twentieth Anniversary Edition with a New Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 153. Elizabeth Clark, Elizabeth Castelli, Daniel Boyarin, and Virginia Burrus have undertaken similar work. See Elizabeth A. Clark, "Ideology, History, and the Construction of 'Woman' in Late Ancient Christianity," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2, no. 2 (1994): 155–184; Elizabeth A. Castelli, "The Ambivalent Legacy of Violence and Victimhood: Using Early Christian Martyrs to Think With," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 6, no. 1 (2006): 1–24; Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, 1st ed. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Virginia Burrus, "Mapping as Metamorphosis: Initial Reflections on Gender and Ancient Religious Discourses," in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, ed. Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (Boston: Brill, 2007), 1–10; Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography*, 1st pbk. ed. (Philadelphia Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).



femininity. ‘Woman,’ and ‘man,’ are figures of male speech. Gender—no less than sexuality—is an irreducible fiction.<sup>48</sup>

Halperin echoes Irigaray: “there is no such thing as authentic femininity.” Instead, gender is at once produced and endlessly productive. The presence of women in the text becomes foundation for the construction of male characters, male bodies, and masculine subjectivities. The “fullness and totality” of the masculine indeed depends upon the presence of the feminine.<sup>49</sup>

While studies of early Christianity are intensely attuned to the use of women to communicate ideas about gender and power, in studies of the Hebrew prophets, thinking with women often takes a materialist turn. A key example in the case of Hosea is Alice Keefe’s *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea*.<sup>50</sup> In emphasizing socioeconomics and the politics of consumptions in eighth-century BCE Israel, Keefe’s reading treats the female body not as a synecdoche or stand-in for female experience, but rather as a complex social symbol – to tweak Keefe’s title, women’s body *as* social body, functioning as “a complex symbol of the death of the nation.”<sup>51</sup> For Keefe, the discourse of the body in Hosea 1-3 is really a critique of exploitative economic practices. The underlying problem in Hosea is not idolatry (figured as adultery), but rather economic exploitation through trade alliances with foreign powers. Gale Yee makes a related argument, arguing that the feminization of the male elite through the marriage metaphor represents a critique of the “native-tributary mode of production in eighth-century Israel and its effect on gender relations, the pluralistic cult, and emergent monolatry.”<sup>52</sup>

Interpreters such as Keefe and Yee are right to direct attention to the material grounding of texts and to the influence of history on literary production. And yet the fact remains that this economic crisis is presented using highly charged sexual and marital imagery – imagery that appears elsewhere, for example in Ezekiel, without a similar economic justification. Yee notes that the marriage metaphor, whatever its sociopolitical groundings, also doubles as a “‘symbolic alibi,’ which obscures for later interpreters Hosea’s conflicts with this leadership while concurrently reinforcing the subordinate status of Israelite women to men.”<sup>53</sup> Without dismissing the economic and political critique that Keefe, Yee, and Kelle, in different ways, articulate, I submit that the thematization of marriage as a “symbolic alibi” and the use of sex and gender as

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<sup>48</sup> Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, 151. Halperin also explicitly rejects the “authentic feminine,” writing, “To mistake this construct for ‘the authentically feminine’ would therefore amount to the most elementary of rhetorical errors, which is to confuse a figural with a literal denomination” (Ibid.).

<sup>49</sup> This approach continues to resonate in early Christian studies. Kimberly Statton writes of recent scholarship, “As these scholars demonstrate, narratives about ascetic virgins or foolish women reveal little about actual women and a lot about how early Christian (male) writers used women ‘to think with.’...Such depictions rely on existing stereotypes and socially constructed notions about women to communicate ideas about power (ascetic or institutional) and authority (‘heretical’ or ‘orthodox’).” Kimberly B. Statton, “The Rhetoric of ‘Magic’ in Early Christian Discourse: Gender, Power, and the Construction of ‘Heresy,’” in *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, ed. Todd C. Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele (Boston: Brill, 2007), 111.

<sup>50</sup> Keefe, *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea*.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>52</sup> Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 82. Brad Kelle, meanwhile, associates the marriage metaphor, particularly as presented in Hos. 2, as “a metaphorical and theological commentary on the political affairs of Samaria at the time of the Syro-Ephraimitic War.” Kelle, “Hosea 1–3 in Twentieth-Century Scholarship,” 208. See as well Kelle, *Hosea* 2.

<sup>53</sup> Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, 109.

salient categories are not accidental or inconsequential. The socioeconomic history of the Northern Kingdom is necessary but ultimately, alone, inadequate to understand the opening chapters of Hosea. While the female body does bear a special relation to the social body, the choice of metaphorical vehicles is not neutral – a point that economically oriented readings too easily gloss over. The body can function as a metaphor, but not without telling us something about the body – and about masculinity – as well. Diotima, after all, is a woman – not a man, not a eunuch, not a walrus. The same basic principle holds for the feminized figure of Israel and for Gomer, Hosea’s wife. Her female form is neither coincidental nor inconsequential.

In addition to economics, the female body in Hosea tells us as well about the construction of *masculinity* – and prophetic masculinity in particular – as a textual and cultural category. As Virginia Burros writes, “Rhetorically, it must be acknowledged, representations of women often also appear to have little to do with women per se, serving rather to mediate assertions of masculine identity or status.”<sup>54</sup> Thinking “with” or “through” the female characters in the text can tell us about a number of issues, agricultural economies and foreign trade disputes among them. But it also, nearly always, tells us something about masculinity – perhaps especially, when masculinity is not the stated focus of the text. In reading Hosea 1-3, I read the feminine figures of Israel and Gomer to offer a more complete representation of masculinity. Masculinity in Hosea has occasionally been a topic in scholarship, although it receives far less attention than questions of femininity. John Goldingay has explored the possibilities of a “masculist” reading of Hosea.<sup>55</sup> Susan Haddox has written on the ways in which Hosea uses the rhetoric of masculinity to shame and condemn Israelite leaders.<sup>56</sup> Haddox’s reading uses masculinity as a category of political rhetoric; my own work, complementary to Haddox’s, emphasizes the construction of gender over the construction of politics. Ken Stone has also written on masculinity and food in Hosea, arguing for a contested and unstable view of masculinity and divinity alike. As Stone writes, “by using food and sex to ‘think’ Hosea we can recognize the incoherence and insecurity of the views of manhood and deity which the book presupposes.”<sup>57</sup> Stone’s study, for its part, takes up the masculinity not just of Hosea but of Yahweh and even Ba’al as well; divinity and food are major concerns. My own focus will remain on the prophet while positioning Gomer in the argument about masculinity. The feminine is essential to the construction of masculinity in Hosea. The female body in Hosea 1-3 is spectacular, fascinating, and upsetting, but it is also ultimately specular. In the final analysis, the feminine body is in the service of a male discourse about embodiment, gender, and masculinity.

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<sup>54</sup> Burros, “Mapping as Metamorphosis: Initial Reflections on Gender and Ancient Religious Discourses,” 5.

<sup>55</sup> John Goldingay, “Hosea 1-3, Genesis 1-4, and Masculist Interpretation,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 17, no. 1 (1995): 37–44. I do not, however, find “masculist” interpretation, with its implicit gender essentialism, a particularly useful strategy.

<sup>56</sup> Haddox writes, “The key to Hosea’s rhetoric is an attack on the masculinity of Israel’s leaders. Hosea utilizes standard conceptions of masculinity found in the ancient Near East, which are particularly developed in the language of politics and warfare.” Susan E. Haddox, “(E)Masculinity in Hosea’s Political Rhetoric,” in *Israel’s Prophets and Israel’s Past: Essays on the Relationship of Prophetic Texts and Israelite History in Honor of John H. Hayes*, ed. John Haralson Hayes, Brad E Kelle, and Megan Bishop Moore, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 446 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 174.

<sup>57</sup> Ken Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex and Bible in Queer Perspective*, Queering Theology Series (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 112.

## II. BODY, LAND, FERTILITY, DESIRE: READING HOSEA 2

The central problem in Hosea 1-3 is negotiating the masculinity of the prophet, and in particular, the ways in which masculinity is destabilized and challenged by prophecy. And yet the negotiation of masculinity in the text does not occur openly. Instead, the anxiety over masculinity, embodiment, etc. is displaced onto the feminine body. Hosea's move outside of ordinary masculine subjectivity is effected through his relationship with another figure even more excluded from the structures of power – a *wife of whoredom*. A woman, especially a promiscuous, fornicating mother of three, is a figure excluded from power. Gomer's denigrated social position and sexualized and opened body thus provide a site in the text from which to think through the problematic demands of prophecy. Even more than the narrative frame of Gomer, however, the female figure of Israel, Yahweh's wife, provides a figure to “think with” and negotiate the problems of prophecy and masculinity. Israel, the lascivious, insatiable, sexual wife substitutes for Gomer – whose actions in the text, beyond her provocative epithet *wife of whoredom*, are in fact quite mild<sup>58</sup> – just as Gomer herself substitutes for Hosea. This chain of substitution is a textual strategy that allows gender and sexuality to be at once to occupy a central position and to remain unspoken with respect to Hosea, its central male figure.

The demand in chapter 1 to marry a *wife of whoredom* and conceive children with her – an act that fundamentally challenges hegemonic biblical masculinity – is only the most obvious sign of this crisis of masculinity. As the biographical framing of Hosea's story indicates, the prophet is also placed in a paradoxical double position in relation to Yahweh, standing in both as husband (in his relationship with Gomer) and as wife (insofar as Hosea himself is a member of Israel, represented in the text as Yahweh's unfaithful wife). Analogically, Gomer is to Hosea as Israel is to Yahweh – and Gomer is a *wife of whoredom*, as befits Israel's religious and sexual transgressions. And yet, at the same time, Hosea himself is a part of the (collective) body of Israel, making him also, through a twist of metaphor, his own wife. But no sooner is the analogy constructed than it begins to collapse into itself. The resulting convolutions of analogy and metaphor, like the strained family narrative and the hyperbolic anger and passion of Yahweh's relationship to Israel, are all a part of a larger negotiation of the problem of prophetic masculinity.

In unraveling this chain of substitutions and significations, I want to begin not with Hosea, nor even with Gomer, but rather with Israel, the bride of Yahweh. Hosea 2 offers a series of “scenes from a marriage” between Yahweh and his bride, Israel. Written in the voice of Yahweh, the text swings between violent anger and tender promises of renewed love. The text begins with Yahweh's renunciation of his wife, delivered to his children, followed by a series of passionate accusations, threats of violence, and death by devouring beasts. Then, in the final third of the chapter, the tone and content alike undergo a sudden shift. Violence is replaced by tenderness as Yahweh promises concerning his bride, *I will entice her and I will bring her into the wilderness, and I will speak tenderly to her* (Hos. 2:16). The poem ends by reversing its own beginning. In place of renunciation, Yahweh and Israel's children speak their eternal family bond. Israel, for her part, remains silent at the poem's end, eternally betrothed to Yahweh and sown into the land (Hos. 2:21-25).

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<sup>58</sup> Gomer is described only as giving birth to and weaning her children.

The rhetoric of the land is essential to understanding how the text uses the female body to negotiate gender and embodiment. To the chain of substitution – Hosea to Gomer to Israel as woman – I want to add another term: the *land*. The metaphorical association of the land as a woman, and of woman’s body as land is an important metaphorical complex in the ancient Near Eastern world, including the book of Hosea. The association between female body and land overflows the ordinary boundaries of tenor and vehicle in the metaphor. Instead, the metaphor of *land as woman* is inextricably bound up in its reverse, *woman as land*. These two metaphorical systems inform and depend upon each other,<sup>59</sup> as well as the negotiation of masculinity and embodiment across the opening three chapters.

### Land as Woman and Woman as Land

In the Hebrew Bible, the dominant form of the metaphor is the representation of the *land as woman*, or as a female body. The gendering of cities as female is the norm in the Hebrew Bible, a convention that can be traced as well in Akkadian and Sumerian literature.<sup>60</sup> Israel is described as the wife of Yahweh not just in Hosea, but across the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, including, most extensively, in Ezek. 16; Judah and Samaria are likewise represented as the sexually licentious sisters Oholah and Oholibah in Ezek. 23.<sup>61</sup> The land itself is less explicitly gendered in the biblical text (attributable, perhaps, to the lingering anxieties of monotheism and the accompanying desire to avoid theo- or anthropomorphizing any entities other than Yahweh). Nevertheless, it, too, is framed with feminine terms. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, for example, the land of Israel is repeatedly described as flowing with milk and honey,<sup>62</sup> attributes that code the land as doubly erotic and maternal.<sup>63</sup> The representation of the land of Israel as a woman – frequently figured as Yahweh’s wife or sexual partner, but sometimes as a daughter as well – is also a recurrent literary trope in the prophets.<sup>64</sup> While Yahweh’s male body appears in the text only rarely, Israel is insistently given a female body and described as a woman. The strength of this representation as a woman is stronger, it seems, than the link between Israel and any one *kind* of woman (wife, whore, mother, daughter), though there is a tendency toward the sexual and the marital.

In representing Israel as female, the biblical texts, like their ancient Near Eastern predecessors, operate according to a basic metaphor of *land as woman*. And yet the terms of the

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<sup>59</sup> The metaphor is thus multidirectional. See Carl R. Hausman, *Metaphor and Art: Interactionism and Reference in the Verbal and Nonverbal Arts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 54.

<sup>60</sup> See Brad E. Kelle, “Wartime Rhetoric: Prophetic Metaphorization of Cities as Female,” in *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad E. Kelle and Frank Ritzel Ames (Society of Biblical Lit, 2008), 95–112; F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep, O Daughter of Zion: a Study of the City-Lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993).

<sup>61</sup> See further Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship Between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> The descriptor appears almost two dozen times. Most of the instances are in the Torah; the first comes in Yahweh’s theophany to Moses, when he tells the prophet he will bring the Israelites forth *to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey* (Exod. 3:8).

<sup>63</sup> Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 62–64.

<sup>64</sup> On the function of this metaphor in modern Hebrew poetry, see Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism Decentering Literary Dynamics*, *Contraversions 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), especially chapter 4.

metaphor, the tenor and the vehicle, also switch places, with the female body described as being like the land. The metaphor is thus a multidirectional metaphor.<sup>65</sup> This occurs most dramatically in the Song of Songs, in which bodies and pleasures are described with fruits and gardens, grapes and apple orchards (Song, *passim*). While this is an inversion of the traditional organization of tenor and vehicle in the biblical text,<sup>66</sup> it is also a metaphor with its own lengthy history, one that predates the biblical text. Thus in a series of Sumerian poems, the goddess Inanna presents her own body as cultivable land:

My vulva, the horn  
the Boat of Heaven,  
Is full of eagerness like the young moon.  
My untilled land lies fallow.  
As for me, Inanna,  
Who will plow my vulva?  
Who will plow my high field?  
Who will plow my wet ground?  
As for me, the young woman,  
Who will plow my vulva?  
Who will station the ox there?  
Who will plow my vulva?<sup>67</sup>

In representing her own body – her vulva, no less – as ground to be plowed, Inanna renders the association between the female body and the land impossible to ignore. While her address is particularly direct (and effectively so – her lover Dumuzi responds immediately with “I will plow your vulva!”<sup>68</sup>), she nevertheless uses a conventional ancient Near Eastern metaphor to talk about the body. As Andersen and Freedman write, “The comparison of a fertile wife with a fruitful field is widespread in the ancient Near East; in complementary fashion, the penis is sometimes likened to a plow and the word ‘seed’ is used for all kinds of planting.”<sup>69</sup> Inanna uses this language with particular vigor, but her representation of her body is not itself unique. Instead, *woman as land* and *land as woman* function as paired, mutually sustaining metaphors in the text.

As the example of Inanna shows, the distinctions between tenor and vehicle, while salient in any particular instantiation of the metaphor, do not hold up for the metaphorical association of female body and land taken as a whole. *Land as woman* and *woman as land* are both active, functional metaphorical systems in the text, and they build upon each other. Of the woman’s body as land in the Song of Songs, Robert Alter writes, “Imagery is given such full and free play there that the lines of semantic subordination blur, and it becomes a little uncertain what is illustration and what is referent.”<sup>70</sup> While this blurriness is deployed to particular literary effect in the Song of Songs, it is present as well, though to very different effect, in Hosea. The land of

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<sup>65</sup> Hausman, *Metaphor and Art*.

<sup>66</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 193.

<sup>67</sup> Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 37.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 225–226.

<sup>70</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 193.

Israel is represented as a woman, the wife of Yahweh. At the same time, the body of this woman, brought to presence through the poetry of the text, is described as being like the land. The tenor returns as the vehicle of the vehicle, the original vehicle becomes the tenor, and the metaphor turns inward on itself. I want to consider this process, which is foundational to the workings of gender in the text as well as the strategies of displacement the cluster around the question.

### The Body and the Land

The land – the wilderness, the fields, the fruits and grains that grow upon it – is central to Hosea 2. Yahweh cannot stop speaking about the earth and its yield. He repeatedly lists the products of the land (wool and flax, oil and wine; Hos. 2:7, 11). His greatest indignation, it seems, is not simply that Israel has consorted with other gods, but rather that she has specifically failed to acknowledge the true source of the natural fecundity from which she benefits – *she does not know that I gave her the grain and the new wine and the oil* (Hos. 2:10). The problem is a failure to attribute the fertility of the land to its true source, Yahweh. In response, Yahweh offers a vision of punishment for Israel – a punishment that expressed, like the original problem, using the vocabulary of fertility. In Hos. 2:5, for example, Yahweh threatens, *I will make her into a wilderness, and change her into a dry land, and kill her with thirst*. Israel’s punishment consists of being transformed *into* the land, which is desolate and unable to sustain life. And yet at the same time, she is also punished *by* the land, which will *kill her with thirst*. Israel is thus at once identical to the wilderness and oppressed by it. The oppression by the land continues a few verses later, as Yahweh adds, *Therefore, I will hedge up her way with thorns, I will block her road with a wall of stones, so she cannot find her paths*. The land, here a space filled with stones and thorns, functions as an instrument of punishment against the body. Thus the relationship between the metaphorical terms of *woman* and *land* is flexible; what matters most is the thematic association between their fates.

The use of the land to threaten Israel reaches its peak in Yahweh’s promise to remove all fertility and replace it with violence against in the female body. In Hos. 2:11-14, Yahweh vows,

<sup>11</sup>*Therefore, I will return and take my grain in its time,  
and the new wine in its season,*

*I will remove my wool and my flax,  
which were to cover her nakedness.<sup>71</sup>*

<sup>12</sup>*Now I shall uncover her shame<sup>72</sup> before the eyes of her lovers,  
and no one shall rescue her.*

<sup>13</sup>*I will bring an end to all her pleasures:  
her holidays, her new moons, and her Sabbaths,  
and all of her appointed times.*

<sup>14</sup>*I will destroy her vines and her fig trees,  
of which she said,*

<sup>71</sup> According to Anderson and Freedman, “It is clear from Gen. 9:22-23 that ‘erwâ [עֲרֻוָּה] is a euphemism for genitals,” cf Lev. 18 (Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 246.).

<sup>72</sup> *Her genitals*: נְבִלְתָּהּ from נְבִלָה + feminine possessive suffix. The term is a *hapax legomenon*. HALOT gives *shame* as well as *pudenda* (664); BDB has *immodesty* and *shamelessness*. Wolff compares the term to Akkadian *baltu*, *genitalia* and translates *genitals*; Anderson and Freedman urge restraint, noting that the root נבל has the basic meaning of *fool* and settling on *lewdness* as a compromise. LXX translates τὴν ἀκαθαρσίαν αὐτῆς, *her uncleanness*.

*'These are my wages, which my lovers gave me.'*  
*I will make them a thicket, beasts of the field<sup>73</sup> will devour them.*

The total destruction that Yahweh promises is terrible; importantly, it is also natural in every way, with the wilderness serving as both the form and the consequence of the Yahweh's anger. Even the naked female body, shamefully exposed to *the eyes of her lovers*, appears within a larger concern about the land. The removal of the wool and the flax is not simply a literal baring of the female body, but also the symbolic stripping of the trappings of domestication and cultivation from the wilderness. In punishing the woman, Yahweh turns the natural world against her. The suffering and exposure, moreover, reinforce the link between her body and the land.

The land is not simply, however, a place and instrument of violence. Instead, its natural fertility also serves as a sign of consolation and provides a place of seduction. In the final third of Hosea 2, Yahweh's attitude toward Israel shifts dramatically, even as his imagery remains the same. Just as Israel is to be *hedged up with thorns*, so too is her restoration described metaphorically, with the language of natural and agricultural productivity. And like the punishment, this restoration takes place in the wilderness:

*<sup>16</sup>Therefore, I will entice her  
And I will bring her into the wilderness,  
And I will speak tenderly to her.  
<sup>17</sup>I will give her vineyards from there,  
And the Valley of Achor as an opening of hope,  
And she will answer there as in the days of her youth,  
As in the days when she went up from Egypt.*

Restoration and re-seduction, like the threats and violence that precede them, occur both *in* and *with* the land. The wilderness, formerly a space of terror, of murderous thirst and devouring beasts, becomes a place of tenderness. The vineyard doubles as a sign of economic prosperity (wine is an important export of Iron Age Israel) and as a place of love and romance. The reversal is complete. But what remains consistent, even in this reversal, is the underlying metaphorical link between the body and the land. Indeed, the reversal of the threats to promises only further substantiates this close association between the forms of the female body and the forms of the earth.

### **The Pleasures of the Plow**

In his speech of restoration in the final third of chapter 2, Yahweh promises to entice his bride in the wilderness and to win back her love. This association between the female body, the land, and sexual pleasure is not, of course, unique to Hosea, and instead appears in a number of ancient Near Eastern texts. In the case of Inanna, who vividly describes her own body with metaphors of the garden and the field, "plowing the field" is associated not simply with fertility and the succession of generations (the goddess, despite bearing two children, has little interest in being a mother<sup>74</sup>) but also with female sexual pleasure. Anticipating the plowing, Inanna repeatedly describes herself as "full of eagerness."<sup>75</sup> Turning to the biblical context, this embrace

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<sup>73</sup> LXX adds *birds and reptiles*.

<sup>74</sup> Rivkah Harris, "Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites," *History of Religions* 30, no. 3 (1991): 261–278.

<sup>75</sup> Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*, 37.

of female sexuality occurs in the Song of Songs as well, where the land-as-body forms the centerpiece of a discourse of sexual pleasure, including pleasure for the female lover. These scenes of eroticism deliberately blur the pleasures of pomegranates, grapes, and bowls of honey with the pleasures of the body, even as the settings of the text – gardens, vineyards, a nut orchard – hint that even natural pleasure depends upon human cultivation.

In Hosea, however, this discourse of female sexual pleasure is mostly lacking, even when Yahweh pledges to reverse the suffering and sexual punishments he has brought upon Israel. Though Yahweh claims he will *entice* Israel, her pleasure or indeed her consent are never mentioned. Instead, the emphasis in the text is on controlling the body, the land, and what they bring forth. The promise of vineyards in 2:17 (itself not a neutral gift, given the significance of grapes for agriculture and commerce), is quickly displaced by a promise to exercise control over the woman's oral production:

*<sup>18</sup>And it will be on that day – an oracle of Yahweh – she<sup>76</sup> will say 'my husband'  
And will no longer say to me 'my Ba'al.'*

*<sup>19</sup>And I will remove the names of the Ba'als from her mouth,  
And they will no longer be remembered by their names. (Hos. 2:18-19)*

As Yahweh controls what the land brings forth, so too will he control the words and actions that the woman herself produces. The statement that *תִּקְרָא אִישִׁי וְלֹא תִקְרָא לִי עוֹד בַּעַלִי*, *she will say 'my husband' and will no longer say to me 'my Ba'al'* contains a pun. *בַּעַל*, *Ba'al*, the name of Yahweh's rival god, also means *master* or *husband*. The possessive suffix on the noun adds to the parallelism with *אִישִׁי*, *my man* or *my husband*, a word without the same charge of ownership. And yet despite Yahweh's self-positioning – *אִישִׁי* but not *בַּעַלִי*, *my husband* but not *my master* – the passage is very much about asserting ownership of a woman and her body. *אִישִׁי* is, indeed, *בַּעַלִי*. The erasure of the woman under the power of male control of the land is completed in the following verse, where Yahweh makes a covenant – not with the woman, who has been reduced entirely to passive object, but with the *animals* (Hos. 2:20). Though her betrothal to Yahweh follows in verse 21, Israel's secondary position vis-à-vis the animal world is no accident. Nor is her loss of a voice. In verse 18, the woman's speech is compelled by Yahweh (*She will not say...*); in the final lines, her voice is entirely replaced by the voices of the earth and heaven, as well as by Yahweh's/Hosea's *son*:

*And I will sow her for myself in the land,  
And I will have mercy on No-Mercy,  
I will say to Not-My-People, 'You are my people!'  
And he will say, 'My God!' (Hos. 2:25)*

The use of the names of Hosea's children in Yahweh's address suggests a blurring of terms between God and prophet. The terms of the metaphor, Yahweh's marriage and Hosea's, become hopelessly blurred. No-Mercy and Not-My-People, Hosea's children, are now addressed by Yahweh (Jezreel, the older son, appears in the verse prior). In proper biblical fashion, it is the youngest son who speaks, who answers Yahweh *My God!*. But while the children are called by name, their mother, Israel/Gomer is left unnamed and uncalled. Instead of speech or seduction,

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<sup>76</sup> Because the second person feminine singular (2fs) and third person feminine singular (3fs) are identical in the imperfect, *she* may also be translated *you* (fem.) in this verse.



she is sown in the land, and sown *for myself* – that is, for Yahweh/Hosea, the male agent exerting control over the feminized space and the feminine body.

Thus in Hosea, the language of cultivation is used to thematize fertility and to control the female land/body without reference to sexual pleasure. What Hosea 2 shares with the Song of Songs and the other love poems is not pleasure for the woman, but rather an acute interest in the processes and possibilities of agricultural cultivation. These are poems set in gardens and orchards, poems that take a great interest in the production of wine and olive oil, poems that, unlike the wandering Israelites, are not forced to remain solely in the wilderness. But in Hosea, the fertility of the land and body bear no link to pleasure. Instead, the body and the land represent spaces to be plowed, cultivated, and controlled.

### **The Wilderness and the Field**

The images of nature and of fertility in Hosea 2 fall into two general types: images of uncontrolled, often dangerous wilderness (the wild beasts, the tearing thorns, the thicket), and images of cultivation (the vineyards of Achor, the earth answering the grain, the grain, the new wine, and the olive oil, whose (cultivated) source Israel does not recognize). The first set of images predominates in Yahweh's threats and anger, the second in his vision of restoration; Israel's body is linked to the land throughout. These two pairs of images are not simply accidental, but instead represent two distinct metaphorical schemas for understanding the relationship between the female body and the land: *woman as land* in the sense of *wilderness*, and *woman as land* in the sense of *cultivable agricultural field*. The *female body as land*, the dominant metaphor of Hosea 2, is really two separate but related metaphors. Here, the work of classicist Page duBois on ancient Greek metaphors of the female body is helpful. In *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women*, duBois argues that the underlying metaphorical system of woman as *field*, dominant in archaic Greece, is gradually but definitely displaced by other metaphors. These subsequent metaphors (*field*, but also *stone*, *oven*, and finally *tablet*), resist the fertility of body and land alike and refuse female agency in fertility and enhance male power over the feminine.<sup>77</sup> To apply duBois' language to Hosea, the two underlying metaphors in Hosea's *female body as land* are *woman as field* (the body as land as in the sense of wilderness) and *woman as furrow* (the body as land as in the sense of agricultural space to be cultivated).<sup>78</sup>

A similar dynamic animates Hosea 2, where the metaphors of *woman as field* and *woman as furrow* jostle for dominance. The control of fertility and the proper attribution of generative power is a key dynamic in the text. Uncultivated and uncontrolled, the natural world is a force for destruction, a place filled with beasts and thorns. The danger of unchecked fertility links to a second danger, the danger of misattributed fertility. As we have seen, a motivating problem in the text is not merely that Israel has forsaken Yahweh to consort with other gods, but rather *she does not know that I gave her the grain and the new wine and the oil*. Ken Stone suggests that this almost obsessive interest in the origins of the things conceals an anxiety over fertility. He writes, "Yhwh's male honor has been challenged by misattribution to Ba'al of Yhwh's

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<sup>77</sup> Page duBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, 65.

provisions.”<sup>79</sup> This shame, moreover, is linked to a sneaking sense that Yahweh in fact does *not* exercise sole control over fertility and is not the exclusive provider:

By characterizing Yhwh in terms of such recurring demonstrations of manliness as the vehement insistence that one is an adequate food provider, or the harsh punishment of women suspected of sexual infidelity, Hosea ironically leaves the Yhwh he constructs open to the charge of revealing through anxious assertion a sort of divine insecurity about Yhwh’s ability to be (playing again here on Herzfeld’s phrase) “good at being a male god.”<sup>80</sup>

While Stone primarily frames the anxiety in terms of the relationship between Yahweh and Ba‘al as a masculine rivalry, there is also an anxiety vis-à-vis the productive fertility of the feminized land. The almost obsessive interest in commodities marks an anxiety over generativity that is not limited to the status of Israel’s major agricultural exports. There is a discourse here of concern over the generative power of the land and the generative power of the female body that it is mapped upon. If Israel *does not know* who gave her the provisions, perhaps it is because she, the land, brought them forth herself. The anxiety over feminized fertility and parthenogenesis likewise explains why Yahweh’s anger is directed not just at Ba‘al/the Ba‘als (as in the classic scenario of male rivalry over a woman), but also, even primarily, against Israel and her failure of knowledge (*she does not know*). By positioning himself as the sower – *I will sow her for myself in the land* (2:25) – Yahweh ensures his exclusive control over fertility. He also neatly avoids any challenges to his claims, for Israel literally cannot speak after she has been sown in the ground. Her transformation from field to furrow is complete, even as agency – even agency in speech – is taken away. As duBois writes, elsewhere, of the female body as furrow: “She is no longer the parthenogenetic source of all nurturance, but property, marked and bound, ordered by civilization.”<sup>81</sup> The text of Hosea 2 insists that fertility comes not from Baal, not from the parthenogenetic (feminine) land, but from Yahweh alone.

In the second half of chapter 2, the promise of restoration (with a touch of seduction) relies almost entirely on images of the feminized land of the cultivated variety. Instead of thorns and beasts, Hosea 2:16-25 offers vineyards, fields of grain, covenants, and cultivation. In verse 25, this cultivation becomes explicit as Yahweh promises to *sow* Israel in the land. Yahweh’s furor at Israel’s openness – to the Ba‘als, to the land, to unchecked growth – projects an anxiety over the control of female sexuality. *Who opens the female body* becomes a major concern, suggesting, as well, a lingering fear that this female body and its generative power are not fully secured under the authority of the masculine.

Furthermore, because Hosea is, literally, a member of the body of Israel, there is also an anxiety over the male body as open body. Hosea is to speak to the Israelites, Hosea is to marry Gomer – but Hosea himself is perhaps too open. But this openness of Hosea’s body is unspeakable on the level of the text. Instead, it must be negotiated through displacement onto the female body. What remains to be determined is whether the prophet’s openness is an openness, like Israel’s, to foreign influences, or a more frightening openness to Yahweh himself.

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<sup>79</sup> Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts*, 120.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>81</sup> duBois, *Sowing the Body*, 72.

### III. TOWARD A THEORY OF MASCULINITY IN HOSEA 1-3

Hosea 1-3 is a text filled with bodies that are punished, desired, violated, and placed on spectacular display. And yet these bodies are female bodies – the bodies of Israel and Gomer. What of the masculine body, the body of the prophet? Where has Hosea gone? Hosea's body *is* present in the text of chapters 1-3, but only briefly and in fragments. Its specific parts do not really appear in the text. We know that Hosea fathers children and avoids sexual contact and raisin cakes (Hos. 1:3-6, 3:1, 3); all other details of his body and its activities are left unsaid. The pain and pleasure of his body are likewise unstated, though we do receive some suggestion through Yahweh's anger and his passion for Israel, mapped, through the relations of metaphor, onto Hosea as well. There is more to the male body in Hosea 1-3, however, than a fear of sex and raisin cakes. The representation of the feminine body and the land bespeak a larger discourse of anxiety toward the *male* body. The female body is the site upon which this anxiety is expressed and negotiated. This anxious discourse, moreover, coalesces around two themes: fertility and openness.

#### **Masculinity and the Anxiety over Fertility**

Exerting control over female fertility is recurrent concern in the Hebrew prophets, including the book of Hosea. The opening chapters of Hosea are plagued by anxiety over sex, over generativity, and over paternity. This anxiety, while counter to normative biblical masculinity, becomes a key component of prophetic masculinity as it is represented in the Hebrew prophetic literature. In Hosea 2, Yahweh's repeated protestations that he is the source of *the grain, the wine, and the olive oil* (synecdoche for natural fertility *in toto*) camouflage a deep anxiety over who, really, deserves the credit. Stone reads the scene as an account of masculine rivalry between Yahweh and Ba'al, as discussed above;<sup>82</sup> I have suggested a fear of inadequacy vis-à-vis the feminine as well. This is not a fear of castration or a representation of woman as lack, but rather a gnawing worry that the masculine is only a supplement and that fertility – of land, of women's bodies – can occur without men or particular male deities alike. In an ancient world in which Yahweh's role in human and earthly fertility alike is a given, the idea that the land (and, through analogy, the female body) produces without divine involvement or intervention is greatly destabilizing.

In addition, because of the strong marital framing of Yahweh's relationship with Israel, this fertility challenges not simply the general understanding of Yahweh's role, but specific cultural ideas of masculinity. Yahweh has become, contrary to the hegemonic masculine ideals of his time, a husband who cannot claim unchallenged paternity and ownership over what his wife's body produces. *She does not know that I gave her the grain and the new wine and the oil* is an anxiety of recognition that conceals a second, more troubling anxiety of responsibility and paternity – perhaps she does know, and knows that Yahweh did not, indeed, give her these things. This anxiety itself can be read in two directions – either Yahweh has lost control over his wife to a male rival, Ba'al, or the male role that Yahweh occupies is supplemental, and the land/the woman has produced without male involvement.<sup>83</sup>

This anxiety over fertility and family is not limited, of course, to Hosea. In the book of Genesis, for example, Yahweh's role in reproduction is repeatedly thematized in the stories of

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<sup>82</sup> Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts*.

<sup>83</sup> Page Du Bois discusses the anxiety of the parthenogenic feminine land in *Sowing the Body*.

the matriarchs. Yahweh opens and closes the womb. The text insists that fertility – of the body, of the land – depends wholly on Yahweh. But while these stories work to curtail any notion of parthenogenesis or fertility without Yahweh’s presence, a curious side effect is their consequence for the human father. If reproduction is a collaboration between mother and Yahweh, then what room for a human father? Eve, upon bearing her first child, names him Cain (קַיִן), saying *I have gained (קָנִיתִי) a child with the help of Yahweh*. In Hosea, the same risk of the supplemental male and the unnecessary male body occurs even more clearly, and Yahweh himself cannot fully escape it. Yahweh’s characterization in Hos. 2 breaks with the representation in Genesis, where his control over fertility is secure. There, Yahweh controls the opening and closing of the womb; in Hosea, Yahweh’s angst is acted out on the female body that cannot be fully controlled. In the marriage scenes of Hosea, masculinity is thus complicated, incompletely articulated, and vexed. The female body becomes a scene for negotiating this anxiety, and the anxiety over fertility in particular.

This concern over the sources of fertility appears not just in Yahweh’s tortured romance with Israel, but in the account of Hosea’s marriage as well. Hosea’s children offer a good example of this anxiety over fertility in the text, as well as its destabilizing consequences for prophetic masculinity. Marrying a woman without maintaining exclusive control over her sexual access, as Hosea does, is a failure of hegemonic masculinity. Haddox writes, “In Hosea’s female imagery, the presence of children vouches for the virility of the husband, but the possibility that they are not his threatens this element of his masculinity.”<sup>84</sup> From the beginning of the book, Hosea acts outside of the expectations of normative biblical masculinity. Whether his transgression of the expectations of masculinity is intentional or unwilling, the end result is the same: a move outside the ordinary bounds of biblical masculinity. Nor do Hosea’s children with Gomer alleviate this emasculation. Hosea’s family situation is unstable and bordering on culturally illegible. Hosea has two sons and a daughter, but the difficult names he chooses for them, especially Not-My-People, estrange him from the role of father. The assumed promiscuity of their mother also calls into question their parentage, further destabilizing Hosea’s role as patriarch and provider.

It is also possible to read Hosea’s actions in fathering children with Gomer as part of an deliberate challenge to hegemonic biblical masculinity. In this way, Hosea’s actions go further than Yahweh’s in chapter 2 to destabilize masculine performance. Stone writes,

Hosea’s culturally ascribed manhood—and, to the extent that Hosea symbolizes Yhwh, Yhwh’s culturally ascribed manhood—may paradoxically be *surrendered* from the start by virtue of Hosea’s informed decision to marry a woman whose (supposed) ‘promiscuous’ or ‘whoring’ character is already known. With that decision, Hosea/Yhwh actually transgresses in advance, or at least opens the door knowingly for a transgression of, the cultural protocols of masculinity.<sup>85</sup>

Reading Hosea’s decision to father children whose paternity must be challenged as deliberate has several consequences. It forecloses the suggestions of fertile female parthenogenesis that Israel’s non-Yahwistic fecundity perhaps opens. Any possibility of autonomous feminine agency and bodily productivity is suppressed; woman is again inscribed as a category to think with.

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<sup>84</sup> Haddox, “(E)Masculinity in Hosea’s Political Rhetoric,” 187.

<sup>85</sup> Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts*, 127.

However, this *thinking with* becomes as well a mode of critique if we read Hosea's marriage to Gomer as staging a critical response to cultural norms of masculinity.

Hosea's actions complicate his masculine performance. In the opening chapters of Hosea, masculinity is characterized by anxiety over fertility – both the desire to control the fertility of others (women's bodies, the land) and the repeated failure of such control. This anxious masculinity appears in the brief biographical accounts in Hosea 1 and 3 (indeed, a reluctance on the part of the text to elaborate on Hosea's fraught experiences with his wife's sexuality and fertility may well be the reason for the chapters' brevity). It appears as well in the poetic account of Yahweh's marriage in chapter 2. Yahweh, whose experiences with Israel are the ostensible model for Hosea's marriage to Gomer, expresses repeated uneasiness over the uncontrolled fecundity of the land and of his wife's sexual appetites. The loosening of masculine control over the female body/land – and over the opening of the body/land in the text in particular – generates anxiety, particularly concerning the performance of hegemonic masculinity. And yet it also suggests a possible opening in the text, a space of deliberate alternate masculine performance that challenges the norms of biblical masculinity. Hosea is perhaps modeling another way to be a prophet and a man. He demonstrates a prophetic masculinity that is not based upon feats of strength, bodily prowess, or even the successful communication of a message. Instead, Hosea is open, acted-upon, and ultimately transformed by prophecy.

### **Masculine Anxiety and the Open Body**

Fertility is not the only source of anxiety in the negotiation of male embodiment in Hosea. Instead, in Hosea 1-3, the problem of fertility – of the land, of the body, of the people – is linked in particular to a concern over the open body. The openness of the female bodies of Israel and Gomer becomes another motivating problem in the text. Opening the body also functions as a form of punishment, as when Israel is exposed to her lovers and torn by thorns. These openings of the female body, spectacularly displayed at the center of the text, bespeak an anxious interest in a more open masculine subjectivity, one that moves beyond hegemonic biblical masculinity. For the male subjects in Hosea 1-3, as for the female bodies, the central problematic becomes one of openness.

The opened and open body is essential to the process of “thinking with” women in Hosea 1-3, and in particular of thinking *masculinity* with women. Understanding Hosea's embodiment requires Gomer's body, and Israel's. This argument for thinking with the afflicted female body finds its best articulation not in scholarship on Hosea, but rather in the scholarship of Carol Clover, and especially in her study of gender in the horror film, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*.<sup>86</sup> Insisting that “the standard critique of horror as straightforward sadistic misogyny itself needs not only a critical but a political interrogation,” Clover takes up the construction of sex, gender, and the body in the contemporary horror film, arguing that to dismiss such films as lowbrow or sadistic is to ignore their complex negotiations of gender.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Of Clover's work on the horror film, her treatment of gender in the slasher film, “Her Body, Himself” is best known, and has even made inroads in biblical studies. See Haddox, “(E)Masculinity in Hosea's Political Rhetoric,” 187.

<sup>87</sup> Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1993), 20.

Of particular help in thinking through masculinity and openness in the Hebrew prophets is Clover's reading of the possession film.<sup>88</sup> The possession film is a genre ostensibly centered on a female body, which is possessed by the devil, an evil spirit, or other nefarious forces.<sup>89</sup> The action of the film centers on the attempts, usually by a male protagonist or protagonists, to vanquish evil and to close the openness of the female body. This openness of the female body is, as Clover notes, an idea with a lengthy history; women have long been represented as threateningly "open," both physically and psychically. In Hosea 1-3, as in the occult possession films that Clover describes, the female body is repeatedly an object of intense scrutiny, as well as much violence. Israel's body is too fertile, too sexual, too active, not limited to Yahweh, but open, as well, to the Ba'als. Gomer's body is likewise too sexual, too fertile, too *open*. As an אִשָּׁת זְנוּנִים, her body is opened sexually. There is also an openness on the level of signification, both the significance of Hosea's marital choice and the meaning of the Hebrew phrase used to describe his bride.

While Hosea's wife receives only relatively mild verbal rebuke, Israel is exposed, revealed, hedged up, silenced, and re-seduced,<sup>90</sup> all in the service of restoring Yahweh's authority. The female bodies, both of Gomer and of Israel, are "opened up." The openness of Israel is imagined both bodily and on the level of the land. And Hosea, as a member of the body of Israel, is implicated in this openness. If Israel is problematically "open," then this openness extends to her constituent parts, including a man named Hosea who Yahweh calls as his prophet. The promiscuous openness of Israel to the Ba'als is likewise represented as threatening in Hos. 2. Yahweh's threat to *strip her naked, and expose her like the day she was born* (Hos 2:5) represents a forcible opening of the body to reveal the dangers that have already entered within it.<sup>91</sup> This opening and exorcising of Israel's body is echoed in Hos. 2:19, when Yahweh promises *I will remove the names of the Ba'als from her mouth, and they will no longer be remembered by their names*. Yahweh must regulate the interior of Israel's mouth and body, an interior already opened to the Ba'als. At least as it relates to the female body, this procedure is not unlike the requisite exorcism scene in the possession films. The openness of the female body becomes a ground for working out masculine anxiety.

The physically opened female body gives material form to the otherwise unspeakable problem of an "open" masculinity. In Hosea, as we have seen, the male prophetic body appears only briefly and in fragments, while the female body becomes the spectacular, sensational centerpiece of the text. However, this female body is not simply a distraction from or compensation for the missing male body. Instead, in the prophet as in the possession film, the opened female body suggests as well the "opening" of the male character. In the possession film, the opening of the masculine is the dominant plot. This masculine opening takes a number of forms – an increased self-awareness, a loosening of the grip on hegemonic masculinity, an acceptance of alternate world orientations. The opening of the female body serves as the visible sign of a narrative of opening the male character. Clover writes,

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 67, 65–66.

<sup>89</sup> For this genre, *The Exorcist* and *Witchboard* are two classic examples. See further Ibid., 65–113.

<sup>90</sup> On the verb of פתח, see further note 98 in my chapter 3, below.

<sup>91</sup> This is not unlike Father Karras and Father Merrin's exorcism of Regan in *The Exorcist* or Jim and Brandon's attempts to save the possessed Linda in *Witchboard*. See Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 105.

I would suggest that the remapping of the masculine in the occult film entails a kind of territorial displacement in the world of gender. I am suggesting, in other words, that the expulsion of the bad masculine—machismo—goes hand in glove with the expansion of the good masculine, the redefined or the ‘new man’: that this expansion encroaches on and appropriates characteristics traditionally located in the feminine, and that the boundaries of the feminine are correspondingly displaced into territories of distaff excess. Crudely put, for a space to be created in which men can weep without being labeled feminine, women must be relocated to a space where they will be made to wail uncontrollably; for me to be able to relinquish emotional rigidity, control, women must be relocated to a space in which they will undergo a flamboyant psychotic break, and so on.<sup>92</sup>

The possession film is not about spectacular, tortured, opened female bodies, but rather about the work of crafting a more “open” masculinity. Negotiating the possibility of alternate masculinity requires a radical displacement of femininity. This displacement, moreover, relies on the excessive opening of the female body, first by the evil that possesses her, then by the man or men who seek to “cure” her. Like the creation of the world within the splayed body of the murdered primal mother Tiamat in the *Enuma Elish* – and like the violently opened woman/land Israel – new forms of masculinity depend upon broken open women.<sup>93</sup>

A similar problem of male openness – and male prophetic openness in particular – is pervasive in Hosea, though it lacks the final resolution that the ending of the possession film brings. Hosea 1-3 is filled with anxieties over openness. While the meaning of Gomer’s description as an אִשָּׁה זְנוּנִים is never clarified in the text, the basic problem is an over-openness of her body, which is sexually accessible to others. The raisin cakes of Hosea 3 are likewise condemned because they suggest the opening of the body through their association with erotic and cultic practice.<sup>94</sup> Hosea’s body is opened, implicitly, through both the consumption of food and the participation in sexual activity; he is also made open to the divine word, the coming of which marks the beginning of his prophetic calling. These openings, however, are mostly implied in the text; in this they differ from the forced open of Israel’s body, for example, which is explicit in Hosea 2. Yahweh’s body is also largely absent from the text, an absence which the use of the first person narrative voice in Hos. 2 tacitly supports.<sup>95</sup> However, the present body of Gomer provides a site in the text to “think with,” and to think upon the problem of prophetic openness in particular.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> In the Akkadian creation myth *Enuma Elish*, the god Mark (patron god of Babylon) defeats his mother, Tiamat, in battle and then creates the world from the remains of her body.

<sup>94</sup> In the Song of Songs, raisin cakes are a food of sexual pleasure, linked to a powerful openness of the body to the body of another. Similarly, when David gives raisin cakes to the Israelites upon the arrival of the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem, he sends them home to eat them – the raisin cake, it seems, is too powerful to be eaten in public, perhaps because of its aphrodisiacal properties (2 Sam. 6). The moment is already too close to a dangerous bodily openness. David, dancing and singing, exposes himself before the people, breaking with the acceptable cultural performance of kingship and masculinity. The criticism of David’s actions is placed in the mouth of Michal, perhaps to neutralize some of the condemnation.

<sup>95</sup> Compare Eilberg-Schwartz’s analysis of first-person speeches by Yahweh in Ezekiel. Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*, chapter 5.

In relation to Hosea, bodily openness plays out in several ways. On the narrative level of the text, Gomer, the *wife of whoredom*, is opened, and this openness, in turn, opens Hosea to shame. As a prophet, Hosea is commanded to open himself to Israel, to pass on the words the Yahweh speaks to him. And yet Hosea himself is also opened. He is opened when Israel – the woman, the land – is opened, because Hosea himself is a part of the collective body of Israel. He is likewise opened by the demands of prophecy. No longer able to act as an ordinary man, Hosea is opened to the word of Yahweh, which comes to him, fills him, and compels his actions. Like Israel, Yahweh’s wife, Hosea is forced to speak and to act in a certain way, compelled by his relationship to Yahweh. But while this openness places the female body at the forefront of the text, Hosea’s own body remains unspoken. We know that the prophet takes a wife and fathers children, and that, in chapter 3, he refrains from sexual activity. All that we have of his male body is a suggestion of his genitals. Openness is negotiated in the text without reference to the opened male body. But this negotiation is only possible because the female body is so spectacularly opened and exposed in the text. Gomer provides what Clover terms a “palpable field” to negotiate masculinity.<sup>96</sup> That Gomer, insofar as she stands in for the land of Israel, is herself a “field” (in both senses of the term) suggests the close association of the female body and the land, the cultural problem of the female body, and the instability of the feminine Israel as a figure to “think with.”

Of course, taking the female body/land as a “palpable field” for negotiating masculinity does little good for the (specular) feminine. Recall Clover: “Crudely put, for a space to be created in which men can weep without being labeled feminine, women must be relocated to a space where they will be made to wail uncontrollably; for me to be able to relinquish emotional rigidity, control, women must be relocated to a space in which they will undergo a flamboyant psychotic break.”<sup>97</sup> Translated to biblical terms, for a space to be created in which Hosea can experience openness and non-normative biblical masculinity – in Stone’s words, “a transgression of the cultural protocols of masculinity”<sup>98</sup> – Gomer must be relocated to a space of whoredom, shame, and cultural exile. For Yahweh to set aside a hypermasculine rivalry with the Ba’als, Israel must undergo excessive physical suffering, psychological fragmentation, and an eventual merging into one with the land that holds Jezebel’s blood.<sup>99</sup> The Book of Hosea uses the female body not just to work through anxieties about the land and the sources of its prosperous productivity (the anxiety of fertility discussed above), but also to negotiate the specific anxiety of prophecy as a forced opening of the male prophetic subject to Yahweh. As Clover writes, “the standard scheme puts, or at least seems to put, the female body on the line only in order to put the male psyche on the line.”<sup>100</sup> In Hosea, the text opens and exposes the female body in order to explore the opening and exposure to Yahweh of the male prophetic psyche.

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<sup>96</sup> Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 88. In *The Exorcist*, for example, while Regan’s body is spectacularly prominent – she thrashes, screams, speaks with a deep voice, has the words “help me” appear on her stomach – the narrative of personal transformation is that of Father Karras, the priest, whose story is the central one, and whose psyche is “on the line.” As Clover writes, “For all its spectacle value, Regan’s story is finally significant only insofar as it affects the lives of others, above all the tormented spiritual life of Karras” (86). Karras’ crisis of faith, combined with his anxieties over closeness to other men, is the central crisis.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>98</sup> Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts*, 127.

<sup>99</sup> Jezebel was murdered at Jezreel by Jehu (2 Kings 9:30-37).

<sup>100</sup> Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 105.



The possession films that Clover discusses, for all the extravagant physicalized anguish of their heroines, end with the therapeutic or redemptive opening of their *male* characters. The central story is a male story, as the title of another of Clover's chapters, "Her Body, Himself," makes clear.<sup>101</sup> In the marriage texts of Hosea 1-3, there are similar gestures toward a redemptive conclusion, particularly in Yahweh's promises to speak gently to Israel and to win back her love in the second half of chapter 2. The coda of Hosea's domestic narrative (Hos. 2:1-3) likewise promises restoration for Israel. 2:1 reads, *The number of the children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured and cannot be counted. And instead of saying, 'You are not my people,' it will be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'* A therapeutic renaming of Hosea's children follows. Even chapter 3 ends with a promise of Davidic restoration.<sup>102</sup>

Notably, each of these moments of restoration/redemption focuses on the feminine and its associated figures: Gomer, Israel, or their children. A transformed self-understanding by either Yahweh or Hosea is nowhere in evidence. (If anything, if we take Yahweh's instructions in Hos. 3:1 to read *Go again, love a woman who is loved by another and who commits adultery*, then Hosea emphatically does *not* learn or evolve as a character. Instead, we have displacement and disavowal, indicating anxiety over an open masculinity that cannot easily be dispersed or filled. Even the promises of restoration at the end of the marriage texts do not promise a whole or restored prophetic body, but rather a multiplication of prophetic descendants.

### **Prophecy, Openness, and the Incoherence of Prophetic Masculinity**

Beyond a general anxiety over open masculinity, Hosea demonstrates a specific anxiety over the ways prophecy opens the male body and subject to Yahweh. This second anxiety, the anxiety of prophecy, concerns the opening of the prophet to Yahweh. While it is not strictly or even necessarily sexual, the openness that prophecy demands nevertheless calls into question the organization of masculinity for the prophet. Imagining the opened male prophetic body ushers in productive new possibilities of masculine subjectivity – possibilities that, however, ultimately remain not fully actualized in the texts.

The most dramatic opening of the prophetic body is represented in physical terms in the book of Ezekiel, where the prophet swallows a scroll covered in divine words (a scene I will discuss in great detail in the next chapter). In many of the other prophetic books, including Hosea, the word of God simply *comes* to a prophet. And yet this simple opening verse – *The word of Yahweh, which came to Hosea, son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel* – contains not just a complicated historical positioning but also a charged relationship between the principal actors, Hosea and Yahweh. In the Hebrew דְּבַר־יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֵלַיִהוּשֶׁע בֶּן־בְּעֵרִי (*the word of Yahweh which was (הָיָה) to Hosea ben Beeri*), the only verb is הָיָה, the past tense form of the root הָיָה, *be* – hardly a verb upon which to hang a strong argument for the word coming and materially entering the body. But the openness of prophecy is less a physical opening (with the exception of Ezekiel) than an opening of the masculine subject as subject. Hosea, as we have seen, is opened to shame through the opened body of Gomer, is opened through his membership in the promiscuously open body of Israel. This openness is necessary for him to serve as a conduit and messenger for the divine word.

<sup>101</sup> The first chapter in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, "Her Body, Himself" is a study of the slasher film.

<sup>102</sup> Hos. 2:1-3 and 3:5 are widely accepted to be late additions to the original text.

Prophecy *opens* by making the prophet into a medium, an open conduit between God and people. It is for this reason – this feminine and feminizing openness, which Clover also discusses<sup>103</sup> – that women are often thought to make better oracles, mediums, and even prophets.<sup>104</sup> While the Hebrew Bible lacks (or resists) this tradition of female prophecy,<sup>105</sup> it does share in the association of open bodies with femininity. The result *appears* to be a feminizing of the prophetic position – but to speak more precisely, this is not a feminization, but rather a displacement of the prophet from normative masculinity. The prophet experiences a different sort of masculinity (feminine experience remains, as discussed above, beyond the reach of the text). Prophecy demands an openness of the prophetic subject. But because male openness is paradoxical and largely unthinkable under the order of hegemonic biblical masculinity, it is displaced to the female body, which provides an alternate ground to think through and theorize prophetic openness and its consequences for prophetic masculinity.

In Hosea 1-3, the bodily anxiety over prophecy translates as well into a more general anxiety over signs. The crisis of masculinity in Hosea doubles as a crisis of meanings. This is not simply because of a cultural association of masculinity with order, legibility, and meaning,<sup>106</sup> but because the prophet's openness is essential to his prophetic work.<sup>107</sup> The openness of the message – what distinguishes prophecy from apocalyptic, according to Buber<sup>108</sup> – depends upon the openness of the prophetic body. Put another way, for the prophet to speak as man of God, he must be symbolically unmanned by being opened to Yahweh.<sup>109</sup> And yet this opening also makes communication difficult, if not impossible. Hosea gives his children symbolic names, and yet these names are a geographical riddle and two outright rejections of his intended audience. Similarly, his right, as father, to name the children is called into question by his marriage to a promiscuous (or worse) woman. That he was commanded to marry this woman by Yahweh is true, but this does not really bolster his claims of fatherhood. The unstable family relations and the fragile social community destabilize the claims of meaning and kinship alike.

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<sup>103</sup> Clover describes Regan (from *The Exorcist*) and Linda (from *Witchboard*) as part of “a long line of female portals, from the equally gullible Eve through the professional portals—sibyls and prophetesses—of classical and medieval times to the majority of psychic and New Age channelers of our own day.” Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 71.

<sup>104</sup> Compare, for example, Phyllis Mack's discussion of the metaphor of the woman as vessel in seventeenth-century religious communities in England. Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 23. See also

<sup>105</sup> See my discussion in greater detail in the introduction to this dissertation.

<sup>106</sup> See further my chapter 3, “Jeremiah and the Gender of Prophetic Sound.”

<sup>107</sup> Cook writes of the prophet, “He is open to God's message; he utters it to the people, the people are open to the threat or the promise, the destruction or salvation, at God's hands. The message is always about this, and its signature is its own openness to possibilities and actualities, to fact and apocalyptic definition.” Albert Spaulding Cook, *The Burden of Prophecy: Poetic Utterance in the Prophets of the Old Testament* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 25.

<sup>108</sup> Martin Buber, “Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour,” in *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies*, ed. Nahum Norbert Glatzer (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 172–187. On prophecy and apocalyptic, see further my chapter 4, below, as well as Wilson, “From Prophecy to Apocalyptic”; Paul D. Hanson, “Old Testament Apocalyptic Reexamined,” *Interpretation* 25, no. 4 (1971): 454–479.

<sup>109</sup> For another perspective on unmanning, see my discussion of Daniel Paul Schreber in “Voluptuous, Tortured, and Unmanned: Ezekiel and Daniel Paul Schreber,” forthcoming in *The Bible and Posthumanism*, ed. Jennifer Koosed.

Openness, meanwhile, remains an open question, for signs and for bodies. At points, the prophet seems to be figured as open; at other moments, this openness is displaced onto the female body and a link between female form and masculine subject is vehemently denied. Hosea, Yahweh's stand-in, is opened *to* Yahweh, and yet Yahweh, the divine husband, is never opened to another. On the level of the divine figure, at least, it seems that traditional, hegemonic biblical masculinity maintains its grip. In the case of Hosea, the status of masculinity is more complex. The prophet seems to occupy multiple positions simultaneously: hegemonic patriarchal masculinity (*vis-à-vis* Gomer), a subversive rejection of social gender norms (Stone), an opening-up to the will of Yahweh, and an unstable position in relation to the active, opening female other of both Gomer and Israel. While Yahweh is chiefly threatened by his masculine rivals and by the promiscuous fertility of the feminine land and body, Hosea represents a more complicated, contradictory masculine role.

Importantly, the contradictions in Hosea's experience of masculinity are *not* resolved in the text. If Hosea's actions seem incongruous or inconsistent, then this is simply a reflection of his confused, pluriform position *vis-à-vis* hegemonic biblical masculinity. Hosea 1-3, for all the attention it directs to gender, sex, and the body, does not offer a coherent, singular theory of prophetic masculinity. The male body acts, but is also acted upon; the female body is acted upon, but also acts. In Hosea 1-3, the male prophetic body is not yet theorized or fixed in its meaning. Instead of a single, complete representation, the text presents tendencies, moments, inconsistencies. The open body is an alternative to normative biblical masculinity, but at this point, it remains more possibility than full-fledged alternative. And yet this ambivalence and ambiguity also leaves more interpretive space in the text, without calcifying around a single, "alternate" masculine subject position.

## Conclusions

In Hosea 1-3, the female bodies of Gomer and Israel are fascinating, frightening, infuriating, and seductive. And yet the representations of the female body do not really tell us about "the feminine" as represented in Hosea at all, but rather at once conceal and reveal the negotiation of masculinity and the male prophetic body in the text. In the marriage texts of Hosea 1-3, the critical relationship is not the analogical one between the characters (Yahweh and Israel, Hosea and Gomer), but rather the metaphorical fluidity between the female body and the land. This metaphorical complex – *the woman's body as land*, but also *the land as the woman's body* – provides a location in the text to work through the problematics of fertility, bodily openness, and prophetic identity. In the course of Yahweh's account of his straying wife Israel, the reinscription of the more specific metaphor *woman's body as field and wilderness* into *woman's body as furrow and cultivable agricultural space* asserts masculine control over fertility, over and against any notion of generative or even parthenogenetic female body or feminized land. The assertion of control indicates, as well, an anxiety, a lingering fear that perhaps the masculine is not necessary but rather supplemental, both to controlling the land and to controlling the female body.

The anxiety over fertility is only the first masculine anxiety that the text, unable or unwilling to confront such questions directly, approaches circuitously through the representation of the feminine. The repeated images of the open female body in Hosea 1-3 indicate an anxiety over the open masculine subject. The ideal biblical male body is whole, complete unto itself, non-passive, and unopened to the other. At the same time, religious subjectivity – and prophecy

in particular – demands the opening of the male body to Yahweh. The opened female bodies of Israel and, to a lesser degree, Gomer, represent a first working-through of this paradox of biblical masculinity. While an open masculinity is never fully embraced by the text of Hosea, neither is the possibility foreclosed. Instead, the text preserves a moment of instability and openness that is also a moment of promise. Clover writes of her experiences researching *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, “watching horror brings insight that “once registered, never lets you see any movie ‘straight’ again.”<sup>110</sup> Reading the open body in Hosea 1-3 has a similar effect on reading Hosea, and indeed the other prophetic texts: we can never see prophetic masculinity ‘straight’ again.

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<sup>110</sup> Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 20.

## Chapter 2

### THE PROPHET AS HUNGER ARTIST: PAIN, EMBODIMENT, AND FRACTURED MASCULINITY IN EZEKIEL 1-5<sup>1</sup>

Many of the most outstanding moments of embodiment in the Hebrew prophets occur in the book of Ezekiel. It is in Ezekiel that the body of the feminized Israel is most graphically sexualized and then violated: *You grew up and became tall and reached womanhood<sup>2</sup>; your breasts were formed and your hair had grown, yet you were naked and bare* (16:7). It is in Ezekiel that the body of God most clearly appears in human form (1:26-28).<sup>3</sup> And it is in Ezekiel that the body of the prophet himself figures most prominently. A frequent command from Yahweh, for example, is for the prophet to clap his hands and stomp his feet,<sup>4</sup> a imperative intimately and immediately linking bodily action and the prophetic act. But nowhere is the body more present than in the first five chapters of the book, during which Ezekiel sees Yahweh and is called as a prophet. His first prophecies are not delivered as words at all, but rather through a series of bizarre actions. Known commonly as the “sign acts” or “action prophecies,” these actions begin with the prophet’s dumbness and physical confinement and include the enacting of a ritual siege, the consumption of siege rations, and the cutting, burning, and scattering of the prophet’s hair and beard.

This chapter offers a study of the body of the prophet as it appears in the book of Ezekiel, and in particular, the body as it appears in a section of the book of Ezekiel known as the “sign acts.” These sign acts, which are found in chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Ezekiel, describe the prophet’s first actions upon receiving his prophetic call. He builds a tiny model of the city of Jerusalem and then acts out a siege against it, even raising his arm to prophesy against it (Ezek. 4:1-3, 7). He lies on his side, bound with cords, for 430 days (4:4-6). He mixes together a disgusting assortment of foods and then cooks bread, using excrement as fuel (4:9-15). He cuts off his hair and beard with a sword and burns them (5:1-4).

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this argument were presented at UC Berkeley as an Arts Research Center fellow and at the Religion and Sexuality Research Seminar at Emory University, both in 2010. I am grateful for the valuable feedback from both groups.

<sup>2</sup> For example 16:7, *You grew up and became tall and reached womanhood; your breasts were formed and your hair had grown, yet you were naked and bare*. On *full womanhood*: The Masoretic text (henceforth MT) reads *וַתָּבֵרְךְ בְּצִדְיָי וַתָּבֵרְךְ בְּצִדְיָי* and *came with the highest adornment*, a euphemism for puberty. The Septuagint (henceforth G) has *καὶ εἰσηλθεις εἰς πόλεις πόλεων*. See Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 224n7c.

<sup>3</sup> God’s body also appears in Exodus, when Moses sees God’s back (Ex. 33:20-23) and Moses and the seventy elders picnic at God’s feet (Exod. 24:9-11), and in the book of Daniel (Dan. 7:9-14). Specific body parts, such as the hand of God (ambiguously positioned between the metaphorical and the material) also sometimes appear.

<sup>4</sup> For example, Ezek. 6:11, *Clap your hands and stamp your foot, and say, Alas for all the abominations of the house of Israel!*

What to make of Ezekiel? The prophet's actions have been explained in a number of ways, from street performance to theater of the absurd to schizophrenia.<sup>5</sup> However, these explanations fail to account for the degree of suffering that the sign acts create for Ezekiel's body, as well as their seemingly total lack of success. The book of Ezekiel gives no suggestion that the sign acts succeed in communicating anything to the Israelites; and the intended message is difficult to separate from the sense of fascinated revulsion we feel in reading about Ezekiel's body. Instead, the sign acts, like the theophany and call narrative that precede them, describe a crisis of embodiment and a crisis of masculinity.

As I have already suggested in the dissertation's introduction, the Hebrew Bible sets forth strict categories of gender, regulating both the forms bodies take and the actions that male and female subjects undertake. But Ezekiel, called as a prophet, fails at biblical masculinity, at least in its dominant and normative forms. He cannot speak, cannot act with strength and vigor, cannot do anything except lie in the dust and perform a pantomime of prophecy. His body, too, fails to conform to the requirements of masculine embodiment. Ezekiel's body is not strong or beautiful or impenetrable. Instead, his body is a body defined by pain, by weakness, by abjection. Above all, the prophetic body in Ezekiel is marked by its openness – an openness to penetration by the divine word that pushes the prophet outside the boundaries of normative biblical masculinity. For Ezekiel, prophecy forces the prophet outside the ordinary bounds of biblical masculinity, into a different experience of what it means to be a prophet, a body, and a man.

## I. EZEKIEL

### An Introduction to Ezekiel

The Book of Ezekiel is a book fraught with contrasts. The book begins with the prophet Ezekiel ben Buzi, a priest or the son of a priest,<sup>6</sup> living among the exiled Israelite elite in Babylon. The opening lines of the book seem, at least, to locate both text and speaker in a particular historical moment:

*<sup>1</sup>In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw divine visions. <sup>2</sup>On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), <sup>3</sup>the word of Yahweh came to Ezekiel ben Buzi, the priest, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of Yahweh was on him<sup>7</sup> there.* (Ezek. 1:1-3)

The theophany and early acts of prophecy that form the beginning of the book are presented as occurring among the exilic community in Babylon before the final fall of Jerusalem (in 586 BCE). Whether the dates and the Babylonian provenance of the book are historical truth or a neat literary invention is a legitimate and open question (as is the book's authorship of the book by

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<sup>5</sup> Kelvin Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 1st ed., Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, Ky: J. Knox Press, 1990), 34; Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*. See further my discussion, below.

<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew (like the English phrase "Ezekiel, the son of Buzi, the priest") is ambiguous with respect to whether father or son is the priest.

<sup>7</sup> Reading with the Masoretic text; the Greek has *upon me*, a harmonization of the first and third persons.

one “Ezekiel”); scholars have debated the text’s claims on all three issues. Despite such challenges, the two most important twentieth century Ezekiel commentators, Walther Zimmerli and Moshe Greenberg, both treat the dates, the authorship, and the Babylonian location of the prophet as generally reliable (though they agree on little else<sup>8</sup>).

Proving the historicity of an ancient figure, however, is a dicey task, and I am far less convinced than either Zimmerli or Greenberg that it is possible to recover a historical individual behind the text. Furthermore, I do not think that such a project really speaks to the book of Ezekiel as a text, or to the prophet as a figure within it. Instead, as in the previous chapters, my approach to the text will be literary, dealing mostly with the received text in its final Masoretic form.<sup>9</sup> In this vein, I am less interested in reconstructing the historical personage of “Ezekiel” than in understanding the workings of the book called Ezekiel as a literary text, and in particular in the play of masculinity, embodiment, and prophecy.

As a literary text, the book of Ezekiel brings together visions, oracles of warning, accounts of wordless performances, traditional prophetic poetry, and exhaustively detailed architectural plans for the future Temple. The text switches between first and third person, with the first person passages frequently blurring the voice of the prophet with the voice of Yahweh. At one point, Ezekiel complains about his sweet voice, which prevents him from being taken seriously as a prophet (Ezek. 33:32). At several others, he is struck dumb and does not speak at all (3:15, 3:26; Ezekiel is explicitly released from dumbness in 24:25-27 and 33:21-22). Of the priest turned prophet, Hermann Gunkel writes, “Ezekiel is without pity, harsh, somber, even cruel, embittered by the struggle, and severe even in his prophecies of deliverance... Ezekiel, full of untamed ferocity, is more baroque than great.”<sup>10</sup> Harold Fisch praises the poetic richness of the prophet’s voice, even as he refuses the role of poet.<sup>11</sup> Ellen Davis, meanwhile, argues that

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<sup>8</sup> Where Zimmerli and Greenberg – and the rival interpretive modes that their work represents – diverge is the issue of textual composition. Zimmerli offers an accretionary model of Ezekiel: a core of originally oral sayings, attributable to the historical prophet, are expanded on by a series of later writers, editors, and glossators. Much of the work of Zimmerli’s commentary is devoted to carefully peeling back these layers of additions to reveal an original, true core. See Greenberg, for his part, refuses such a dismantling of the text, instead preferring to treat the work as a coherent whole, “the product of art and intelligent design.” Greenberg further claims the Ezekiel the prophet is likewise the author of the work. However, as Paul Joyce points out, accepting a single author (or tightly knit authorial school) does not logically require that this author be the historical Ezekiel. These divergent attitudes toward composition also influence how the two scholars approach the question of textual variants. While Zimmerli makes much use of the Septuagint and other textual versions, Greenberg deliberately sticks to the Masoretic text as much as possible, turning, when necessary, to Rabbinic and later Hebrew traditions more than to the Greek. See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 1; *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st. ed., The Anchor Bible v. 22 (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1983); Paul Joyce, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, Library of Hebrew Bible ; Old Testament Studies 482 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> I will note meaningful variants in the Greek. In emphasizing the received text, I follow Greenberg (against Zimmerli). However, unlike Greenberg, I am not prepared to attribute the text to the historical Ezekiel as author. *Ezekiel 1-20*.

<sup>10</sup> Hermann Gunkel, “The Prophets: Oral and Written,” in *Water for a Thirsty Land: Israelite Literature and Religion*, Fortress Classics in Biblical Studies (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 130.

<sup>11</sup> Fisch, *Poetry with a Purpose : Biblical Poetics and Interpretation*, 44.

Ezekiel's is a "fundamentally literate mind" and that his literary genius is basically written, not oral.<sup>12</sup>

But Ezekiel is not the object of universal critical admiration. As in the case of Hosea, feminist criticism has frequently condemned the "pornoprophetics" of Ezekiel (who is in this respect worse even than Hosea<sup>13</sup>). In a related vein, David J. Halperin describes Ezekiel as consumed by "dread and loathing of female sexuality," but argues that such an attitude is part of a larger psychopathology.<sup>14</sup> Edwin Broome, an important source for Halperin, prefers to keep the literary out of the psychoanalytic and merely diagnoses Ezekiel as a paranoid schizophrenic (and he is neither the first nor the last to do so.)<sup>15</sup> Daniel Smith-Christopher rejects the feminist and psychoanalytic condemnations of the prophets, arguing that Ezekiel's rage, radical misogyny, and bizarre performances are all attributable to the trauma of exile and colonial violence.<sup>16</sup> Other scholars insist that Ezekiel is basically a rational, functional individual, whose excesses are explainable as lively street theater or other strategic actions.<sup>17</sup>

So this is our priest-prophet – a sweet-voiced speaker or a writer a misogynist, a trauma victim, or a traumatized misogynist; a shrewd performer, a historical individual or a complete literary construct. What about his body, the central concern of this dissertation chapter? To address this question, I want to turn to the first five chapters of the book itself.

### **A Brief Survey of Ezekiel's Body in Ezekiel 1-5**

The body of the prophet Ezekiel does not appear immediately or completely in the opening chapters of the book of the Ezekiel. Instead, we become aware of the prophet gradually, partially, through his actions and anti-actions, his perceptions and responses to the world around him. The book begins in a standard enough form, with the prophet's name, his lineage, and his cultic status – we know that Ezekiel is the son of Buzi, that he (or perhaps his father) is a priest, and that he has seen visions. At this opening moment in the text, the prophet is defined only by genealogy and by social position. There is no mention of Ezekiel's body, though its presence is perhaps implied as a perceptual apparatus in the reference to visions (*I saw divine visions*, Ezek. 1:1; *As I looked...*, Ezek. 1:4; *I heard the sound...*, Ezek. 1:24). Beyond the brief framing of the prophet through genealogy and social function, which suggest certain basics about the prophetic body (male sex, adulthood (Num. 1:3), the priestly cultivation of ritual purity, which involves a

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<sup>12</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, Bible and Literature Series v. 21 (Sheffield, England: Almond, 1989), 39.

<sup>13</sup> The comparison of the prophetic texts with pornography first occurs in Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea." On the prophetic pornography argument, see my chapter 1.

<sup>14</sup> Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*, 216. He writes of the prophet, "He was gifted as we are not; and his extraordinary literary genius allowed him to express his pain in images of ghastly luminosity, which, once absorbed, are all but impossible to forget" (5).

<sup>15</sup> Edwin C. Broome, "Ezekiel's Abnormal Personality," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65, no. 3 (1946): 277–292.

<sup>16</sup> See Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), particularly chapter 3, "Listening to Cries from Babylon: On the Exegesis of Suffering in Ezekiel and Lamentations"; Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Ezekiel in Abu Ghraib: Rereading Ezekiel 16:37–39 in the Context of Imperial Conquest," in *Ezekiel's Hierarchical World: Wrestling with a Tiered Reality*, ed. Stephen L. Cook and Corrine Patton, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series no. 31 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> For example, Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*; Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*. I will return to the street theater argument subsequently in this chapter.



procedure for the “care of the self”<sup>18</sup>), we become aware of the prophetic body through three of its features: its eyes, its ears, and its weight. This bodily awareness transpires as Ezekiel describes the appearance of Yahweh (suggesting the prophet’s eyes), hears the divine voice (suggesting the prophet’s ears), and tumbles into the dust (suggesting the prophet’s weight).

Ezekiel’s fall into the dust before Yahweh is at once a sign of respect and a response to the overwhelming presence of the divine. This prophetic tumble, while an unexpected entry into prophecy, does not last for long. Ezekiel cannot remain in the dust where he has fallen, for Yahweh has left the land of Israel – an extraordinary occurrence – to call Ezekiel as his prophet in exile. Ezekiel is to go and speak to the rebellious house of Israel. After Yahweh has issued his call, a scroll covered in words of *lamentation and weal and woe* appears before Ezekiel and the prophet swallows it, finding its taste as *sweet as honey* (Ezek. 3:2). But instead of speaking Yahweh’s prophetic message, Ezekiel is struck dumb by divine command and sits, speechless, for a week. And then finally, Ezekiel begins to prophesy.

This entry into prophecy relies upon the body. Ezekiel does not speak, but rather performs a series of symbolic actions, commonly known as the sign acts.<sup>19</sup> Yahweh’s first command to his performing prophet involves building a model city. He instructs,

*<sup>1</sup>And you, mortal,<sup>20</sup> take a brick and lay it before you and draw a city upon it, Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup>Lay siege to it; build siegeworks against it; set camps against it; place battering rams<sup>21</sup> all around. <sup>3</sup>And you, take an iron griddle and place it as an iron wall between you and the city. Set your face against it and let it be besieged. This is a sign for the house<sup>22</sup> of Israel.* (Ezek. 4:1-3)

During this siege of the model Jerusalem, Ezekiel passes his time lying bound on his side, for first 390 and then 40 days (4:4-8). He also, despite being bound with cords, raises his arm to prophesy against his tiny city 4:7). During this time, he combines wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt to make bread, then eats only twenty shekels worth a day (about eight ounces of food), which he washes down with small amounts of water (Ezek. 4:9-12).<sup>23</sup> This bread,

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<sup>18</sup> See Lev. 1-16 and 27, the Priestly Code. On the relation of such ritual prescriptions to the masculine ideal, see Hentrich, “Masculinity and Disability in the Bible.”

<sup>19</sup> Ezekiel’s actions are referred to as functioning as a “sign” (אֵימָה) in Ezek. 4:3. For this reason, I will generally use “sign act” or “sign acts” to refer to the somatic performances in the text. Cf Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*; Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997). The actions are also known as “symbolic actions” (*Symbolische Handlungen*) following Georg Fohrer, *Die Symbolischen Handlungen Der Propheten*, 2nd ed., *Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten Neuen Testaments Bd.54* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1968)..Other terms include “prophetic acts”/“actes prophétiques” (Samuel Amsler, “Les Prophètes et la Communication par les Actes,” in *Werden und Wirken des Altes Testament: Festschrift für Claus Westermann zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Ranier Albertz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1980), 194–201.); “acts of power” (Thomas W. Overholt, “Seeing Is Believing: The Social Setting of Prophetic Acts of Power,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 7, no. 23 (1982): 3–31.); and “prophetic drama” (David Stacey, *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament* (Westminster, London: Epworth Press, 1990)). See further Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*, 11–13.

<sup>20</sup> *Mortal*: Hebrew מָוֹתָם, *son of man*, Greek *υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου*. This phrase is also used in Revelation (see chapter 4, below).

<sup>21</sup> MT adds *against it*, via assimilation to prior clauses in the verse; LXX and V omit.

<sup>22</sup> Reading with MT, LXX has τοῖς υἱοῖς = לבני.

<sup>23</sup> Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 37. The amount of water consumed is about one and a third pints.

moreover, is not cooked over an ordinary fire but rather over cow dung – Yahweh at first orders Ezekiel to use human excrement, but Ezekiel objects, claiming that this would render him impure. This is the only time the prophet complains, or indeed says anything. Finally, at the beginning of chapter 5, Yahweh instructs,

*<sup>1</sup>And you, mortal, take a sharp sword, use it like a razor, and pass it over your head and your beard, and take a balance and divide it.<sup>24</sup> A third<sup>25</sup> you shall set on fire in the city when the days of the siege are completed, a third you shall take and strike with the sword all around, and a third you shall scatter to the wind and I will unsheathe the sword after them. (Ezek. 5:1-2)*

A few hairs are spared, then gathered again, and then burned (Ezek. 5:3). This is the last of the sign acts, and Ezekiel turns from actions to language for most of the remainder of the book.

These opening five chapters of Ezekiel are often divided into two separate units – the theophany, when Yahweh appears and Ezekiel receives his prophetic calling (1-3:15), and the sign acts, when Ezekiel first acts as a prophet (3:16-5). It is true that the call narrative in Ezekiel 2-3 corresponds to a common biblical genre of call stories,<sup>26</sup> while sign acts are far less common in the other prophetic books,<sup>27</sup> and do not necessarily follow immediately on the call narrative itself. There are also some textual and stylistic differences between the two sections of text. (And from the practical standpoint of anyone writing a commentary, there is certainly enough strange and fascinating material in the theophany or the sign acts alone, without the need to combine the two into a single textual unit).

However, despite these internal differences in the text, there is a strong case to be made for reading the theophany/call narrative and the sign acts together. As Margaret Odell has argued, both sections fit together into a larger and coherent whole and “should be interpreted as an account of a prolonged initiation in which Ezekiel relinquishes certain elements of his identity as a priest to take on the role of prophet.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, and significantly for my own argument, the two units of text also participate together in the construction of the prophet’s body. This construction emerges across the first five chapters, building upon itself. To take but one example, the body lying in the dust in the sign acts (4:4-6) is a body in relation to, and informed by, the

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<sup>24</sup>The cut hair is the implied object.

<sup>25</sup>LXX has τέταρτον, identifying four acts of destruction. LXX also uses τέταρτον in 5.12. The form of 5.2 in G is as follows: *A quarter you will burn in the fire in the midst of the city according to the completion of the days of the siege, and you shall take a quarter, and you shall burn it up in its midst, and a quarter you shall cut up with the sword around it, and a quarter you shall scatter by the wind, and I will unleash the dagger after them.*

<sup>26</sup>N. Habel, “The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77, no. 3 (1965): 297–323.

<sup>27</sup>Following Ezekiel, Jeremiah engages in the greatest number of sign acts, including hiding a loincloth, wearing a yoke, and what Mark Brummit, borrowing from Brecht, terms prophetic “Lehrstücke” or Learning Plays (Mark Brummitt, “Of Broken Pots and Dirty Laundry: The Jeremiah Lehrstücke,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 2, no. 1 (2006). On Jeremiah see as well Friebel, *Jeremiah’s and Ezekiel’s Sign-Acts*.) Hosea’s marriage to Gomer and naming of his children are often read as a sign acts, as are Isaiah’s naming practices. Isaiah also walks around naked for three years.

<sup>28</sup>While Odell’s argument emphasizes Ezekiel’s social role, I am interested in the representation and transformation of the prophet’s body, which figures more prominently in this opening section than anywhere else in the book. Margaret S. Odell, “You Are What You Eat: Ezekiel and the Scroll,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 2 (1998): 229.

body fallen in the dust in the theophany (1:28). In reading this body (not just in the dust, but in its actions as well), I will consider the first five chapters of Ezekiel together, as a cohesive narrative structure. I want to begin, however, not at the beginning, but rather with the sign acts in chapters 4 and 5. It is here that the body is at its most excessive, spectacular, abject. Beginning with the body in the sign acts illuminates the significance of the body that precedes it, the body in the theophany and the call narrative. And so after reading the body in the sign acts (in the section that follows), I will return to the earlier passivity of the body in the text to articulate a unified theory of the prophetic body in the opening five chapters of Ezekiel.

## II. EZEKIEL'S BODY IN THE SIGN ACTS (EZEK. 4-5)

### Ecstasy and Pathology

Ezekiel's actions have long frustrated interpreters of the biblical text. In his *Guide to the Perplexed*, Moses Maimonides argued that the sign acts must be understood metaphorically, because the idea that God would demand such self-humiliation of his prophets is absurd. Maimonides wrote about Ezekiel, "God is too exalted than that He should turn His prophets into a laughingstock and a mockery for fools by ordering them to carry out crazy actions."<sup>29</sup> Since Maimonides, more recent scholars have ignored Maimonides's theological subtlety and have taken the prophet's "crazy actions" as real happenings, signs of either ecstasy or madness. Over a century ago, Bernhard Duhm, Hermann Gunkel, and Johannes Lindblom identified ecstasy as part of prophetic subjectivity; Gustav Hölscher offers the fullest argument for ecstatic acting as a key prophetic practice.<sup>30</sup> More contemporary anthropological and comparative studies have explored the link between ancient Israelite prophecy and "trance" states in other religious traditions.<sup>31</sup>

Taking a less sanguine view of the prophet's peculiarities, other scholars treat Ezekiel's actions not as ecstasy or culturally meaningful religious practice, but rather as signs of psychopathology. This recurrent critical argument, already set forth by August Klostermann in 1877, holds that Ezekiel's actions must reflect some kind of underlying mental illness: the prophet must be sick to act as he does.<sup>32</sup> In the early twentieth century, Edwin Broome, influenced by Freud, argued that what he termed "Ezekiel's abnormal personality" was best explained as schizophrenia. While Broome's argument was harshly criticized and rejected by biblical scholars and psychoanalysts alike, it continues to reappear in the scholarship (David J.

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<sup>29</sup> Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* (2.46), trans. S. Pines. Quoted in Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 22n31.

<sup>30</sup> David L. Petersen, "Ecstasy and Role Enactment," in *"The Place Is Too Small for Us": The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 279.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, no. 3 (1979): 321–337; Simon B. Parker, "Possession Trance and Prophecy in Pre-Exilic Israel," *Vetus Testamentum* 28, no. 3 (July 1, 1978): 271–285; Petersen, "Ecstasy and Role Enactment"; Peter Michaelsen, "Ecstasy and Possession in Ancient Israel," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 3, no. 2 (1989): 28–54.

<sup>32</sup> August Klostermann, *Ezechiel: Ein Beitrag zu besserer Würdigung seiner Person und seiner Schrift*, Theologische Studien und Kritiken 50, 1877. For a concise summary, see Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*, 8–11.

Halperin's *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology*, for example, offers a book-length revival of the argument.<sup>33</sup>)

The ecstasy argument, especially in its anthropologically informed forms, normalizes the very behaviors of Ezekiel that the psychological argument pathologizes. However, while they differ in judgment, both the ecstasy and the psychopathology interpretations share the assumption that the text offers reliable access to a historically real individual and set of practices. The point of contest is the relationship between Ezekiel's actions and the society in which he performs them – not the actions themselves. However, as I have already suggested, reconstructing historical individuals is always a difficult task, and sometimes an impossible one. Adding on a layer of retroactive psychological diagnosis only makes things more difficult, introducing not simply anachronism but also the justly criticized practice of diagnosing fictional characters based on their literary representation.<sup>34</sup> While a reading that treats ecstasy as a religious experience or practice better avoids the trap of anachronism, it, too, has its problems, especially in the case of Ezekiel's sign acts. Though there is some evidence for ecstatic prophecy elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the books of Samuel and Kings, the evidence in Ezekiel is much thinner, though it is possible that *the hand of Yahweh fell upon me* (Ezek. 3:22) indicates some idea of possession.<sup>35</sup> However, there is no other evidence in 1-5 suggesting that possession or trance is an understanding of Ezekiel's actions that is immanent to the text here. Furthermore, reading the Ezekiel as ecstatic here requires a flattening of the literary character of the sign acts that ignores the status of the text as literature. As Ellen Davis has argued, because the book of Ezekiel is originally a written *literary* work, "problematic features [in the text] are best understood as aspects of Ezekiel's effort to create a new literary idiom for prophecy."<sup>36</sup> For Davis, the specific details of the sign acts are less important than their status as literary inventions marking the beginnings of written composition. Such details, however, are of vital interest to my own exploration of Ezekiel's prophetic body. Nevertheless, Davis' argument usefully directs interest in the sign acts away from the question of *Are such acts possible?* and toward the question *Why do the sign acts matter to the book of Ezekiel?*

While ecstasy offers a useful model for other moments in biblical prophecy, applying it to Ezekiel's actions in chapters 4 and 5 requires a flattening of both the literary texture of the book and the lived complexity of the trance state. An appeal to pathology requires the same flattening and forgetting of the literary character of the text. And yet what we have, in Ezek. 1-5, is not a straightforward historical or medical account, but rather a literary composition that describes a series of strange and difficult actions by a strange and difficult prophet. And so from psychological and anthropological readings of this prophet, I want to turn to another explanatory model: performance.

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<sup>33</sup> Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*.

<sup>34</sup> On the mistake of confusing "character-effects" with characters, see, for example Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy," 325.

<sup>36</sup> Davis also argues that the sign acts are literary constructs that do not reflect historical events or actions by the prophet. Her larger project is not an analysis of the sign acts, or of prophetic embodiment, but rather a historical account of the shift from orality to literacy. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll*, 127.

## Performance, Performance Art, and the Prophetic Body

The performance approach shifts the emphasis from the prophet's mental or psychological condition to his performance of particular acts. This emphasis on action generally begins with a basic understanding of the sign acts as performance. The subsequent argument can develop in a number of directions. Kelvin Friebel offers perhaps the least provocative position, describing the sign acts as "rhetorical nonverbal communication."<sup>37</sup> David Petersen describes the actions as "ritual acting," while William Doan and Terry Giles claim that all prophecy (not only the sign acts) assumes a "performance mode of thought" that links prophets (and later scribes) the audience and "allows the two to meet and mutually participate in the experience of the drama."<sup>38</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp dubs Ezekiel 4-5 "Prophetic Theater of the Absurd," but is less interested in absurdity as such than in the sign acts as an extreme form of communication.<sup>39</sup>

In the context of Ezekiel's sign acts, such theories of performance helpfully direct our attention away from modern diagnostic categories and back to the actions of Ezekiel's body. But while the psychopathology reading is too hasty in condemning the strangeness of Ezekiel's actions as signs of illness, the performance reading shifts too far in the opposite direction, assuming that Ezekiel's actions must be intentional and culturally meaningful. Describing the sign acts as performance is useful insofar as this framing of the events emphasizes their break with other normative modes of action in the biblical world, and even with the normal practice of prophecy. There are several problems, however, with the neat turn to performance to explain prophetic action. First, as David Stacey has argued, it is nonsensical to portray the sign acts as message-oriented street theater or as innovative communicative aids, as there is no reason to believe that such acts contribute anything to the communication of a message. Stacey writes, "Ezekiel's actions may arrest attention, but few of them can be said to communicate meaning more easily than words."<sup>40</sup> And indeed, the text never gives us any sign that Ezekiel's actions are ever understood by anyone he encounters (or, indeed, that they are intended to be understood – Yahweh even warns in 2:3 *Mortal, I am sending you to the house of Israel,*<sup>41</sup> *to the rebellious ones*<sup>42</sup> *who have rebelled against me*, adding in 2:7 that the people may not hear Ezekiel.)

Second, and more seriously, framing the sign acts as communicative or theatrical performance too quickly glosses over the question of materiality. The body of the prophet is denied a significance independent of the plot of the drama and is frequently reduced to a prop in the service of the larger performance. The performance model, as it appears most frequently in

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<sup>37</sup> Friebel, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, passim.

<sup>38</sup> William Doan and Terry Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power: Performance Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 61.

<sup>39</sup> Blenkinsopp writes, "Such sign acts should not be regarded as merely illustrative, as a kind of visual aid. Their purpose was to enhance the force of the spoken word, to make possible the more intense kind of identification with it that successful theater can achieve." Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> Stacey, *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament*, 266.

<sup>41</sup> *House of Israel*: reading with LXX, MT has *בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל*. Zimmerli states that *בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* is the "customary usage" of Ezekiel and that in general, *בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל* "represents a weakening of the expression due to a scribal error" Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 1:89n3.

<sup>42</sup> Reading with LXX; MT adds *אֶל-גּוֹיִם*, *to nations*. The lack of an article is peculiar. Zimmerli suggests that the gloss in MT "perhaps was intended to divert to the nations, the indictment of Israel which was felt to be too severe" Ibid.

biblical studies,<sup>43</sup> assumes that the basic aim in prophecy, as in artistic performance, is communicating *something*. While this message may be communicated in unconventional ways, there is still a message, somewhere, somehow, being communicated. The limitations of this assumption are that it privileges the message over the medium, and ignores the significance of the prophetic body as a *body*. The body of the prophet is denied a significance independent of the plot of the drama and is frequently reduced to a prop in the service of the larger performance.

But not all performance is drama; not all performance places communication above all else. Explaining the sign acts as “prophetic drama” is not the only possible way of using the concept of performance to unlock the text. Yvonne Sherwood argues for understanding prophecy not just as performance, but also as a form of performance art. Like performance artists, “Prophetic performers and speakers seem particularly, indeed peculiarly, dedicated to provocation and the ideal of turning the prophet and the audience inside out.”<sup>44</sup> This provocation is dramatized, moreover, on “the body of the prophet, who is both its subject (speaker) and its object (victim).” Sherwood’s turn from “street theater” to more radical modes of performance and performance art<sup>45</sup> redirects attention to the body of the prophet and its ambivalent relation to the word. As she rightly points out, prophetic actions such as the sign acts are intrinsically paradoxical, at once animated by language and resistant to it.

The comparison with contemporary performance art is helpful where more traditional ideas of performance (as well as theories of ecstasy and pathology) are not because it forces us to consider the materiality of the body – its messy corporeality – without reducing this body to its function of communicating a larger, more important or “real” message. When understood as performance art, or more specifically “body art,” the body of the prophet does not merely communicate a message (the prophet as sign) or participate in a larger communicative act (the

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<sup>43</sup> For example Stacey, *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament*; Doan and Giles, *Prophets, Performance, and Power*. The adaptation of performance studies into biblical studies does not always capture the complexity or theoretical engagements of the former genre. However, recent work, such as a volume of the journal *Bible and Critical Theory* (1. 2, No. 1, 2006) edited by Yvonne Sherwood dedicated to performance theory, models innovative critical engagement with a variety of forms of performance theory. See further note 45 below, as well as my discussion in this chapter.

<sup>44</sup> Yvonne Sherwood, “Prophetic Performance Art,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 2, no. 1 (2006): 1.1–1.4.

<sup>45</sup> Performance art and body art have occasionally figured in biblical studies, as in William Stewart’s comparison of Rachel Griffiths and Jesus or in Roland Boer’s reading of the Song of Songs vis-à-vis Annie Sprinkle. Theresa Hornsby’s “Ezekiel Off Broadway” begins with the provocative juxtaposition of Ezekiel’s actions with the work of Karen Finley, Annie Sprinkle, and Bill T. Jones, but fails to follow through on this opening engagement with performance art, shifting instead to Judith Butler’s theory of performativity. However, the best engagement with the prophetic body as excessive, embodied, and overfilled with sensation comes from Sherwood herself, in an article entitled “Prophetic Scatology. However, Sherwood’s study of the “most disturbing orifices/corners of the ‘body’ of prophetic literature” relies not on a comparison with performance art, but rather with visual art, including Damien Hirst, Gilbert and George, and the 1997 London exhibition *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*. The success of her study shows that a critically astute analysis of the body does not necessarily require a turn to the language of performance art. See William Stewart, “Crown of Thorns: Ancient Prophecy and the (post) Modern Spectacle,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 2, no. 1 (2006); Roland Boer, “King Solomon Meets Annie Sprinkle,” *Semeia* 82, no. Missoula, MT (1998): 151–182; Roland Boer, *Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door* (New York: Routledge, 1999), “Night Sprinkle (s): Pornography and the Song of Songs”; Theresa Hornsby, “Ezekiel Off-Broadway,” *The Bible and Critical Theory* 2, no. 1 (2006); Yvonne Sherwood, “Prophetic Scatology: Prophecy and the Art of Sensation,” ed. Stephen D. Moore, *Semeia Studies* 82 (2000): 183–224.

prophet as street performer). Instead, “body art,”<sup>46</sup> has the important advantage of directing attention to the materiality of the body and its material limitations. As Amelia Jones writes, “Body art, through its very performativity and its unveiling of the body of the artist, surfaces the insufficiency and incoherence of the body-as-subject and its inability to deliver itself fully.”<sup>47</sup> Ezekiel’s sign acts, at once ambiguous, aggressive, and largely unable to reach the rebellious house of Israel (2:5) demonstrate such an “insufficiency and incoherence of the body-as-subject.” Performance theory, particularly the study of performance and body art, can thus destabilize our traditional understanding of prophetic action as intrepid street theater or ingenious communication and moves instead to a more fraught understanding of embodiment, its significations, and its resistances. In the case of Ezekiel, performance theory is most useful precisely when it draws our attention to the *incoherence* of performance and of the performing body. Ezekiel may well perform, but the performer he most resembles may be not Karen Finley or Annie Sprinkle, but rather a performer from literature: Franz Kafka’s hunger artist.

### **Ezekiel and the Hunger Artist**

In 1922, Kafka wrote a short story he titled “A Hunger Artist,” describing an artist whose art is fasting.<sup>48</sup> This “hunger artist” goes for weeks without eating, all the while living in a cage so that his feat of abstinence can be watched by the spectators who gather around him. Though the hunger artist at first draws large crowds, eventually the attention of the public turns elsewhere, and he is forced to join a shabby circus, where he is made a part of the menagerie. Finally, he starves to death, unwatched by anyone, and his empty cage is filled by a panther. Like the written accounts of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, Kafka’s story is in part a literary response to a contemporary practice – just as there were real prophets in ancient Israel, there were real hunger artists in early twentieth century Europe, and Kafka likely observed them<sup>49</sup> – but its value does not lie in this relationship to history or to historical individuals. Instead, the historicity of the account is secondary to the literary effect that it produces. Like Ezekiel’s sign acts, Kafka’s story has an unsettling edge, and it lingers in a way that the historical accounts do not. It also has a different sort of power than other, more conventional accounts of fasting in religious literature, including the lives of numerous saints. Unlike the ravaged bodies of fasting saints, the hunger artist’s pain cannot be simplified and explained with a straightforward narrative of his suffering. Shortly before his death, the hunger artist tells the man who finds him, starving, his reasons for fasting: “I have to fast, I can’t help it...because I couldn’t find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else.” Kafka adds, “These were his last words, but in his dimming eyes remained the firm though no longer proud persuasion that he was still continuing to fast.”<sup>50</sup> This moment interrupts the gravity of a man

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<sup>46</sup> For the term “body art,” see Amelia Jones, “‘Presence’ in Absentia: Experiencing Performance,” *Art Journal* 56, no. 11 (1997): 18.

<sup>47</sup> Odell, “You Are What You Eat.” See also Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1998).

<sup>48</sup> Franz Kafka, *Selected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir (New York: The Modern Library, 1993).

<sup>49</sup> Sigal Gooldin, “Fasting Women, Living Skeletons and Hunger Artists: Spectacles of Body and Miracles at the Turn of a Century,” *Body & Society* 9, no. 2 (June 1, 2003): 27–53; Robin Blyn, “From Stage to Page: Franz Kafka, Djuna Barnes, and Modernism’s Freak Fictions,” *Narrative* 8, no. 2 (May 1, 2000): 134–160.

<sup>50</sup> Kafka, *Selected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, 255.

starving to death, as well as the heroic narrative of fasting as a battle against appetite and desire. All that remains is his body.

The tableau that Kafka presents – the slowly starving body, the uninterested and absent spectators, the aggressive (even irritating) suffering, without meaning – has a great deal in common with Ezekiel. Ezekiel’s audience of exiles displays very little interest in his exploits, however much pain they cause him. At the same time, in the biblical text, there is no suggestion that the meaning of Ezekiel’s actions is at all obvious to his audience. Instead, every time Ezekiel performs an action, it is immediately followed in the text by a remark explaining *why* the action was performed (for example, *This is a sign for the house of Israel*, Ezek. 4:3). But the very fact that such explanations are needed – and are needed at every point – suggests that the sign acts themselves are not really intelligible as either signs or acts. Such moments of explanation are symptoms of an underlying anxiety, a desire to control the unruly prophetic body and to assign to it a specific meaning.<sup>51</sup> Like Kafka’s story, biblical text engenders a feeling of unsettledness, unease, and instability that refuses a straightforward meaning.

### **Hunger, Pain, and Unspeakable Suffering**

Furthermore, as reading Kafka’s hunger artist together with Ezekiel suggests, the body of the prophet in the sign acts, like the body of the hunger artist, is a body in radical pain. Even as the hunger artist insists that his starvation is a result of being unable to find the food he likes, there are also repeated suggestions of his suffering. At first, he suffers primarily from the ravages of hunger on his body.<sup>52</sup> And yet the artist also suffers, as the story draws to an end, from neglect – from the absence of the spectators, from the smell of the menagerie, from his proximity to the animals.<sup>53</sup> At every point, this bodily pain and suffering is very much a part of the hunger artist’s art, even as this art fails. Pain plays a similar role in Ezekiel’s sign acts. To be sure, Ezekiel never complains (unlike, for example, Jeremiah, who spends a great deal of his own prophetic book shouting, lamenting, and crying in pain). However, the actions that are demanded of Ezekiel are painful, even torturous. Ezekiel’s activities may communicate very little (or very little *successfully*) about the perversity of Israel, but they suggest a great deal about the relationship of prophecy to bodily suffering. To lie unmoving for more than a year, to eat food baked on excrement, to enact with one’s body the destruction of the world – these are not so much attention-getting tricks as scenes of agony. Thus Ezekiel holding up his arm against the tiny city is not simply an action of farce, but the cause of great physical pain, even torture. In another story in the Hebrew Bible, the prophet Moses has to hold up his arms while the Israelites battle their enemy the Amalekites. Moses cannot do it, and his brother Aaron and another man, Hur, help hold up his arms (Exod. 17:8-13). Ezekiel, unaided, must hold his own arm far, far longer. Stillness can be a form of torture as surely as movement. There is a similar pain in

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<sup>51</sup> Traditional biblical criticism of the sources of the text seems to offer a solution, insofar as many scholars suggest that the explanatory comments are the work of a later editor, touching up the text. This does not solve the problem, however, but rather adds a diachronic dimension. Assuming, following source critical logic, that the text of the sign acts was unsettling enough that a later editor or scribe felt the need to explain the prophet’s comments only make the anxiety created by the sign acts *more* clear.

<sup>52</sup> Kafka writes, “His head lolled on his breast as if it had landed there by chance; his body was hollowed out; his legs in a spasm of self-preservation clung close to each other at the knees, yet scraped on the ground as if it were not really solid ground.” Kafka, *Selected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, 248.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.



Ezekiel's thirteen (or, if we include the punishment of Judah, fourteen) months of lying motionless. The body, immobile, brings torture upon itself.<sup>54</sup>

The other sign acts, too, implicate the prophet Ezekiel's body in a universe of pain and abjection. Ezekiel's food, so carefully prepared, is part of a slow process of starvation. This starvation, moreover, occurs in an overarching context of disgust. The mixture of grains in Ezekiel's bread is widely accepted to symbolize the impurity and degeneration of the starvation rations in a besieged city.<sup>55</sup> The use of excrement as cooking fuel further increases the sense of disgust. Julia Kristeva has argued that feces and other marginalia of the body – hair, nails, blood – are “abject” and are reviled because they remind us of our own mortality.<sup>56</sup> To cook over feces is to introduce the margins of the body, and thus the possibility of death, into the scene of eating.<sup>57</sup> From the beginning, Ezekiel's prophecy is intimately bound up with disgust and death, which are enacted on the body through the basic act of consumption.

After lying bound, prophesying against the brick, and consuming only survival rations, Ezekiel removes and destroys his hair and beard. Only a few hairs are spared, seemingly reflecting the prophetic motif of the deliverance of a remnant of survivors. There is an even greater cruelty and pain, however, in the seeming preservation of a remnant. The hairs spared and bound up in the prophet's robe are not delivered but rather subjected to a second round of cutting, burning, and scattering. This is the basic narrative structure of the Marquis de Sade's novels of seemingly unlimited torture – the body is preserved and rejuvenated only so as to allow a constant restaging of the original scene of pain.<sup>58</sup> Thus in Sade's *Justine*, the heroine's ravaged body is magically healed every evening in preparation for the following day's torture. So too with the margins of Ezekiel's body: that which is spared can be ravaged and destroyed again.

And the slow, painful destruction of the body is as essential to Ezekiel's performance as to the hunger artist's. At the end of Kafka's story, the cage previously occupied by the deceased hunger artist is used to house a panther. Kafka writes,

The panther was all right. The food he liked was brought him without hesitation by the attendants; he seemed not even to miss his freedom; his noble body, furnished almost to the bursting point with all that it needed, seemed to carry freedom around with it too; somewhere in his jaws it seemed to lurk; and the joy of life streamed with such ardent passion from his throat that for the onlookers it

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<sup>54</sup> In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry makes clear that inaction and stillness are a form of torture no less cruel than pain actively inflicted on the body. Scarry writes, “Standing rigidly for eleven hours can produce as violent muscle and spine pain as can injury from elaborate equipment and apparatus, though any of us outside this situation, used to adjusting our body positions every few moments before even mild discomfort is felt, may not immediately recognize this... Only when a person throws his head back and swallows three times does he begin to apprehend what is involved in one hundred and three or three hundred and three swallows, what atrocities one's own body, muscle, and bone structure can inflict on oneself.” Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1987), 48.

<sup>55</sup> Friebe, *Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's Sign-Acts*, 226–227; Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, 37–38.

<sup>56</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3.

<sup>57</sup> This basic structure of disgust remains even after Yahweh permits the prophet to substitute cow dung for human excrement for practical reasons.

<sup>58</sup> Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1990).

was not easy to stand the shock of it. But they braced themselves, crowded round the cage, and did not want ever to move away.<sup>59</sup>

The panther offers everything, it seems, that his predecessor the hunger artist lacked: the “joy of life,” the body active and beautiful, the eager consumption of food, the animated, beautiful body that enralls a crowd. The supple feline delights the spectators who brace themselves around his cage, entrancing their gaze.<sup>60</sup> Kafka’s panther, with “the joy of life stream[ing] with such ardent passion from his throat,” succeeds where the hunger artist does not – and where Ezekiel does not. Instead, Ezekiel and the hunger artist fail to present active, beautiful bodies, even as they fail to hold the gaze of the spectators. Their bodies are bodies that are unable – or unwilling – to consume, to perform, to provide a spectacle worthy of the gaze.

This failure is also, in the case of Ezekiel, a failure of masculinity. As I have set forth in the introduction, the masculine body in the Hebrew Bible should be firm, powerful, self-sufficient, beautiful –not the hunger artist’s starving body, but the beautiful and deadly form of the panther. This is a body that can and should be the object of the gaze. But such a gaze is *not* attracted by Ezekiel’s sign acts, even as they pain and open the prophetic body. Ezekiel finds himself transformed by pain and shifted outside of the ordinary parameters of hegemonic biblical masculinity. As I will suggest in the following chapter, the voicing of pain is coded in the biblical text as a strongly feminine act. And yet it is not just the sound of pain, but also the *experience* of pain, that pushes the suffering body outside of the bounds of hegemonic biblical masculinity. Ezekiel’s silence does not vouchsafe his masculinity. Instead, in a milieu in which persuasive speech is coded as masculine, Ezekiel’s failure to either speak or to persuade through actions represents a failure at hegemonic biblical masculinity.

### **Ezekiel’s Body in Pain**

The pain in Ezekiel is shocking both because it seems unhelpful and unnecessary for the prophetic message, and because it is caused by ordinary, unremarkable objects used in remarkable ways. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes about how pain brings about what she calls the “dissolution of the world.”<sup>61</sup> Scarry argues that one of the most powerful, and terrifying, strategies used by torturers is to transform ordinary objects into weapons. A chair, a light bulb, a bathtub, even the sound of a door locking – these ordinary things are used by the torturer to inflict pain upon the prisoner.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the very ordinariness of these objects means that their violent use is an inversion of the order of things. In Scarry’s words, this inversion “unmakes the world.” Scarry writes, “Torture is a process which not only converts but announces the conversion of every conceivable aspect of the event and the environment into an

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<sup>59</sup> Kafka, *Selected Short Stories of Franz Kafka*, 255–256.

<sup>60</sup> Kafka’s choice of a panther calls to mind an earlier panther from German literature, found in Rilke’s poem “The Panther.” The allusion to Rilke further thematizes the question of vision. As Paine writes of Rilke’s *The New Poems*, including “Der Panther,” “the key to experience seems contained in the act of seeing.” (Jeffery M. Paine, “Rainer Maria Rilke: The Evolution of a Poet,” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 10, no. 2 (April 1, 1986): 159.) Behind Rilke, we find as well the panther as a traditional Christian allegorical symbol of Christ – another body deserving of, and demanding, the visual attention of the spectator.

<sup>61</sup> Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 38, 53–54 and *passim*.

<sup>62</sup> Scarry also writes, “torture is a process which not only converts but announces the conversion of ever conceivable aspect of the event and the environment into an agent of pain.” *Ibid.*, 27–28.

agent of pain.”<sup>63</sup> This is precisely what happens to Ezekiel. Ordinary objects – ropes, a brick, foodstuffs – are turned into weapons against the body. And this transformation of objects into weapons marks the unmaking of the world, as surely as the siege of Jerusalem does.

Scarry further argues that pain resists language and communication. She writes, “Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language.”<sup>64</sup> This, too, is true of Ezekiel, who like the hunger artist never gives voice to his pain and who never speaks during the sign acts, except to protest against the instruction to use human excrement. Nor does Ezekiel’s body “speak” or communicate a message through his suffering, either through a psychoanalytic model of somatic compliance or through the placing of the body’s pain in a larger narrative frame (as in many accounts of martyrdom, stigmata, or other forms of religious suffering.) The pain of his body, the pain brought about by the sign acts, does not offer up a straightforward explanation. Nor does pain function in the service of a larger meaning, as it does, for example, in the narratives of martyrdom. Instead, pain suggests only the difficulty of prophecy and the unmaking of the world. Ezekiel’s sign acts are not particularly effective at communicating a clear message, but they are all too effective at painning the prophet’s body. The body of the prophet Ezekiel, the body as it emerges in chapters 4 and 5, is thus an abject, pained, and shattered body, a body unable to speak or explain its suffering.

Ezekiel’s suffering thus does not represent a triumph of masculinity through heroic martyrdom and self-mastery (though this interpretation of suffering becomes common in later texts such as 4 Maccabees and other Hellenistic and martyrological writings).<sup>65</sup> This logic of heroic and masculine (even masculinizing<sup>66</sup>) suffering, while an important discourse of Jewish and Christian martyrdom, is not at work in Ezek. 4-5. Instead, as victim instead of agent of suffering, Ezekiel is simply displaced from the dominant position of hegemonic biblical masculinity. His body is a body that fails at hegemonic masculinity even as it fails at the meaningful pain of martyrdom. Instead, Ezekiel’s body resists the dominant categories of gender performance and gendered suffering, even as his body suffers intensely.

### III. EZEKIEL’S BODY BEYOND THE SIGN ACTS

#### **Ezekiel Before Yahweh: The Body Before the Sign Acts**

Ezekiel’s performance of the sign acts challenges and destabilizes his performance of masculinity. The prophet fails at action, at beauty, at holding the gaze of the spectators. Instead, his pain, his silence, and his failure to communicate the prophetic message with success all direct attention away from Yahweh’s message and toward the prophetic body, with its pain, immobility, and failure to subscribe to hegemonic masculinity. This twin crisis of masculinity

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>65</sup> Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, “Taking It Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 117, no. 2 (1998): 249–273.

<sup>66</sup> As Moore and Anderson suggest, “Paradoxically, as we shall see, the prime exemplar of masculinity in 4 Maccabees is a woman,” – the mother of the martyred sons, who conforms to “The literary and philosophical topos of the subject who is anatomically female but morally masculine.” Ibid., 252, 267.

and the body does not, however, originate in chapter 4, when the sign acts begin. Instead, the crisis begins to unfold in the opening chapters of the book of Ezekiel, beginning with the text's opening event, the theophany. It is here that Ezekiel's passivity and bodily openness first figure in the text, anticipating the painful, gender-challenging spectacle of performance in chapters 4 and 5. In these earlier scenes in Ezekiel, the body of the prophet is constituted both through its own passivity and through its relationship to other bodies, which re-inscribe the weakness and inadequacy of the prophet's own body. As in Hosea, this weakness and failure is also linked to a bodily openness – though in Ezekiel, even more than in Hosea, this openness also suggests the possibility of an alternate organization of masculinity.

### Passivity and Openness

Almost as soon as Ezekiel's body appears in the text, it is represented as passive, open, and un-masculine – or better, as non-normatively masculine. Instead of displacing Ezekiel from the category of (hegemonic) “masculinity” into an oppositionally constructed “femininity,” the text suggests the possibility of alternate, non-hegemonic masculinities and masculine bodies. At least briefly, the text proliferates forms of masculinity. The opening chapters of Ezekiel offer an account of a visual event and an aural event – a vision and a call.<sup>67</sup> Thus in the opening chapters of the book of Ezekiel, the prophet's body initially appears as a perceptual apparatus. We thus first come to know Ezekiel and his body through what he sees and hears. In the first two chapters, Ezekiel describes his the appearance of Yahweh's chariot, with the deity himself seated within it. In the course of his description – the most detailed visual description of God in all the Hebrew Bible – he uses forms of the word *ראה*, *to see* (including the related noun *מראה*, *appearance*) 22 times.<sup>68</sup> This emphasis on visuality distinguishes Ezekiel from the earlier classical prophets, whose primary form of sensory engagement with the divine is in the realm of sound (*Hear the word of Yahweh*).<sup>69</sup> Auditory perception also serves as a textual mark of the prophet's body. Such perception first appears in 1:24, as the prophet describes the sound of the creatures that draw Yahweh's chariot.

Sound gains greater importance in the second chapter, as Ezekiel hears Yahweh's speech. With both sound and sight, the overwhelming impression is of the prophet as passive perceptual apparatus, overwhelmed by the visual and sonic presence of the divine. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the prophet's body first asserts itself against this overwhelming heavenly presence by falling further downward, into the dust: *Like the bow in a cloud on a rainy day, such was the appearance of the splendor all round. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard someone's voice* (Ezek. 1:28). This is a scene of auditory perception that also establishes a proper bodily posture of listening, as Ezekiel falls and then is commanded to rise.<sup>70</sup> Ezekiel's tumble at Yahweh's feet is not just ritual self-abasement, but also an act of self-violence that marks the first real entry of the prophet's body into the text. Notably, this entry is an interruption, and no sooner has Ezekiel fallen than Yahweh commands him to rise. The body thus interrupts the scene of prophecy.

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<sup>67</sup> Audition is significant to this prophetic call.

<sup>68</sup> *מראה*, *likeness*, appears an additional 10 times.

<sup>69</sup> For the classical formulation of this argument, see Gunkel, “The Prophets: Oral and Written,” 87.

<sup>70</sup> *He said to me, Mortal, stand, and I will speak to you, and a wind came to me as he spoke to me and stood by my feet and I heard the one speaking to me* (Ezek. 2:1-2).

The passivity and weakness that Ezekiel's tumble suggest about his body also set the tone for what follows. Yahweh's hand reaches out and feeds him a scroll filled with words of *lament and weal and woe* (Ezek. 2:10) and tasting *sweet as honey* (Ezek. 3:2). This scene directs attention to Ezekiel's body not just as form but also as opening, an interior space that makes itself known through consumption of an Other.<sup>71</sup> This consumption of divine language brings with it as well the silence of the prophet, as Ezekiel is struck dumb by divine command. Prophecy thus comes to Ezekiel from outside; his only active action is one of swallowing, taking the prophetic word into his body. Like the sign acts, this scene with the scroll shows that prophecy is understood as deeply embodied and as dependent upon the body. And like the body lying in the dust, it also shows the inherently passive stance of prophecy.

As already detailed in the introductory chapter, in the ancient Near Eastern world of the prophet Ezekiel, "passive" is the functional opposite of "masculine." Masculinity is not static, but is produced and sustained through action. To play on John Berger's famous dictum about gender in art, "men act and women appear,"<sup>72</sup> in the ancient and late antique Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds, men act and non-men are acted upon.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, a prophet lying passive in the dust, a prophet whose most active actions are to fall to the ground and to swallow a scroll, is a prophet acting in a way contrary to dominant biblical masculinity. The prophet does not act, even to speak, but is instead acted upon. Ezekiel fails to enact dominant masculinity.

Ezekiel's passivity is linked, especially in the moment of swallowing the scroll, not simply to domination and submission, but also to openness. In the Hebrew prophets, from Hosea to Zechariah, prophecy requires the opening of the body. While the ideal male body is whole, self-contained, and self-directed,<sup>74</sup> the prophetic body is opened by and to Yahweh. This openness is most dramatically represented in Ezekiel's swallowing of the scroll. Prophecy physically enters into the body. In this scene, moreover, the prophet is doubly marked as both active and passive. While Ezekiel chooses to swallow the scroll, he nevertheless does so upon divine command. Furthermore, the immediate consequence of his action is the loss of agency, as he sits, stunned, for seven days. Ezekiel opens his mouth to accept the prophetic calling, and his body and subjectivity are, in turn, opened from within. In other prophetic call stories, this opening is explicitly represented as painful. When Isaiah has a vision of Yahweh in the Temple, his first response is to bemoan his *unclean lips*;<sup>75</sup> a seraph responds by touching them with a fiery coal, purifying them (Isa. 6:5-7). Here, as in Ezekiel, the emphasis is placed on the openings of the body, which are both central to prophecy and forced to experience great pain. Prophecy opens the body – prophecy burns the lips – and prophecy is painful. Openness, it seems, is a necessary step in the prophetic call, even as it challenges the hegemonic masculinity of the prophetic body.

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<sup>71</sup> The subject made known through the other is a common philosophical figure, from Hegel's recognition to Levinas' call of the other, and the helpmeet of Gen. 2. We might also identify a similar structure as well in the simultaneous double creation of male and female in Gen. 1.

<sup>72</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1990), 47.

<sup>73</sup> See further Creangă, *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*; Todd C Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, eds., *Mapping Gender in Ancient Religious Discourses*, Biblical Interpretation Series 84 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), especially Virginia Burrus, "Mapping as Metamorphosis: Initial Reflections on Gender and Ancient Religious Discourses," 1–10.

<sup>74</sup> Hentrich, "Masculinity and Disability in the Bible."

<sup>75</sup> The word for *lip* (שֶׁפֶט, dual שִׁפְתַּיִם) in Hebrew also means *speech* or *language*.

## Hard Bodies, Open Bodies

The vulnerability and openness of the prophet's body is reinforced through the contrast between Ezekiel and the Israelite people to whom he is sent. The bodies of the Israelites are described as hard, impenetrable, threatening to the other. Immediately before the scroll appears to Ezekiel, Yahweh instructs him,

<sup>3</sup>*He said to me, "Mortal, I am sending to the house of Israel, to the rebellious ones<sup>76</sup> who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. <sup>4</sup>And<sup>77</sup> you will say to them, thus said the Lord Yahweh. <sup>5</sup>They—whether they listen or not, for they are a rebellious house—will know that a prophet has been in their midst. <sup>6</sup>And you, mortal, do not be afraid of them and do not be afraid of their words, for nettles<sup>78</sup> and thorns are with you, and you sit upon scorpions. Do not be afraid of their words, do not be daunted by their faces, for they are a rebellious house."* (Ezek. 2:3-6)

The resistance of the Israelites is here figured as a refusal of openness, a refusal to allow the prophetic word (or the prophet himself) to enter in. Instead of vulnerability and discontinuity, which are central to the representation of Ezekiel's body, they are characterized with images of pain, rebellion, and resistance to penetration by the prophet's words. The Israelites are a terror and a threat, which, like thorns and scorpions, threaten to penetrate or to cut into the body of the prophet who is sent to them. As in the sign acts, the text presents Ezekiel's body as at risk for wounding and opening, and as fundamentally different from the bodies of the Israelites to whom he is sent.

After Ezekiel swallows the scroll, materially incorporating the divine word of commissioning, Yahweh offers a second description of the Israelites' bodies, this time framed in the language of the prophet's own transformation. Yahweh tells Ezekiel, *I will make your face as hard as theirs, and your forehead as brazen as theirs. I will make your forehead like adamant, harder than flint* (Ezek. 3:8-9). Here, the hardness and impenetrability of the Israelite body remains, even as it is extended, belatedly, to the prophet himself. There is also a reference here to the repeated description of the Israelites as a stiff-necked people (Exod. 32:2, 33:3, 5, 34:9; Deut. 9:6, 13; 2 Chron. 30:8). In the case of the corporate body of Israelites, these descriptions are pejorative – the Israelites are described as stiff-necked when they resist Yahweh. Moses' greatest problem, it sometimes seems, is the hardness of the people he is called to lead (Num. 11:11-15). However, on the level of the individual body, hardness and resistance are valorized as essential traits of the male body.<sup>79</sup> Ezekiel's body must be made hard; male bodies must be hard (though for Ezekiel, at least, this bodily impenetrability is fleeting at best, perhaps because it begins with openness, an openness to the divine word.).

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<sup>76</sup> Reading with G; MT adds אֶל-גּוֹיִם, *to nations*. The lack of an article is peculiar. Zimmerli suggests that the gloss in MT "perhaps was intended to divert to the nations, the indictment of Israel which was felt to be too severe." Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 1:89n3.

<sup>77</sup> Reading with G, MT begins the verse with הַבָּנִים הַקְּשֵׁי פְנֵים הַזֵּהָרִים לָב *The sons are brazen-faced and tough-hearted. I am sending you to them*, a secondary expansion influenced by Isaiah and Jeremiah (Ibid., 1:90n4.)

<sup>78</sup> קָרְבִּים, sing. קָרֵב, likely *nettle*, is a *hapax legomenon*. See Greenberg for a discussion of its meaning. He notes that nettles, thorns, and scorpions are "analogous stinging things" *Ezekiel 1-20*, 66.

<sup>79</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, chapter 3.

The promised transformation of Ezekiel's body – *I will make your forehead like adamant, harder than flint* – never seems to occur in the text. Instead of strength, Ezekiel finds only silence, as he sits, dumbstruck, for seven days. When his body becomes an instrument of prophecy, it is through performance and suffering, the body made vulnerable and open to Yahweh.. This basic bodily openness and softness emerge more clearly in contrast with the hardened bodies of the Israelites. Thus the descriptions of the bodies of the Israelites, though relatively scarce in the text, nevertheless contribute to the representation of the body of Ezekiel, which fails to match their hardness or impenetrability. Instead Ezekiel, called as a prophet, is permeable to the divine word and to bodily transformations that challenge hegemonic masculinity.

### **Masculinities in Contest: Ezekiel's Body and Yahweh's Body**

If the openness of Ezekiel's body is highlighted through the contrast with the impenetrable Israelite bodies, then the prophet's crisis in masculinity emerges in his relationship to the body of Yahweh. Ezekiel's tumble in the dust does not serve only to demonstrate the prophet's submission and obeisance. Instead, it also directs attention to the question of masculinity. Ezekiel's passive, not-so-masculine body is positioned in opposition to the pronounced masculinity of the body that stands before it – the body of Yahweh. In the Hebrew Bible, successful masculinity is marked in the text with beauty and power, both of which Yahweh's divine body has in excess. Ezekiel's vision of the divine body progresses in stages, shifting from the dazzling chariot to the body seated within it to the fiery loins at the body's center. Within a rush of wind and a confusion of cloud and fire, Ezekiel perceives the *חַיִּים*, *living creatures*, drawing the chariot.<sup>80</sup> Though Ezekiel claims they have *אָדָם*, *human form*, he also notes that the *חַיִּים* possess wings, calf feet, and four faces (a human, a lion, an ox, and an eagle), and move upon *wheels within wheels* filled with eyes (1:5-18). The *חַיִּים* actively blur the boundaries of human and animal, animate and inanimate, placing under scrutiny the otherwise taken-for-granted boundaries of the prophetic body. The hybrid spectacle of the *חַיִּים* and the fantastic chariot that they pull also suggests the inadequacy of human embodiment, its limitations and its weakness. Ezekiel's body is not a dazzling assemblage of living beings and metallic dazzle, a hybrid creature that draws power from transgressing the boundaries of species and of life itself. Instead, he is a mere man, lying in the dust.

If the function of the *חַיִּים* is to problematize normative categories and to draw attention to the limits of human embodiment, then the divine body does all this and more, challenging the masculinity of the prophetic body. In the biblical text, Yahweh is a paradigm of successful masculinity and virility. And Ezekiel cannot stop gazing at this perfect male body that appears before him. The prophet struggles to explain what he sees:

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<sup>80</sup> Greek ζῴων. Greenberg notes that the Hebrew term *חַיִּים* is used here not to mean 'animal' but, more generally, 'living thing;' the same is true of the Greek ζῴα. And this ambiguity, I want to suggest, is intentional. Though they are later identified as cherubim (in 10:1), the ambiguous *חַיִּים* used here signifies Ezekiel's own incomplete understanding of that which he gazes upon. Furthermore, the vagueness of the term *חַיִּים*, along with the paradoxical images that Ezekiel describes (wheels within wheels, a chariot that moves straight ahead in all directions), challenges our urge, as readers, to assimilate what Ezekiel sees to known categories. *Ezekiel 1-20*, 43.

*Upon the likeness of the throne, a likeness of something like the appearance of a man. And I saw something like the dazzle of hashmal,<sup>81</sup> something like the appearance of fire surrounding it all about,<sup>82</sup> upward from what appeared to be his loins. And downward from what appeared to be his loins, I saw something like the appearance of fire, and he was surrounded by brightness. (Ezek. 1:26b-27)*

Ezekiel's speech is filled with evasions, substitutions, and linguistic hedging; as Stephen Moore writes, his "attempt to drape the divine form in words carries him to the brink of aphasia."<sup>83</sup> The body before Ezekiel sparkles with fire and rainbows, its beauty and power reflected in the spectacular creatures that the chariot. Yahweh's form is at once virile and beautiful, perfect in its masculinity; Hentrich describes the "Israelites' imagination of YHWH as the perfect (male) human."<sup>84</sup> Ezekiel is concerned not simply with the body as a whole, but with its specific marker of masculinity – the divine penis.<sup>85</sup> The prophet is simultaneously fascinated by the divine loins and unable to bring himself to gaze directly upon them. Instead, he looks up, he looks down – and then, he says only that Yahweh's appearance is like a rainbow.

The body of Yahweh that so fascinates Ezekiel is a male body, though not one who flashes his penis with the same vigor as the lusty Ugaritic El in "The Birth of the Gracious Gods."<sup>86</sup> While the sex of the deity is uncontested, the physical markers of sex are discreetly concealed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz notes that even when the body of the deity appears in the text, the face and the genitals remain obscured. And yet it is Ezek. 1-2, more than any other text, that lingers on God's genitals. According to Eilberg-Schwartz, this textual gaze is deeply interested in God's genitals, which it finds at once fascinating and repulsive, forbidden and impossible to ignore.<sup>87</sup> As the gaze shifts to the penis itself, the human form of the body is replaced with fire, a neat displacement that only heightens the genital fascination.<sup>88</sup> The scene is organized around the desire to gaze upon Yahweh's genitals, even as this desire is overwhelmed by the danger that such an action threatens. Even if we assume that the prophet's desire is to gaze upon the *body* of Yahweh and not his genitals *per se*, the physical markers of masculinity, and thus the basic sexualized dynamic, remain central to the scene. The confluence of divinity,

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<sup>81</sup> A gleaming substance whose precise identification remains uncertain. It is sometimes translated *amber* or *electrum*.

<sup>82</sup> *Surrounding it all about*. Missing from LXX.

<sup>83</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, 85.

<sup>84</sup> Hentrich, "Masculinity and Disability in the Bible," 79. See as well Moore, *God's Gym*. I also address the male body of Yahweh in greater detail in my introduction.

<sup>85</sup> The best text on the divine genitals remains Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*.

<sup>86</sup> *The Birth of the Gracious Gods* offers a lengthy description of El's "hand" (a common Ugaritic – and biblical – euphemism for penis) and the pleasure it brings to his pair of young wives. See Simon B Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1997), "The Birth of the Gracious Gods" (CAT 1.23), translated by Theodore J. Lewis. See especially lines 30-52 (pages 210-212).

<sup>87</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz further notes, "there is almost no rabbinic commentary on Ezekiel 1:27 and 8:2, the two verses that mention the deity's loins" and concludes "the lack of commentary on what are extraordinary statements of Ezekiel strongly suggests a process of censure." However, in later rabbinic mysticism, the vision becomes an important text. Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus: And Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*, 181.

<sup>88</sup> This combination of desire to look and refusal to see also calls to mind Freud's argument concerning fetishism, and the reaction of the child to observing the "castrated" genitals of the mother. As in the formation of the fetish, Ezekiel's gaze upon the forbidden genitals engenders a crisis.



masculinity, and power is doubly projected in fire and in voice, both of which the dusty, speechless Ezekiel lacks. The human inadequacy of the prophet is further reinforced through this encounter with divine virility, the loins that dazzle and lick with fire.

The pain, weakness, and openness of the prophet's body to the divine word are placed in contrast to this dazzling male form. Unlike the hyper-masculine Yahweh, Ezekiel is weak, speechless, friendless, and altogether too preoccupied with his body, even as he repeatedly demonstrates its limits and failures by paining and starving himself. In these opening chapters, Ezekiel does not succeed at biblical masculinity, a failure made all the more obvious by the immediate juxtaposition in the text between the body of the prophet and the body of Yahweh who calls him. Ezekiel's bound, immobile, slowly starving body lies in sharp contradistinction to this dazzling apparition of the divine body.

### **An Excursus: Ezekiel's Masculinity and the Female Body in Ezek. 16**

Unlike the opening of Hosea, there are no female bodies in the opening five chapters of Ezekiel. The brief account of the prophet's family lineage mentions only his father, following the biblical genealogical convention of describing only the male line. The Israelite polity to which Ezekiel directs his actions is understood, as elsewhere in the Bible, as an audience of men. It is only much later (in chapter 24) that the text reveals that Ezekiel has a wife. And significantly, moreover, Ezekiel's wife appears in the text only in the event of her death, as Yahweh kills her and then forbids Ezekiel from mourning her (Ezek. 24:15-18) – a sign to the people that also speaks a great deal about the more general economy of femininity in the prophets. In the opening five chapters of Ezekiel, there seem to be no women at all.

But this absence of women does not mean the feminine body – or more specifically, a *fantasy* of the feminine body – does not figure into Ezekiel's performance of masculinity. Instead, in the thoroughly masculine space of the theophany, call narrative, and sign acts – all texts without any feminine presence – the feminine has its own significance through absence.<sup>89</sup> Where the feminine does appear, as in chapters 16 and 23 (as well as the death of Ezekiel's wife in chapter 24), it functions to shore up textual ideas of the masculine. As Hosea 1-3, in these texts masculinity and male embodiment are constructed in relation to a fantasy of the feminine.<sup>90</sup> In the final form of the Hebrew text, the textual representations of the sexed female bodies also bear upon the construction of Ezekiel's body in chapters 1-5. The representations in chapters 16 and 23 draw on the prophetic trope of representing idolatry as adultery and Israel as a promiscuous and unfaithful wife to her husband Yahweh. While this trope appears elsewhere, including Hosea and Jeremiah, the instances in Ezekiel are particularly graphic and violent; as Halperin notes, "In Ezekiel, the prevailing emotion is pornographic fury."<sup>91</sup> And yet the female body at the core of this pornographic fury also has something to tell us about the male prophetic body in Ezekiel. In exploring this connection, I will base my comments on Ezek. 16, but it is worth noting that nearly everything applies as well to Ezekiel 23, the account of the whoring sisters Oholah and Oholibah.

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<sup>89</sup> On a similar structure in Isaiah 29, see Graybill, "Uncanny Bodies, Impossible Knowledge and Somatic Excess in Isaiah 29."

<sup>90</sup> See further my chapter 1.

<sup>91</sup> Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*, 142.

Within the prophetic corpus, Ezekiel 16 offers perhaps the fullest articulation of the so-called “marriage metaphor,” which figures Israel as the unfaithful wife of Yahweh. The first person text, narrated by Yahweh (though, like all Yahweh’s speeches, voiced by the prophet), describes the infant Israel’s abandonment by her parents. Yahweh discovers her by the side of the road, *flailing in your blood* (16:6). As Israel grows to womanhood, the text takes particular interest in her body, describing her physical development: *You grew up and became tall and arrived at full womanhood; your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare* (Ezek. 16:7). Yahweh anoints the girl Israel with oil and dresses her, first in his own cloak, and then in fine fabrics, jewelry, and precious metals (Ezek. 16:7-13). Israel’s transgressions and punishment are likewise figured in corporeal terms. After accusing her of *playing the whore* (a common prophetic figure for infidelity, and one that has been well-critiqued by feminist scholarship<sup>92</sup>), Yahweh delivers one of the most notorious speeches in the Hebrew Bible:

*<sup>36</sup>Thus says Yahweh,<sup>93</sup> “Because your shameful secretions (תִּשְׁתִּי<sup>94</sup>) were poured out and you uncovered your nakedness<sup>95</sup> with your whoredom with your lovers, and your abominable idols, and like the blood of your children, which you gave them. <sup>37</sup>Behold, I am gathering all of your lovers whom you pleased,<sup>96</sup> and all of the ones that you loved and the ones that you hated. I will gather them against you from all sides and I will uncover your nakedness before them and they will see your nakedness. <sup>38</sup>And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and pour out blood upon you in wrath and jealousy. <sup>39</sup>And I will give you over into their hands and they will destroy your platform and tear down your high places, and tear off your garments and take all of your jewelry, and you will be left naked and bare. <sup>40</sup>They will raise up an assembly against you and they will pelt you with stones and hack you to pieces with swords. (Ezek. 16:36-40)*

Israel’s transgressions – seducing foreign lovers, *playing the whore*, sacrificing her children to foreign gods – share two important characteristics. They are active, and they are intimately bound up with the body. In a cultural ethos where femininity is associated with passivity and masculinity with activity, the active female is a dangerous threat, especially the female figure who uses her body to actively pursue sexual pleasures.<sup>97</sup> In the punishment that Yahweh

<sup>92</sup> See my discussion in chapter 1.

<sup>93</sup> MT adds אֲדֹנָי, *my lord*; omit with G.

<sup>94</sup> *shameful secretions* תִּשְׁתִּי : a *hapax legomena* of uncertain meaning. Greenberg translates *your juice*, explaining that the term is “a reference to female genital ‘distillation’ produced by sexual arousal” and noting an Akkadian cognate. TWOT suggests *lust* or *harlotry* but concedes that the meaning is dubious; HALOT notes the uncertain meaning and the parallel with עֲרֹנָה and suggests a meaning of *female modesty* or, alternately, *shame*, as well as a possible meaning of *menstruation*. In any case, the parallel with עֲרֹנָה makes the general meaning clear. *Ezekiel 1-20*, 285–286n35.

<sup>95</sup> Likely an expression for the genitals. See HALOT; Anderson and Freedman on Hos. 2:9. עֲרֹנָה occurs in close conjunction with גִּלְהָה, *uncover*, in Isa. 47:3 as well.

<sup>96</sup> Cf Ps. 104:34 for עָרַל אֵל as *to be pleasing to someone*. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 1-24*, 1:330 n37a.

<sup>97</sup> For an insightful recent study on this topic, see S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study in the Book of Ezekiel*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 368 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003).

promises against Israel, the female Israel is stripped of her active agency, but not of association with the body. Instead, her punishment is described with an appalling corporeality, as she is made the victim of both visual scrutiny and brutal violence (*they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords*).

A number of feminist studies have taken up Ezekiel 16, seeking either to explain or to excoriate its prurient interest in imagining and sexualizing gender violence. As I argue in the first chapter of this dissertation, however, there is no trace of an “authentic” feminine in the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible. As Tamar Kamionkowski writes specific to Ezekiel 16, “This text, as a product of male writers and readers, does not express female experience, nor can the female point of view be inferred or read into the text. The text does not tell us anything about real women, even if a woman is a central character; it tells us about men's *ideological constructions* of gender, and especially masculinity, set within a theological framework.”<sup>98</sup> I want to push this argument further and suggest that Ezekiel 16 tells us, beyond “men’s *ideological constructions* of gender” about the specific ideological construction of the *male body of the prophet* Ezekiel in the text. Ezekiel 16’s lurid fantasy of female embodiment and torture casts a long shadow not only over feminist biblical criticism, but over the legacy of the book of Ezekiel as well.

In a number of important ways, the representation of female embodiment in Ezek. 16 – and in particular the female body as object of divine punishment – reverses the model of male prophetic embodiment that appears in the first five chapters of Ezekiel. Though both Ezekiel and Israel are tortured, the latter’s body is described in almost obsessive detail, part by part, while Ezekiel’s material form receives almost no notice from the text. We are told, repeatedly, of Israel’s blood, her lust, her nakedness, her body stripped bare before the eyes of others, while Ezekiel’s body appears in the text only in fragmentary moments of perceiving the deity, falling in the dust, and swallowing of the scroll. Similarly, while the text of Ezekiel 16 creates an affective matrix through which the text is perceived – sights, smells, howling naked babies and glistening jewels, as well as the sadistic pleasure in watching Israel’s suffering (and the nagging anxiety of identification with her) – the text of Ezekiel 3-5 remains curiously opaque, as we have seen. Aside from his single protest about human excrement contaminating his ritual purity, Ezekiel voices no objections or reactions to what is commanded of him. The bodily actions demanded of him suggest torturous pain, but this pain, too, goes unstated in the text. Finally, while Israel’s punishment, like the marriage metaphor, is over-determined by its association of idolatry and adultery, the sign acts do not assign a meaning or an explanation to bodily suffering. Instead, they thematize the non-directionality and non-narrativity of the suffering body.

Reading the body of Ezekiel in Ezek. 1-5 against the female body in 16 offers a new understanding of prophetic embodiment. While the female body is over-determined in both its significance and its suffering, the male body has a less stable position in the textual economy of materiality and meaning. As a suffering male body, Ezekiel does not occupy the familiar female subject position of the unwieldy, excessive body demanding of punishment. His body, too, suffers, but without clear meaning. His pain is not given a place of identification. His bodily form is not subjected to the gaze of the text. And yet this male body still experiences incredible pain. To pursue this pained masculinity and its relation to prophetic embodiment, the book of Ezekiel alone is not enough, not even with recourse to the dramatically sexed and embodied forms of the feminine.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 42.

## The Challenge to Masculinity

And so what sort of masculinity, and what sort of body, do we have in the opening chapters of the book of Ezekiel? The abject, pained, and opened body of the sign acts – a body positioned outside of the boundaries of hegemonic biblical masculinity – does not first emerge from the dust when Ezekiel begins his prophesying. Instead, from the opening lines of the book of Ezekiel, the prophet's masculinity is contested and his body is made open and vulnerable. A priest in exile, Ezekiel clings to his masculine genealogy and his masculine profession (there are no women in the priesthood, no men with disfigured or failed male bodies). And yet masculinity is already in crisis, as the prophet's primary actions are characterized by passivity (receiving the vision of the chariot, falling onto the ground) and openness (eating the scroll, taking in the prophetic call). Unlike the bodies that surround him – fantastic cyborg bodies, the virile divine body, the impenetrable Israelite body – Ezekiel's body is weak, open, soft, unmasculine.

Even the spectral feminine bodies of Ezek. 16 and 23, excessive in their sexuality and their experience of sexual violence, figure in the construction of Ezekiel's body as non-normatively masculine. Like the feminized Israel, Ezekiel's body is opened, but unlike Israel, this openness cannot be looked upon or thematized in the text. Ezekiel, opened, is struck dumb. Like the feminized Israel, Ezekiel is tortured (in 4-5), but his pain remains unspeakable. The representation of female sexuality and the female body in Ezek. 16 (and 23) works, through its hyperbole, to sustain biblical constructions of gender (though this same hyperbole risks slipping into camp and undercutting what it seeks to sustain). Without the fantasy of the sexed and opened feminine to sustain Ezek. 1-5, normative masculinity is challenged. Ezekiel's masculinity, constituted against the female body in Ezek. 16, is negotiated instead against the male bodies of Yahweh and the (here normatively masculine) Israelites. And in this negotiation, the prophet's position within normative biblical masculinity falters, even as his pained and opened body breaks with the desired norms of embodiment in the biblical text. As Ezekiel experiences, prophecy and prophetic embodiment are at odds with successful masculinity. This position is never formulated in words in the text, but it comes through clearly in the suffering and the unmaning of the prophetic body. Instead of communicating a prophetic message, the body communicates its own suffering, as well as the position of extremity that has pushed it outside of hegemonic masculinity.

And so Ezekiel, the pained, passive prophet, fails at masculinity. However, failure is not the only possible way to read masculinity in the sign acts. Instead, we can also read passivity as openness, and the sign acts as containing the possibility, however slim, of a different sort of masculinity and a different experience of embodiment than the dominant models. Prophecy does not simply depend upon the body as a conduit; it also opens the body of the prophet. Ezekiel opening his mouth to swallow the scroll is the clearest example of this openness. However, the sign acts, which simultaneously treat the prophet as a sort of divine puppet and expose the body's capacity for pain, also suggest prophecy as opening the body. And this openness breaks with the dominant representation of biblical masculinity, represented in the opening of Ezekiel by Yahweh himself. Openness, in turn, suggests more than simply a failure to achieve normative, active, virile, penetrative masculinity. The open male body – a paradox according to narrow oppositions of traditional gender roles in the biblical text – also suggests the possibility of a different kind of masculine body, a masculine body that does not dominate others – either symbolically, with beauty and power, or physically. Instead, this is the masculine body as defined by pain, weakness, and openness.

## IV. EZEKIEL'S BODY AT THE END OF HIS PROPHECY

### Masochism and Pleasure

Ezekiel fails to achieve the sort of beautiful and powerful male body that hegemonic biblical masculinity demands, even as he fails to perform this masculinity. Instead, his body is weak, pained, opened; his masculinity, shattered. However, unlike so many other male bodies in the Hebrew Bible that fail at normative masculine embodiment – Mephibosheth, Esau, the unlucky possessors of deformed genitals – Ezekiel's body and actions are not condemned by the text. Instead, as contrasting Ezekiel 1-5 with the excessively scrutinized female body of chapter 16 makes clear, there is an almost studious refusal of judgment, even of attention, toward Ezekiel's body. We should also remember that Ezekiel acts as he does because he is commanded to do so by Yahweh, the same Yahweh whose role in the text is to vouchsafe hegemonic masculinity. Why is Ezekiel's transgression of normative masculinity never punished, or even commented upon?

The prophet's actions, so different from the standards of masculine behavior and male bodies elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, are not condemned or rejected by the text in the way that so many other non-conforming male bodies are. In this textual silence, there is perhaps also a glimmer of possibility, of a possibility of an alternate form of masculinity, a masculinity grounded in weakness and openness, not in domination, strength, and beauty. Jan Tarlin goes the furthest in pursuing this line of thought, suggesting that Ezekiel's actions here are a form of erotic masochism, with the prophet "experiencing a homoerotic ecstasy through self-debasement in submission to (a decidedly male) Yahweh's violent will."<sup>99</sup> Tarlin further argues that the masochism of Ezekiel's visions and sign acts is set against the "triumphant pleasures of male sadism" against women in chapters 16 and 23.<sup>100</sup> These two positions stand in tension; Ezekiel represents "a male subjectivity suffering the effects of a historical trauma and oscillating wildly between the experience of masochistic, ecstatic, utopian ruination on the one hand, and the attempt to defend itself from that experience by sadistically inflicting suffering on women and foreigners on the other."<sup>101</sup> In reframing Ezekiel's failures at masculinity as masochism, Tarlin raises questions of desire, pleasure, and agency. Does Ezekiel, perhaps, wish to be for something other than hegemonic masculinity? Does he desire to submit, to experience openness? This argument – prophetic submission is a form of masochism – has been made about Jeremiah as well,<sup>102</sup> and Mark Jordan has called for a more general investigation of the relationship between religious modes of subjectivity and S/M.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Jan William Tarlin, "Utopia and Pornography in Ezekiel," in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, ed. Timothy K Beal and D. M Gunn, Biblical Limits (London: Routledge, 1997), 175.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>102</sup> See Ken Stone, "You Seduced Me, You Overpowered Me, and You Prevailed': Religious Experience and Homoerotic Sodomasochism in Jeremiah," in *Patriarchs, Prophets and Other Villains*, ed. Lisa Isherwood, Gender, Theology, and Spirituality (London: Equinox, 2007), 101–109. See as well my discussion of masochism in Jeremiah's Confessions in the following chapter.

<sup>103</sup> Mark D. Jordan, *The Ethics of Sex* (Malden, Mass: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002). See especially chapter 7, "Redeeming Pleasures," 155–172, 167 and *passim*.

In raising Tarlin's reading, I am not rejecting my own earlier claims regarding the prophet's suffering. The prophet's body is a tortured body. However, thinking about prophetic pain through the category of masochism helps to connect the particular suffering of the body to the overarching crisis of masculinity. Tarlin's work is most useful in situating this tortured, abased body in relation to the prophet's subjectivity across the book of Ezekiel. Surveying the book as a whole, including the passages of misogynistic violence, he concludes that Ezekiel, violently torn between masochistic self-abasement and sadistic violence against women, is positioned outside of normal masculine subjectivity. He writes,

His male subjectivity in ruins, but still in the throes of a transcendental male homoerotic relationship, feminized but not female, Ezekiel, like Fassbinder's Erwin, is a visitor from the utopia beyond male and female. The return onto male subjectivity of the violence that males usually inflict onto females has, for Ezekiel, created a new form of subjectivity: a person with a penis who has renounced any claim to possessing the phallus. This subjectivity bears and lives the violence that gives rise to the primal human subject in solidarity with other selves rather than inflicting or projecting it upon them. This new subjectivity that voluntarily incorporates symbolic castration in a masculine body is not recognizable to western eyes as either male or female.<sup>104</sup>

Tarlin's key insight is to recognize Ezekiel as positioned outside of the normative boundaries of biblical masculinity. Ezekiel represents "a new form of subjectivity: a person with a penis who has renounced any claim to possessing the phallus." But while I embrace Tarlin's description of Ezekiel's novel form of subjectivity, I want to challenge the weight he places on the feminization of the prophet, as well as his symbolic castration. The transformation of Ezekiel's body is less a process of feminization than a reconfiguration of the category of masculinity. Ezekiel's swallowing of the scroll, his loss of speech, and his eventual turn to performance suggest not the loss of the phallus, but rather the opening of the prophetic body. As with Hosea,<sup>105</sup> the motivating problem for Ezekiel is not lack, but rather openness. Instead of refusing the category of the masculine, Ezekiel experiences transformation within it, suggesting the possibility of discontinuity, vulnerability, and openness. This is an opening of the body and the self alike that goes beyond homoerotic ecstasy into a new imagining of body, sex, and prophecy, as well as their mutual relations. The prophetic body, masochistic or otherwise, offers another possibility of a different masculinity. This alternate masculinity never emerges fully in the text. Still, the book of Ezekiel not only documents the impossible position of the embodied male prophet but also leaves open the suggestion that this impossibility contains, within it, other possible masculinities.

### **The Final Vision**

Ezekiel's body, with its failure to conform to the normative standards of male embodiment, seems to suggest the possibility of a move outside of hegemonic biblical masculinity. And yet this possibility is never pursued in the text. Nowhere in the book of Ezekiel is the prophet's body as significant as in the first five chapters, and nowhere is masculinity as destabilized. Instead of a transformed male body, the book of Ezekiel ends with the transformation of religious space, in the form of a new temple.

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<sup>104</sup> Tarlin, "Utopia and Pornography in Ezekiel," 182.

<sup>105</sup> See chapter 1 above.

Chapters 40-48 of the Book of Ezekiel offer an elaborate vision of the rebuilt temple – its dimensions, construction, and the priests who will serve within it.<sup>106</sup> In a vision that mirrors the theophany at the book’s beginning, Ezekiel is transported to the new Temple: *the hand of Yahweh was upon me, and he brought me there. He brought me in divine visions to the land of Israel and set me upon a very high mountain, and upon was a building like a city to the south.* (40:1b-2). Here, Ezekiel meets a man *whose appearance was like that of bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand.* As on the banks of the river Chebar, Ezekiel has encountered another beautiful, more-than-human being – and yet the effect here is to shore up order, not to destabilize it. While the book began with Yahweh leaving the land to find a prophet, it ends with this same prophet transferred back to the land of Israel, now restored. As the man with the measuring rod shows Ezekiel the temple and the city, his vision of the new Temple gradually expands to include the entire land, and the final chapter lists the tribes of Israel and their location in the new land. The final line of the book gives a name to the city: *And the name of the city from now on shall be: Yahweh is There.*

The vision of the new temple and the new Jerusalem do not simply replace missing architectural structures and geography. Instead, they offer a thoroughgoing restoration and reversal. As Cook writes,

The space of the new land counterbalances and fulfills the initial balance in the opening heaven that had been vouchsafed to this mighty speaker...Ezekiel has, as it were, substituted space for time in this last vision, which extends the Temple outward from more usual measurements into an extent that encompasses the whole space of his lost country.<sup>107</sup>

The fantasy of the rebuilt temple imagines a healing for the trauma of exile. At the same time, it transposes the imagery of the opening theophany from the chariot to the Temple itself, where Yahweh returns to dwell in chapter 43. As Cook points out, the time of disaster is replaced with a utopian imagining of space. Thus the final chapters and the opening chapters, taken together, form both an inclusion and a reversal.

The rebuilt temple does not simply offer a generalized reversal of the trauma of exile, however. It also offers a specific reversal of the pain and openness of the prophetic body. Where Ezekiel’s body is opened by the prophetic word, the interior of the new temple is walled off, rendered separate from the world. Where Ezekiel’s body is degraded, bound and starving, the body of the temple is adorned with finery. Where Ezekiel is ignored and shunned by the Israelites, the temple becomes the object of communal interest and care (46:15; 48:19).

The temple body serves the repository of utopian fantasy, replacing the specific body of the prophet with an abstract and collective “body.” The association of temple and body, so essential to architecture of the book of Ezekiel, is not the prophet’s invention. Instead, the temple

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<sup>106</sup> I will offer a related reading of this scene, which I set against the transformed, “unmanned” body of Daniel Paul Schreber (author of *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*) in “Voluptuous, Tortured, and Unmanned: The Bible and Daniel Paul Schreber,” forthcoming in *The Bible and Posthumanism*, ed. Jennifer Koosed. See Daniel Paul Schreber, *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, trans. Ida Macalpine and Robert A. Hunter (New York: New York Review Books, 2000).

<sup>107</sup> Cook, *The Burden of Prophecy*, 86.

is frequently understood as a body,<sup>108</sup> just as the space of the city is frequently anthropomorphized, often as a woman.<sup>109</sup> In Ezekiel's final vision, the temple returns as reimagined body. However, this body is emphatically *not* a feminine body. As Christl Maier writes,

In the concluding vision of the new temple (Ezekiel 40-48), every trace of Jerusalem's female character as well as her name has been deleted. The space of the city is greatly diminished and separated from the temple precinct (Ezek 45:1-6) in order to express the discontinuity between the new temple and the defiled preexilic city."<sup>110</sup>

The reimagined space of the new city and the new temple are predicated on the removal of the feminization of space. Bennett Simon echoes Maier's argument, writing, "the temple vision is almost totally devoid of feminine elements."<sup>111</sup> Instead, as Simon notes, the form of the temple is traditionally, normatively masculine and shores up hegemonic representations of masculinity. Imagining a new Israelite history and a new Israelite temple body requires, it seems, erasing every trace of the non-normative masculinity staged on a previous symbolic body, the body of the prophet Ezekiel. The prophet's body is replaced by an architectural body whose gender stability opposes the shattered remnants of Ezekiel's own masculinity.

### **Is the Temple an Adequate Consolation?**

This shift in focus to the temple does many things: it brings an end to the agonies of Exile, it furnishes Yahweh with a new and glorious home, it sets forth a proper ordering of space for the many returned Israelite peoples. But the temple does not follow through on the ambiguous promise of Ezekiel's body to destabilize biblical masculinity. Instead, the book of Ezekiel, which begins with a date and a body, thus comes to its end with a place and a name. The imposition of a name marks the ordering of the world into proper categories (*cf* Gen. 1, 2), mirroring the organizing of space and peoples in the description of the temple. The text ends by promoting stability, not undermining it.

Roland Boer has argued that, while the early chapters of Ezekiel are ecstatic, anarchic, and carnivalesque, the anarchic and utopian impulses in the text are ultimately unsustainable. What begins as critique and an instability is ultimately reintegrated into the dominant system, in what Boer calls "a rather bleak prospect for any subversive and marginal practice, whether in prophecy or metal music" (his article also undertakes a comparison of Ezekiel to Axl Rose).<sup>112</sup> By concluding with the restoration of the book of Ezekiel ends up reinstating order, not subverting it. The traditional system of categories, represented by the temple and the law, are reestablished. This is represented textually by the measuring the temple, which the text takes care to repeat, emphasizing its authority. In addition, Ezekiel experiences another vision of Yahweh:

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<sup>108</sup> Mary E. Mills, *Alterity, Pain and Suffering in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 479 (New York: T & T Clark, 2007). 1 Cor. 6:19-20.

<sup>109</sup> Christl Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>111</sup> Bennett Simon, "Ezekiel's Geometric Vision of the Restored Temple: From the Rod of His Wrath to the Reed of His Measuring," *The Harvard Theological Review* 102, no. 4 (October 1, 2009): 428.

<sup>112</sup> Boer, *Knockin' on Heaven's Door*, 107.



<sup>2</sup>And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. And the land shone with his glory. <sup>3</sup>The appearance<sup>113</sup> I saw was like the appearance I had seen when he came to destroy<sup>114</sup> the city, and the appearance I had seen at the River Chebar, and I fell toward it. <sup>4</sup>And the glory of Yahweh entered the temple by the gate, which was to the east. <sup>5</sup>The spirit lifted me and brought me to the inner courtyard, and behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the temple. <sup>6</sup>I heard a voice speaking<sup>115</sup> to me from the temple. A man was standing beside me. <sup>7</sup>He said to me, mortal, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell among the children of Israel forever. The children of Israel will no longer defile my holy place, neither they nor their kings, with their whoring and with the corpses of their kings in their death. (Ezek. 43:2-7)

This vision is in close textual relationship to the vision that opens the book of Ezekiel. In the temple vision, as in the theophany on the river Chebar, Yahweh comes in a confusion of sound and light, a fiery glory that once again leave Ezekiel lying on his face in the dust. As if the parallels are not obvious enough, the prophet takes pains to add, *The vision I saw was like the vision I had seen, with the coming of corruption upon the city,*<sup>116</sup> and the vision that I had seen by the river Chebar (a degree of anxious over-explanation that perhaps calls to mind the attempts to explain the sign acts). But while Yahweh's first appearance to Ezekiel brought warnings about a hardheaded people and promises of prophetic failure, here the vision is one of holiness and reunion. Everything wrong is righted again; everything old is new again. In Boer's terms, subversive and marginal practice (including Ezekiel's practice of subversive practice of prophecy and marginal experience of embodiment), are subsumed into the dominant hegemonic ideals.

While Boer's main concern is with anarchism and hegemony, his analysis of Ezekiel speaks to the problems of masculinity and embodiment as well. The text, in substituting a restored temple body for an open and abject male human body, stabilizes the ruling ideology of the text. But these accomplishments come at a price – the erasure of the specific, sexed, suffering, and abject but insistently material body of the prophet. In ending with Ezekiel's visionary transport to the rebuilt Temple, the book neatly leaves behind the messy question of prophetic embodiment, of the suffering and linguistic crisis and fraught masculinity that figure so prominently in the opening chapters of the book. And yet this quick move to leave behind the body of the prophet, I suggest, is likewise what makes the conclusion of the book of Ezekiel, in the last analysis, unsatisfying. The text ends with a lovely architectural vision that is also a

<sup>113</sup> *The vision*. Reading with LXX ἡ ὄρασις, *the vision*; MT כְּמֵרָאָה הַמֵּרָאָה, *like the appearance of the appearance*, reflects some corruption.

<sup>114</sup> MT בְּבֵאִי, *when I came* as בָּבֵאוּ, *when he came*. MT בְּבֵאִי לְשַׁחֵת אֶת־הָעִיר, *when I came to destroy the city* represents the corruption of בָּבֵאוּ into בְּבֵאִי through ו/י confusion or, less likely, theological motivations. LXX εἰσεπορευόμεν τοῦ χρίσαι contains the same first person error; τοῦ χρίσαι reflects a corruption of לְשַׁחֵת to תחלמש (from חמש). Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48*, ed. Frank Moore Cross and Klaus Baltzer (Fortress Press, 1983), 4087n3b, 408n3c.

<sup>115</sup> *A voice speaking*. LXX φωνή λαλοῦντο, reflecting Hebrew קוֹל מְדַבֵּר; and the *hithpael* participle has fallen out in MT. On the justification for LXX over MT here, see Azzan Yadin, "קול as Hypostasis in the Hebrew Bible," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 4 (2003): 608–609.

<sup>116</sup> Ezek. 10 is also an important intertext for the theophanies at the book's beginning and end.

sleight of hand, a misdirection away from the prophet's body, but we are not fooled. Building a new temple does not erase the prior sufferings of the body and its painful, pregnant openings. Ezekiel's body lies unconsolated in the dust. Ezekiel has no consolation of transformation, no radical self re-imagining in female form. Instead, like the infamous women of Ezekiel 16 and 23, the body of Ezekiel himself likewise remains, a messy streak of embodiment that mars the book's neat attempts to evacuate the body.

In the opening chapters of the book of Ezekiel, the body of the prophet is wounded, pained, and opened. And yet this body, in the mist of its suffering, also suggests the possibility of a different, non-hegemonic representation of biblical masculinity. This masculinity never emerges fully in the text of Ezekiel; its openness is written over by the closed-off walls of the rebuilt temple that bring the book to its end. And yet still, the possibility is present, if largely unspoken, in the text. Opened by the word of Yahweh, Ezekiel's body performs, suffers, experiences abjection, and defies the normative expectations of prophecy. While in Hosea the negotiation of prophetic embodiment is displaced onto the female body, in Ezekiel the prophet's own body serves this role – though not without disruptive and painful consequences. Still, Ezekiel's pain is also the pain of imagining a different sort of masculinity, and a different sort of male body – a possibility that appears, however briefly, in the opening chapters of Ezekiel.

### Chapter 3

#### JEREMIAH AND THE GENDER OF PROPHETIC SOUND: VOICING MASCULINITY IN THE CONFESSIONS<sup>1</sup>

This chapter takes up the voice, in particular the voice of the prophet Jeremiah, as an instantiation of embodied prophetic masculinity. I begin this chapter with two wagers: that the voice has a particular and meaningful relationship to embodiment, and that the voice is a site where prophetic masculinity is destabilized. The voice, to be sure, is not identical with the body. And yet it nevertheless maintains a peculiar, intimate relationship with the body. Indeed, the liminal status of the voice – between body and non-body, or between body and “soul,” makes it an ideal vantage point for a critical exploration of prophetic embodiment.

In the previous chapter, a study of the tortured and excessive body in the book of Ezekiel, I described extreme suffering as having a shattering effect on normative masculinity and embodiment alike. There, I treated the prophet’s inability to speak as one sign of a larger crisis staged on and through the body, disturbing Ezekiel’s relationship to hegemonic masculinity. Here, instead of treating silence and sound as expressions of secondary phenomena associated with language and with the body, I will begin with the voice. In particular, I will take up the vocal expressions of the prophet Jeremiah in the Confessions, a series of first person laments found in chapters 11-20 of the book of Jeremiah. In these texts *voice* assumes the significance of *body* in Ezekiel’s sign acts and, like the body in Ezekiel, has a destabilizing effect on the masculine economy of representation.

The book of Jeremiah has a set of native concepts concerning gender, which largely accord with the representations of sex and gender found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> As in most ancient literature, masculinity is associated with mind, order, and authority, while femininity is associated with body, chaos, and disorder. However, Jeremiah’s Confessions subvert this norm. On the levels of sound, structure, and content, Jeremiah’s voice mimics not normative masculine discourse, but rather feminine sound. Furthermore, Jeremiah’s voice also sounds a great deal like the voice of the hysteric, which itself represents a destabilizing encounter between sound and gender. Jeremiah, of course, is not a hysteric – the modern category is anachronistic to apply to the biblical text – but the hysterical form and affect of his voice gain meaning when read in relation to hysteria, as well as the twentieth century psychoanalytic discourses that coalesce around it. Highlighting the ways that prophetic sound breaks with normative masculine sound points, in turn, to the prophet’s voice as a site of critique and resistance. Jeremiah’s refusal of normative masculine sound in favor of a different, non-phallic vocality destabilizes the larger configuration of gender in the text while opening a space for a different kind of masculinity and a different masculine voice.

In Jeremiah’s Confessions, the voice of the prophet is remarkably unstable, shifting between genres and speakers and occasionally abandoning speech entirely in favor of a cry that

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this argument was presented at the Gender, Sexuality, and the Bible Group of the Society Biblical Literature at the 2010 Annual Meeting. I am grateful for the feedback I received from participants.

<sup>2</sup> See further the introduction.

pierces the text. This cry links Jeremiah's speech to the larger soundscape of the book of Jeremiah and introduces the close relationship between Jeremiah's speech acts and certain genres of speech and sound marked as feminine within the biblical text. The deep affinity of Jeremiah's speech in the Confessions with what the biblical text codes as feminine sound undercuts the association of prophecy with orderly, regulated masculine discourse. It also calls into question the status of prophetic masculinity. Voice and sound challenge the hegemonic formation of masculinity in Jeremiah's Confessions and offer the possibility of alternative configurations and understandings of sexes, bodies, and sensations.

## I. JEREMIAH AND HIS CONFESSIONS

### A Brief Introduction to Jeremiah

The Book of Jeremiah is a book organized around imminent disaster. Called as a prophet from within his mother's womb – *Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I sanctified you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations* (Jer. 1:5) – Jeremiah prophesies the destruction of Judah, the fall of Jerusalem, and the Babylonian captivity. This message of impending destruction is shot through with great personal suffering, both emotional and physical. *My insides! My insides! I writhe in pain!* (Jer. 4:19) and *My heart is sick* (Jer. 8:18), the prophet complains, and yet he continues to prophesy, antagonizing the Judean king and people. As Jeremiah himself admits, his words are reviled by his listeners, who plot repeatedly to take his life and more than once cast him into prison.<sup>3</sup> He likewise has a fraught relationship with the king and with his prophetic contemporaries. The first half of the book of Jeremiah foretells the Babylonian exile; the final chapters of the book narrate the prophet's forced exile into Egypt and the fall of Jerusalem.

The relationship between the narrative arc of the book of Jeremiah, the life experiences of its author (or authors), and the larger dynamics of sixth century Judean history are all major concerns for readers of Jeremiah.<sup>4</sup> The major commentaries on Jeremiah outline three possible approaches to this problem of how to read the prophetic work. The first approach, clearly demonstrated by the commentaries of William Holladay and more recently Jack Lundbom, treats Jeremiah as a historical figure who acted as a prophet in the final years of the kingdom of Judah. This historical approach assumes that at least some of Jeremiah's words are at least partially

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah describes plots against his life in 11:19, 17:17-18, 18:19-23, and 20:10, and is opposed by Hananiah in 28:1-17. Jehoiakim seeks to arrest Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch in 36:26, and Jeremiah is imprisoned in 38:1-13.

<sup>4</sup> Complicating the question of textual history, the Hebrew (MT) and Septuagint (LXX) versions of Jeremiah are quite different. LXX is a seventh to an eighth shorter than MT. In addition, the two texts have a different internal ordering of the shared materials, particularly the Oracles Against the Nations. Seeking to explain the differences, Holladay notes that proto-G was likely preserved in Egypt, while the proto-MT was in Palestine. (See William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 6–7.). Holladay argues for the primacy of the longer MT text, while both McKane and Emmanuel Tov claim that it represents an expansion of LXX. McKane further suggests that the text thus offers an early example of the accretionary “rolling corpus” model (Emanuel Tov, “The Literary History of the Book of Jeremiah in Light of Its Textual History,” in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 363–384; William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), liii.) I agree with the basic primacy of LXX, though without necessarily ascribing an originality to its “kernels.” I will nevertheless adjudicate each variant individually, with reasons given in the notes.

preserved in the poetry (found in what Sigmund Mowinckel termed the “A” stratum of the text), and that his life bears some real relation to the biographical material (set forth in the “B” Stratum.)<sup>5</sup> A second critical position refuses a biographical hermeneutic but holds onto the idea that the layered text possesses, as McKane puts it in his commentary, a “kernel” of original text. This original fragment has been greatly expanded and altered through the process of literary production.<sup>6</sup> A third approach, pioneered by Robert Carroll in his commentary and embraced by a number of recent scholars, rejects both the question of the historical individual and the problem of the literary original in favor of an ideological and critical analysis that emphasizes incoherence, internal contradiction, polyphony, and even failure.<sup>7</sup>

In reading Jeremiah (as in reading the other prophets discussed in this dissertation), I am not interested in the pursuit for a historical individual, a historical text, or a historical truth. Nor is my primary concern dismantling the historical and historicist claims of other scholars – a task that Carroll’s commentary, in particular, undertakes brilliantly.<sup>8</sup> Instead, taking up the prophetic voice as voice suggests a move beyond the impasse of Jeremiah as literary character, Jeremiah as ideological construct, and Jeremiah as historical individual. I will use the Confessions as a site to question and destabilize the text’s articulation of prophetic masculinity. As such, my methods are literary and gender and queer theoretical, not historical. My concern is not with a historical individual who spoke or wrote these words, but rather with the relationship between the masculinity of the prophetic figure and the quality of the voice.

And nowhere is voice more important than in the “Confessions,” a collection of texts found (interspersed with other material) in chapters 11-20 of the Book of Jeremiah (Jer. 11:18-23, 12:1-6, 15:10-14, 15:15-21, 17:14-18, 18:18-23, 20:7-13, and 20:14-18).<sup>9</sup> In these texts, which are presented in the first person, Jeremiah speaks back against the God who has called him to prophesy, complaining of the pain and personal suffering his prophetic vocation has wrought for him. The name “Confessions” does not appear in the Bible, and the passages that we group together under this modern appellation are not marked or set off from the remainder of the text in

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<sup>5</sup> The composition history of the book of Jeremiah is nearly as fraught as the life of its eponymous prophet. The text is composed of three interwoven textual strata: (A) prophetic poetry, (B) narratives of the prophet’s life, and the previously mentioned (C) Deuteronomistic interludes and editorial expansions. First identified by B. Duhm in 1901, this tripartite model of the text was given its classical formulation by Sigmund Mowinckel in 1914 and is widely accepted by contemporary scholars. My work in this chapter will engage mostly (but not exclusively) with the poetry of the A stratum. See Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia: Erklärt*, Kurzer Hand-commentar zum Alten Testament Abt. 11 (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1901); Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition Des Buches Jeremia*, Videnskapselskapets Skrifter 1913, no. 5 (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad, 1914). For commentary on the text, see Holladay, *Jeremiah*; William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26-52* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989); Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> McKane calls this a “rolling corpus.” William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah: Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI-LII* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), lxxv.

<sup>7</sup> Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, 1st American ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986). See as well Robert P. Carroll, “Century’s End: Jeremiah Studies at the Beginning of the Third Millennium,” in *Recent Research on the Major Prophets*, ed. Alan J. Hauser (Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 217–231.

<sup>8</sup> Carroll, *Jeremiah*.

<sup>9</sup> This scheme for the Confessions follows Diamond; O’Connor offers a slightly different division of the texts. Happily, the ordering of the Confessions is the same in both MT and G. See Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*; Kathleen M. O’Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Their Role in Chapters 1-25* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1987).

any way. In fact, nearly every scholar who writes about the texts begins with a few requisite remarks about the inadequacy and anachronism of the name “Confessions,” sometimes proposing an alternative as well. Thus Holladay calls the passages “complaints,” McKane prefers “laments,” and Diamond hedges, referring to the “so-called confessions” and “the texts generally known as the confessions.”<sup>10</sup> Despite this scholarly ambivalence with respect to naming, the texts do share a number of stylistic and generic parallels, and it is widely accepted by scholars that they bear a special resemblance to each other and are distinct from the rest of the book of Jeremiah.

The debate over what to call the Confessions is linked to a more complicated interpretive question concerning the “I” in this body of texts. How do we understand the prophetic speaker? Though this is always a concern in the prophetic literature, it is particularly significant in the Confessions, given the parallels between the texts and other genres, such as the lament psalms, which are often understood as collective. While traditional biblical scholarship (and premodern interpretations), accepted the prophetic speaker as Jeremiah himself,<sup>11</sup> mid-twentieth century scholars responded by arguing for reading the passages as communal laments, emphasizing the generic and stylistic parallels to the psalms of lament.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, reading the Confessions as a communal lament that bears no relation to the life of the prophet avoids the autobiographical fallacy that plagues so many readings of the text.<sup>13</sup> However, this form of reading goes too far in ignoring the working of the text *as literature*, with a complex relationship to its community of origin. As McKane writes against the reduction of the text to a purely communal expression of distress,

Whether we say that 10.19f, 22-24 are attributable to a personified community, or whether we say that they are attributable to Jeremiah, the reference of our words is the same, if Jeremiah is the poet. In a deeper appreciation of the passage any attempt to make a distinction between Jeremiah and the community with which he identifies himself is wooden and unreal.<sup>14</sup>

While McKane is writing against a specific scholar (Henning Reventlow<sup>15</sup>) and about a particular passage (Jer. 10.19f, 22-24), his words are a useful reminder regarding the Confessions as a whole. Like McKane, I reject the idea that “Jeremiah” substitutes for the Israelite nation as a

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<sup>10</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 358; McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, liii; Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> In the more historicist articulation of this argument, Jeremiah’s complaints represent a true account of the prophet’s persecution; other readers emphasize not the difficulty of the prophetic vocation but rather the individual experience of suffering. Thus John Skinner writes, “To Jeremiah prayer is more than petition. It is intimate converse with God, in which his whole inner life is laid bare, with all its perplexities and struggles and temptations; and he unburdens himself of the distress which weighs down his spirit, in the sure confidence that he is heard and understood by God to whom all things are naked and open.” In this reading, the Confessions offer direct access to Jeremiah’s personal experience of suffering, as well as his call to prophetic vocation. John Skinner, *Prophecy & Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah*, Cunningham Lectures 1920 (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922), 213–214.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Henning Reventlow, *Liturgie und prophetisches Ich bei Jeremia*, [1. Aufl. (Gütersloh): Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1963).

<sup>13</sup> For example, Skinner, *Prophecy & Religion*.

<sup>14</sup> McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, xciii.

<sup>15</sup> Reventlow, *Liturgie und prophetisches Ich bei Jeremia*.

whole. I will push McKane's argument further, however, and suggest that what matters is not the so much Jeremiah the poet, but rather "Jeremiah" as represented by the poet.

In these poetic texts, sound and voice play an important role in establishing and contesting meaning. Before turning to the instabilities of masculinity in the Confessions, I want briefly to trace a brief soundscape<sup>16</sup> of the Confessions (where the sounds are, perhaps unsurprisingly, primarily masculine), before taking up the ways that feminine sound is represented in the book of Jeremiah and in the Hebrew Bible more generally. In Jeremiah, women's sound is associated with marriage, birth, and death – all powerfully liminal moments that center on sex, the body, or both. Jeremiah himself, however, produces sounds that fit into this peripheral female use of voice more than into the ordinary realms of masculine discourse. Sound is an essential starting point to understand the Confessions.

### **Reading the Confessions: the Problem of Sound**

Sound has great importance in the biblical text, greater than we as modern readers, steeped in visual culture, sometimes realize. Much of the Hebrew Bible is audiocentric, with sound providing meaning, richness, and a connection to the divine in the text.<sup>17</sup> In the case of Yahweh, the biblical God whose image cannot be represented, sound provides the primary form of access to the divine. (Even in the folkloric stories of Genesis, Yahweh most frequently manifests through sound, as when he makes himself known to Adam and Eve through the sound of walking in the garden, or in his repeated vocal addresses to Abraham). The voice of Yahweh is an important component of the aural texture of the text, or what R. Murray Schafer terms the "soundscape."<sup>18</sup> A soundscape, as the name suggests, is a landscape of sound, a description of the ways in which sound is present (and absent) in a place or text.<sup>19</sup> In the case of a text such as Genesis, the soundscape is relatively straightforward. In Genesis 3, for example, we have, in addition to the sound of Yahweh in the garden (Gen. 3:8) the voices of Adam, Eve, and the serpent, the sound of the pains of childbirth, perhaps the sound of a needle sewing clothes (first from leaves, then from leather). In the Confessions, in contrast, the soundscape is richly complex – and this complexity is essential to the text and its construction of meaning.

In Jeremiah, including the Confessions, the search for the soundscape begins with a challenge not present in Genesis: all the sounds in the text are explicitly filtered through the voice of the prophet Jeremiah, who is presented as speaking (or perhaps writing) the text. The voice that speaks the Confessions is always, on some level, the voice of Jeremiah (though this voice sometimes ventriloquizes both Yahweh and the prophet's adversaries). And yet mediated through this voice, we also find a broad range of sounds. There is the clamor of battle and death

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<sup>16</sup> The term "soundscape," coined by R. Murray Schafer in 1977, describes the acoustic environment and offers the sonic equivalent to the landscape. See Raymond Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Soundscape* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Hector Avalos, "Introducing Sensory Criticism in Biblical Studies: Audiocentricity and Visiocentricity," in *This Aabled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper, Semeia Studies no. 55 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 47–59.

<sup>18</sup> Schafer, *The Soundscape*.

<sup>19</sup> Schafer's original description of the soundscape was as much prescriptive as descriptive, privileging certain desired sounds over and against undesirable background noise. For a useful critique, see Ari Y. Kelman, "Rethinking the Soundscape: A Critical Genealogy of a Key Term in Sound Studies," *The Senses and Society* 5, no. 2 (2010): 212–234.

by the sword (Jer. 11:22), the crackling and hissing of fire (15:14), the frightening racket of the raiding party (8:11), the silence of the grave and womb (20:17-18). While the absence of sound suggests an absence of life itself, the sounds that *are* present also represent threats.

Interspersed into across soundscape, the most important sounds in the text are human ones, uneasily balanced between articulate vocality and incoherent noise. These human sounds include cries, shouts, whispers, and whimpers. The human cries that rise from the soundscape of the Confessions, while still filtered through the voice of Jeremiah himself, echo across multiple implied speakers. Jeremiah's friends and family cry out for his life: *For even your brothers and your father's house, even they deal treacherously with you, Even they are in full cry after you;*<sup>20</sup> (גַּם־הֵמָּה קָרְאוּ אַחֲרַיךָ מְלֵאָה ; 12:6; compare 11:21). Jeremiah cries to Yahweh for healing and deliverance: *Heal me, Yahweh, and I will be healed, deliver me and I will be delivered, for I praise you!* (כִּי תִהְיֶה לְתִי אֶתְהָא 17:14). A cry rises up from the home of the prophet's enemies: *Let a cry be heard from their homes (תִּשְׁמַע זַעֲקָה מִבְּתֵינֵהֶם), when you bring a raiding party upon them suddenly, For they have dug a pit<sup>21</sup> to capture me, and they have hidden a trap for my feet* (18:22). While the content of each of these cries is different, as well as the language with which they are described, they share a structure of verbal interruption, as well as a high degree of emotional intensity. This intensity, moreover, is nearly always predicated upon suffering. More than marking presence, sound becomes a primary signifier of the affects of suffering, especially pain.

The cry is not limited to the sonic backdrop of the Confessions. Instead, it also infiltrates and dominates Jeremiah's own speech. The cry that the prophet utters is a very different sort of speech act – and a different quality of speech – than ordinary discourse or even ordinary prophecy. Jeremiah, even more than the other voices he mimics, cannot stop crying. He cries to Yahweh for deliverance (*Heal me, Yahweh, and I will be healed, deliver me and I will be delivered for I praise you*, Jer. 7:14), cries out the words *violence and ruin* (*Whenever I speak, I cry; I call out 'violence and ruin!'*<sup>22</sup>; כִּי־מִדִּי אֲדַבֵּר אֶזְעַק חֲמָס וְשׂוֹד אֶקְרָא , 20:8), cries out in pain (*Why is my pain unceasing? Why is my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?* 15:18). At points, as in 20:8, the text thematizes the verbal structure of calling; at other moments (as in 15:18), Jeremiah's crying out is communicated exclusively through the content of his utterance, without specific verbs marking the form of outcry. And in 15:10, Jeremiah drops referential language entirely, raising the purely affective cries of pure lament, אוֹי ('ōy).<sup>23</sup> This linguistic outburst,

<sup>20</sup> *Even they are in full cry after you.* (גַּם־הֵמָּה קָרְאוּ אַחֲרַיךָ מְלֵאָה) MT, following O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*, 11n24. LXX expands to καὶ οὗτοι ἠθέτησάν σε, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐβόησαν, ἐκ τῶν ὀπίσω σου ἐπισυνήχθησαν, *and they have cried out; they are gathered together in pursuit of you.*

<sup>21</sup> *A pit:* MT reads הִשָּׂה, *conversation*; emend to הִשָּׂה, *pit*. MT reflects waw/yod confusion. LXX reads λογον for Hebrew שיחה, misunderstanding הִשָּׂה/הִשָּׂה, *pit*, as הִשָּׂה, *conversation (a confusion of ש and ה)*, Here the parallelism clearly supports הִשָּׂה/הִשָּׂה, *pit*.

<sup>22</sup> *Whenever I speak, I cry; I call out 'violence and ruin!':* Reading with MT. LXX reads ὅτι παροῦ λόγῳ μου γελάσομαι, ἀθεσίαν καὶ ἀλαιπωρίαν ἐπικαλέσομαι, *because I will laugh with my bitter speech, I will call upon faithlessness and restlessness*, reflecting a different Vorlage. As Diamond writes, "MT represents a more complex meaning and is preferable" Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 251.

<sup>23</sup> אוֹי occurs eight times (Jer. 4:13, 4:31, 6:4, 10:19, 13:27, 15:10, 45:3, and 48:46) but only once in the Confessions (15:10). The related cry הוֹי occurs eleven times (22:13 and 18, 22:18 (four times), 23:1, 30:7, 34:5, 47:6, 48:1, and 50:27 in Jeremiah, but never in the Confessions.



lacking a fixed meaning, go even further than the other cries or outcries in interrupting the ordinary function of language.<sup>24</sup>

Reflecting upon Jeremiah's outbursts and outcries, Geoffrey Hartman has argued that for Jeremiah the "cry" is less an expression of excessive emotion than an instantiation of a specific genre of speech. Of one of texts of the Confessions, 20:7-12, he writes,

Jeremiah being a prophet, the status of language or of the cry is at least as important as the genre concept of prayer. Formal analysis can type vv 7-12 as a prayer. But if there were a genre called "the cry," surely we would consider it at least as fitting. I do not mean psychologically that Jeremiah cries from the depths of his soul; I mean something like "whenever I speak, I shout" or "I cry violence and plunder."<sup>25</sup>

In directing attention to the cry as genre, Hartman usefully moves beyond the reduction of Jeremiah's words to a simple outpouring of emotion (the figure of the "tragic" Jeremiah<sup>26</sup>), as well as to distinguish between the cry in the Confessions and other forms of ordinary speech. The cry, especially the cry of "*Violence and Ruin!*" (וְשִׁי וְסִמְרָה) is a specific linguistic event, Jeremiah's combination of words and sound is deliberate and meaningful. And yet the category of genre does not exhaust the significance of the cry in Jeremiah's Confessions. Instead, the performative cry of "*Violence and Ruin!*" (וְשִׁי וְסִמְרָה) and the purely linguistic cry of וְיָאֵי ('*ôy*) exist on a spectrum with other interruptive, affective forms of vocality, all of which we can associate with the basic structure of the cry, if not all of its generic specifics.

There is also a complex interplay here between content, sound, and voice. Jeremiah's voice in the Confessions is different from other discursive modes, not only because his words suggest a specific intercessional or perhaps legal, genre, but also because of the way that sound exceeds voice and implicates the body in the scene of prophecy. In the Confessions, vocality is not limited to a singular, self-evident, psychologically continuous speaker, or even to the realm of linguistic intelligibility. Instead, Jeremiah wails, complains, accuses, and consoles, even as other voices cry against him, and the sounds of battle, pain, and destruction echo across the soundscape. These sounds are layered over each other, even blurred, as the text switches between speakers, registers, and thematic content. These sounds, in addition, have a richly complicated relation to the body.

### The Voice and the Body

In addition to the soundscape, the relationship between the voice, the body that utters it, and the category of meaning is fundamentally important to understanding the Confessions. The voice is at once a *part* of the body – a voice, ordinarily, requires a throat – an *effect* of the body, and something *separate* from the body. Mladen Dolar argues that the most important characteristic of the voice is its ambivalence. The voice is consistently positioned in-between: between sound and meaning, between body and self, between self and other. This structure of ambivalence and interstitiality defines the voice, which is at once essential to and excluded from

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<sup>24</sup> The highly fixed language that Jeremiah employs to curse his birth (15:10, 20:14-18; compare Job 3) serves a similar function, though it is less fully developed.

<sup>25</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, "Jeremiah 20:7-12: A Literary Response," in *The Biblical Mosaic: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Robert Polzin and Eugene Rothman (Philadelphia, Pa: Fortress Press, 1982), 190.

<sup>26</sup> Skinner, *Prophecy & Religion*, 263.

the meaning, which it brings to presence through utterance. A similar ambivalence and ambiguity appears in the relation of the voice to the body and the self. The voice at once provides materiality to the self and binds the signifier to the body; “the voice is the flesh of the soul, its ineradicable materiality, by which the soul can never be rid of the body.”<sup>27</sup> Simultaneously, however, the voice challenges the production of mutual presence in body and self, as its own source remains hidden. The cry comes from Jeremiah’s body, and yet the divine word comes to Jeremiah’s body from outside. The interstitiality of the voice again emerges in the relation of the body and the self to the other. Here again the voice is located “between-the-two.”<sup>28</sup>

Dolar’s study of the voice thus gives us two important concepts: the voice as ambivalent liminality and the voice as material remainder. The wording of the latter phrase comes from Michelle Duncan, who explores the “material remainders” of vocal performance. Duncan writes, “Voice’s elusiveness, its ineffability as invisible remains does not negate its presence. Aural spectacle brings forth material ephemera that continue to act in and on the body long after they disappear.”<sup>29</sup> The voice, while immaterial, leaves material traces. Both the pains in Jeremiah’s bodies and the social (and sonic) chaos that he engenders are material traces of the “aural spectacle.” Both these material remainders and the ambivalent liminality of the voice are at play in Jeremiah’s Confessions. The literary effect of the text depends, to some degree, on this blurring of sound, creating a cry that at once rises from the mouth of the prophet and the text as a whole. This is paradoxical interiority and exteriority of language that Dolar describes as the voice “between the two” and that Jeremiah evokes with *your words were found and I ate them* (Jer. 15:16) and *You know what comes forth from my lips, and it has been in front of your face* (Jer. 17:16) – the voice as simultaneously part of the body and separate from it. The cry in the Confessions is at intimately a part of the body and foreign to it, a part of meaning and external to it. The cry possesses the prophet and overpowers him, even as he describes himself as overpowered by Yahweh (20:7). The voice is thus a part of the prophetic body, even as it poses a difficulty for the prophetic body.

The foreignness of the cry and the way that sound overtakes the body is thematized elsewhere in the Confessions. Jer. 17:15-16 presents the word of Yahweh that the prophet voices as a semi-autonomous, even foreign, presence:

<sup>15</sup>*Look, they say to me, ‘Where is the word of Yahweh? Let it come!’*

<sup>16</sup>*But I did not hasten away from being a shepherd after you, but I did not desire the calamitous day.*<sup>30</sup>

*You know what comes forth from my lips, and it has been in front of your face.*

Speech is imagined as coming to the prophet from outside, and as coming forth to presence before the face of Yahweh. Sound is likewise linked to knowledge and to desire. Yahweh’s knowledge of his prophet consists of knowing that which passes from Jeremiah’s lips. Sound is the primary link between deity and prophet, even as the dangerous break between Jeremiah and

<sup>27</sup> Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 71.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Michelle Duncan, “The Operatic Scandal of the Singing Body: Voice, Presence, Performativity,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 16, no. 3 (November 1, 2004): 303, 304.

<sup>30</sup> *Calamitous day*: reading with MY. LXX has *και ημεραν ανθρωπου*, and *day of man*, reflecting the corruption of אָנוּשׁ to אָנוּשׁ, *man*.

his countrymen first occurs in sound, as the others accuse him of lacking Yahweh's word. Similarly, in 15:16-18, Jeremiah complains,

*<sup>16</sup>Your words were found and I ate them.  
Your words became a joy to me and a delight to my heart,  
For I am called by your name, Yahweh of Hosts  
<sup>17</sup>I did not sit in the circle of merry-makers and rejoice.  
Because of your hand I have sat alone,  
For you have filled me with wrath.  
<sup>18</sup>Why is my pain unceasing?  
Why is my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?  
Ah! You have become like a dried up well,<sup>31</sup> water that cannot be relied upon.*

Prophetic speech begins as exterior and is only subsequently incorporated into the body of the prophet.<sup>32</sup> The quality of prophetic speech sets it apart from other possible sound acts – here rejoicing, elsewhere as speech that is not a cry. Furthermore, sound brings with it pain and the threat of deception. The cry here suggests the scream of pain and the shriek of grief, as well as the conventionalized wail of lament. The cry likewise at once invokes the body that produces it and moves outside of it. And layered under this cry are a number of other sounds, many of them human, nearly all of them somehow linked to pain and suffering – and linked, as well, to the biblical notion of the feminine.

## II. SOUND, VOICE, AND GENDER

### Sound and Voice in the Hebrew Bible

With this soundscape of Jeremiah's Confessions in mind, it is worth considering, briefly, the ways in which voice is represented in biblical Hebrew more broadly. The Hebrew term has a broader range of meanings than the English *voice*, the Latin *vox*, and the Greek φωνή. The Hebrew word קול (*qôl*) has the base meaning not of *voice* but of *sound* or even *noise*, without specifying this sound as of human origin. קול describes the sound of thunder (Job 38:26), of crashing waters (Ps. 93:4), of fire (Joel 2:5), and of תְּהוֹם, *Têhôm*, the primordial deep (Hab. 3:10). In 1 Kings 19:12, Elijah hears God pass by in קול דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה, *a sound of soft stillness*.<sup>33</sup> Even when קול is applied to people, it does not always refer to the ordered utterances with term speech, but also to a din or shout (Jer. 11:16). People have קולות, but so too do lions (Jer. 2:15), birds (Ps. 104:12, Qoh. 12:4), and musical instruments, including the שׁוֹפָר (*šôfār*), *shofar*, a sort of horn or trumpet (Exod. 19:16).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Dried up well*: כֶּבֶד, a substantivized adjective. The Hebrew contains a difficult to translate double meaning of lying/deceit and of a dried-up water source.

<sup>32</sup> This idea becomes literal in Ezekiel's swallowing the scroll, discussed in chapter 2.

<sup>33</sup> The translation of קול דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה is difficult. דְּמָמָה is a noun with the meaning of *silence* or *whisper* (HALOT, referencing Duhm's *Gottgeweihten* 16, suggests *vibrant silence*), modified by the adjective דַּקָּה *thin, light, soft*. LXX translates φωνή ἁῤῥαξ λεπτή, *the sound of a light breeze* (NETS). NRSV translates *a sound of sheer silence*; NJPS has *a soft murmuring sound*, with the note "Others, 'a still small voice.'" *A still small voice* is found in the KJV and ASV.

<sup>34</sup> On קול, see as well Yadin, "קול as Hypostasis in the Hebrew Bible."

Furthermore, in biblical Hebrew the קול is considered so intrinsic to being that it is frequently used in the text as a guarantor of presence. As the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* describes, “The effect of the sounds normally accompanying a person’s presence is so crucial that the expression ‘there is no human *qôl* (*’ên qôl ’adām* [אין קול אדם]) is the equivalent of ‘no one is there’ (*’ên ’îš* [אין איש], 2 K. 7:10).”<sup>35</sup> Presence in sound is the basic mark of presence as such. In linking presence and sound so intimately, the Hebrew usage anticipates what Derrida comes to call phonocentrism. According to Derrida, the voice serves as the marker of presence. In this narrative of voice, which Derrida terms “phonocentrism” the voice is understood as meaningful and comprehensible, as “full speech that was fully *present* (present to itself, to its signified, to the other, to the very condition of the theme of presence in general.”<sup>36</sup> Voice, קול, guarantees presence, at least according to the norms of the Hebrew text.<sup>37</sup>

Contrasted with the Hebrew קול, the Greek word for *voice*, φωνή (*phōnē*) has a narrower range of meanings. Far more than קול, φωνή is linked to the human voice and to the relatively limited realm of articulate sounds. While it can be used to mean *language, speech, or discourse*, the emphasis remains on intelligibility and not on sound as such.<sup>38</sup> By using the same word for *voice, sound, and even noise*, the Hebrew קול preserves a degree of ambiguity and fluidity between the categories. φωνή, however, is limited in its meanings. Yet despite this more limited range of meaning in the Greek, the Septuagint consistently uses it to render קול even as “in doing so it burdens the Greek term.”<sup>39</sup> This both erases certain ambiguities in the biblical text and provides a clear example of what becomes normative in the western philosophical tradition: the privileging of the voice as meaningful over the voice as soundful. This privileging of meaning over sound implies a more limited understanding of voice that is not previously present in the Hebrew text. In Jeremiah, the emphasis is on affect and sound, and the voice’s relation to meaning is resistant as well as productive.

While קול, the biblical antecedent of phonocentrism, is intimately linked to presence, presence does not exhaust its significance. Instead, the קול of the prophet is also determined in relation to an *absent* קול: the voice of Yahweh. This קול is itself not absent, but, more precisely, sound offers the only form through which the deity comes to presence. In the Hebrew Bible, Yahweh cannot (except in rare instances) be seen, nor can he be visually represented. However, there is also no prohibition on the speech of Yahweh being heard, either in its original utterance

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<sup>35</sup> TDOT 576–588.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 8.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida’s notion of phonocentrism has drawn both praise and criticism. Perhaps the most compelling critique is Mladen Dolar’s argument that Derrida neglects an alternate “metaphysical history of voice, where the voice, far from being the safeguard of presence, was considered to be dangerous, threatening, and possibly ruinous” – the voice as “senseless and threatening,” “seductive and intoxicating,” feminine. In the Hebrew tradition, קול, like the voices Dolar describes, is sometimes seductive, senseless, threatening, feminine. The sweet voice of Delilah is one such a voice (Judg. 16). However, this dangerous voice, which stands in tension with the order-establishing voice of the lawgiver, the king, and the author, does not depend upon absence. Instead, the קול, alternately dangerous and beautiful, lawgiving and order destroying, maintains, as phonocentrism suggests, a positive relationship with presence. Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 70.

<sup>38</sup> TDOT 578. cf φωνή in Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon, Ninth Edition with a Revised Supplement*, 9th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1996).

<sup>39</sup> TDOT 578. V, however, retreats somewhat from this translation practice, using primarily *vox*, but also *tonitrus* for the sound of storms and *sonus/sonitus* for mechanical sounds.

or as re-voiced by the prophets. While at some points in the text, Yahweh's voice comes through clearly (for example, Genesis<sup>40</sup>), this is no sure thing, especially as the fabula of the biblical text advances. Even within Genesis, there is a progressive limiting of vocal communication by the deity, as Yahweh initially speaks to all people (in the primeval history, Gen. 1-11), and subsequently only to Abraham and his descendants. And so as the fabula unfolds, prophecy, predicated upon vocal mediation, becomes increasingly important.

The task of the prophet is to receive the voice of Yahweh and transmit this voice to the people. Yahweh's קול is at once too much and not enough to address the people directly; as Shell writes, "God as ventriloquist needed a spokesman because He was unable to speak directly to the people."<sup>41</sup> This difficulty also comes through in the textual representations of the קול of Yahweh. This voice is sometimes at once too much and not enough. At moments of theophany, in particular, the sonic quality of this voice is frequently ambiguously positioned between human speech and pealing thunder; in Ezekiel, Yahweh's voice is like *many waters* (Ezek. 1:24, 43:2; compare Rev. 14:2, 19:6).<sup>42</sup> In such moments, the sheer force of voice overwhelms all else; the transmission of specific words becomes secondary. This accords with Dolar's basic definition of the voice:

It is the material element recalcitrant to meaning, and if we speak in order to say something, then the voice is precisely that which cannot be said...it is the nonlinguistic, the extralinguistic element which enables speech phenomena, but cannot itself be discerned by linguistics.<sup>43</sup>

For Dolar, the voice is at once necessary for the communicative act and exterior to it. The divine voice exemplifies both halves of Dolar's "linguistic definition" of the voice. In moments of intensity, Yahweh's voice is pure materiality, at once fundamental and in excess of meaning itself. The other voices in the text – and, if we follow Dolar, all voices – share in this double tendency as well, though perhaps to a lesser degree.

The sound of the divine voice at once links Yahweh to his human subjects – speech, after all, is the primary form of connection between Yahweh and his people – and positions Yahweh beyond the realm of the human as the possessor of a voice that resounds like thunder. Indeed, the sound of this voice is so unbearable that even in the theophany on Sinai, Yahweh must turn to Moses to mediate his words.<sup>44</sup> Moses provides the words for a divine utterance that is too purely "voice," in Dolar's sense. The divine voice is beyond word-based meaning, and must be mediated through the prophetic voice. And yet for the prophet, as for Yahweh, this voice sometimes exceeds or breaks with the demands of meaning, offering instead sound, noise, קול.

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<sup>40</sup> For example, God speaks directly to Adam (Gen 2:16-17; 3:9, 11, 17-19), to Eve (3:3 [reported speech], 2:16.), to the serpent (3:14-15) to Cain (Gen. 4:6-7 and 9), to Noah (6:13-2; 9:1-7, 9-17), to Abraham (12:7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:4-21; 18), to Sarah (18:15), to Abimelech (in a dream) (20:3), to Rebecca (25:23), to Isaac (26:24), to Jacob (28:13-15; 31:3; 32:26-30; 35:10-12; 46:2-3), to Laban (in a dream) 31:24, and to Joseph (48:3). God also speaks the world into existence (Gen. 1), as well as sometimes speaking to himself or to an unspecified audience (for example 1:26; 11:4).

<sup>41</sup> Shell, *Stutter*, 107.

<sup>42</sup> The association of Yahweh's voice with thunder is also biblical legacy of the Northwest Semitic storm god theology. (Elijah's *sound of soft stillness* is likely a rejection of this same Northwest Semitic influence).

<sup>43</sup> Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> On this tableau of mediation and its effects on the body of Moses, see the introduction to this dissertation.

The prophet's voice at once marks presence, moderates the pure sound of the divine voice, and contributes to an intricate system of meaning in the biblical text, the soundscape.

### From the Sounds of the Confessions to a Soundscape of Jeremiah

The soundscape of the Confessions is part of the larger soundscape of the book of Jeremiah, and of the other latter prophets. When Jeremiah cries out, as he does so frequently in the Confessions, this cry resounds across the book. Even before the Confessions, in Jer. 4:19, the prophet cries out,

*My insides! My insides! I writhe in pain!<sup>45</sup> The walls of my heart!  
My heart roars, I cannot be silent,  
For I hear<sup>46</sup> the sound of the shofar, the clamor of war.*

As in the Confessions, Jeremiah finds himself compelled to cry. Not only does the prophet cry out, but he also describes his seeming *need* to do so, using the language of bodily compulsion. He cannot do otherwise; the cry rises from him, a force more elemental than will. Elsewhere, Jeremiah describes his cry as forced upon him by the distress of his people: *For the shattering of the daughter of my people, I am shattered,<sup>47</sup> I mourn, and desolation has taken hold of me* (Jer. 8:21). This distress is given double form, moreover, in Jeremiah's embodied experience (*my heart roars* (Jer. 4:19), *fire in my bones* (Jer. 20:9) and in the crying out that appears in close textual proximity (4:19; 20:7).

In the quote from Jer. 4:19, above, the prophet's distressed cry breaks forth in response to another sonic disturbance – *the sound of the shofar, the clamor of war*. Frequently, sound is used in the book of Jeremiah as a marker of distress. Besides the prophet's cries, the most prominent features of the Jeremianic soundscape are often the sounds of war. The שׁוֹפָר, *shofar*, a horn used in times of great religious or political intensity (normally theophanies or imminent battles) sounds seven times in the book of Jeremiah.<sup>48</sup> In every instance, moreover, the shofar sounds an alarm. Chapter 6, for example, opens with

*Flee for safety, children of Benjamin, from within Jerusalem!  
Sound the shofar in Tekoa, lift up a signal upon Beth-Hakkerem,  
For evil looms out from the north, and a great destruction. (Jer. 6:1)*

As in the 4.19, above, the sound of the shofar is the first sign of a coming destruction. Imminent horror first reveals itself – first comes to presence – in sound. The warning sound, moreover, is both the standard means of warning (compare Isa. 18:3; Jos 6, Judges 7) and a divinely commissioned intrusion into the soundscape. The sounding of the shofar serves as an intensification of the warning already mediated through the prophetic voice. The shofar likewise anticipates the clamoring noise of warfare that is to descend onto the people.

Beyond warning and warfare, the soundscape of Jeremiah is also riven by the sound of lament. In Jer. 15:10, the prophet abandons ordinary language and raises the cry of אָוִי ('*ōy*), the

<sup>45</sup> *I writhe in pain*: reading אָוִי לֵבָא with MT *qere*, cf LXX,V. MT *kethib* אָוִי לֵבָא, *I wait*.

<sup>46</sup> *I hear*: Reading with MT *kethib* שְׁמַעְתִּי בְּפִי (MT *qere* שְׁמַעְתָּ בְּפִי). שְׁמַעְתִּי is likely the old feminine ending; in any case, בְּפִי is a common synecdoche for *I*.

<sup>47</sup> *I am shattered*: reading with MT שִׁבְבַתְּךָ; LXX has ἐσαοτώθην, *I was dizzy* (or *blind*) and renders the second half of the verse ἀπορία κατίσχυσάν μεώδινες ὡς τακούσης, *distress has overtaken me, pains as of one giving birth*.

<sup>48</sup> Jer. 4:5, 19, 21; 6:1, 17; 42:14; 51:27.

sound of pure affect and distress. Like the pure sound of Yahweh’s voice, this cry interrupts the soundscape without resolving into words or communicating a specific meaning. Instead, as with the howl of grief or the cry of ululation, it transmits affect itself. But the prophet is not the only one to interrupt the text with his cries, or to raise his voice in mourning beyond words. The voices of women mourning are also an important feature of the soundscape of the book of Jeremiah, and of the ancient Near East. Female mourners appear in Jer. 9:16-19<sup>49</sup>:

<sup>16</sup>*Thus says Yahweh of Hosts,  
Call<sup>50</sup> for the mourning women,<sup>51</sup> and send for the skilled women to come.  
<sup>17</sup>Let them hasten and raise a lament for us,  
that our eyes may overflow with tears, and our eyelids drip with water,  
<sup>18</sup>For a sound of lament is heard from Zion,  
“How we are devastated! We are utterly shamed,  
because we have forsaken the land, and we have been evicted from our homes<sup>52</sup>  
<sup>19</sup>For hear, O women, the word of Yahweh, and let your ears receive the word of  
his mouth  
and teach your daughters a lament, and each to her neighbor a funeral song.*

Mourning, we would do well to recall, is a traditionally female vocation, and the voices of the mourners are female voices that rise above the soundscape of devastation. This interlude of female wailing, moreover, is but one instantiation of feminine sound that emerges at a number of affectively charged points in the book of Jeremiah. There are also the sounds of women in childbirth (Jer. 4:31), the sounds of women promising to worship the Queen of Heaven (44:19), the sounds of Rachel weeping for her children (31:15-16). These feminine sounds, mostly domestic (though not domesticated, as the wailing of mourning shows), offer an individual counterbalance to the sweeping sounds of war and battle. The human voice, crying out over the birth or the death of a child, is a very different sound than the clamor of battle or the strident tones of the *shofar*, announcing the coming destruction. While the sound of the *shofar*, like the sound of lamentation, relates to the collapse of the social and/or political order, both their orientation and their sound are very different.

And so, if the sounds of female crying and the sounds of the *shofar* represent two characteristic, and opposing, forms of sound in the text of Jeremiah, where does the voice of the prophet himself belong? To be sure, all of the sounds in the book, like all of the sounds in the Confessions, are on some level “Jeremiah’s sounds.” And yet as the prophet’s frequent descriptions of his cries and his crying out make clear, there is also something significant about the way in which the text represents Jeremiah’s own vocal production. This Jeremiah of the Confessions is beginning to sound less and less like the authoritative voice of prophetic authority, whether in the biblical tradition or elsewhere – Moses descending from Sinai, or

<sup>49</sup> These verse numbers refer to MT; in LXX the equivalent verses are 17-20.

<sup>50</sup> Reading with LXX καλέσατε ; MT has וְקָרְאוּ וְהָבִינָה, *hasten and call*; expansionary.

<sup>51</sup> MT adds וְהָבִינָה by influence of the second verset. On the argument for deletion, cf McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 208. LXX preserves וְהָבִינָה as καὶ ἐλθέτωσαν here but changes the second instance to καὶ φθεγγῶσθωσαν, a secondary compensation.

<sup>52</sup> *We have been evicted from our homes*. MT מְשַׁכְּנֵנוּ מִבְּיַד־הוֹיָה, *they have hurled down our home*, G ἀπερροίψαμεν τὰ σατηνώματα ἡμῶν (= הִשְׁלִיכוּ), *we must cast aside our homes*; emending with Bright and McKane to וְהָבִינָה, *we are cast/we are evicted*. See *Ibid.*, 209–210.

Calchus telling Agamemnon to sacrifice Iphigenia, or even Jeremiah himself, at other points in the text. Instead, Jeremiah begins to sound more and more like the paradigmatic female voice of Cassandra, hysterical, lamenting, and misunderstood. And indeed, Jeremiah is productively read as using forms of sound culturally coded as feminine. Jeremiah cries, the women's voices cry, and the effects of these utterances are not the same as the *shofar* sounding for war. Therefore, I want to turn to the question of feminine vocality in order to understand more fully Jeremiah's own uses of sound and voice.

### Prophecy and the Gender of Sound

Sound and voice are strongly gendered in the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds. Strong normative associations exist between masculinity, ordered speech, rationality, and self-control, and between femininity, carnality, and affective abandon. Feminine sound has long been feared and represented in male-authored texts as a subversive and dangerous force that refuses reason and grants materiality to immaterial meaning. This complex of associations has been explored in some detail by classicist and poet Anne Carson. In an essay entitled "The Gender of Sound," Carson writes, "Putting a door on the female mouth has been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to the present day."<sup>53</sup> This is because "female sound is bad to hear *both* because the quality of a woman's voice is objectionable *and* because women say what should not be said."<sup>54</sup> As Carson argues, women are not simply marked as other; otherness is constructed and negotiated through sound. Unlike masculine sound, which is ordered, rational, and directed – sound as meaningful speech – female sound is represented as disordered, emotional, directionless, and altogether too closely linked to the body. Carson notes, "the women of classical literature are a species given to disorderly and uncontrolled outflow of sound—to shrieking, wailing, sobbing, shrill lament, loud laughter, screams of pain or of pleasure and eruptions of raw emotion in general" – an analysis that holds as well, she demonstrates, for contemporary discourses of sound.<sup>55</sup> Female sound, as represented in these ancient (and modern) texts, at once resists order and refuses to forget the body. The textual and cultural response is a series of efforts to contain and curtail feminine sound – Carson's "putting a door on the female mouth." This silencing occurs in a number of ways – through displacement, through exclusion, through the association of feminine sound with the wild, the foreign, and the dangerous.<sup>56</sup>

The fear and attempts to contain feminine vocality that Carson traces in ancient Greek and contemporary culture occur as well in the Hebrew Bible. The biblical text, too, seeks to contain feminine sound. Political speech, an important feature of prophecy and a dominant sociocultural discourse, is the domain of men. Prophecy, too, is a largely male affair. In the text, female prophets appear only rarely and the text goes to great pains to curtail their prophetic authority or to subsume it under the figure of a male prophet. So strong is this patriarchal economy of prophecy that, according to the story of the Medium of Endor, even a *dead* male prophet is more powerful, reliable, and desirable than a living female medium (1 Sam. 28). In its

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<sup>53</sup> Anne Carson, "The Gender of Sound," in *Glass, Irony and God*, First ed. (New York: New Directions, 1995), 121.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 126. Beginning with the ways in which the ancient Greeks understood the relationship between gender and sound, Carson traces these attitudes forward to the modern day, finding echoes of Aristotle and Alkaios in Freud's talking cure and Hemingway's dislike of Gertrude Stein.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 124–125.



zeal to criticize and to contain female prophetic authority, the Hebrew Bible adopts a more censorious attitude toward feminine prophetic speech than is the norm in the ancient Near Eastern context.<sup>57</sup> Beyond the marked predominance of male prophets, the *structure* of prophecy reflects the structure of masculine discourse as it appears in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere, with its emphasis on order and control. Disorderly speech, such as Miriam's challenge to Moses (Num. 12), is set apart and excluded, much like the disorderly body (ejaculating, menstruating, birthing, dying).<sup>58</sup> The biblical text as a whole text also places a high value on coherence and clarity of communication, an ideology that comes across most strongly in the account of the giving of the law at Sinai. There, ordered speech is the basic mode of interaction with the divine.<sup>59</sup>

In patriarchal societies such as the biblical world, a "masculine" discourse is also a discourse bound up with the exercise of (male) power. The prophets' scathing social critiques and their peculiar actions (for example, Elisha's miracles and his child-mauling bears<sup>60</sup>) loom large in the text, and sometimes serve to distract us from acknowledging that prophecy is an institution with significant social authority. Even the prophets who are opposed to the dominant social organization (including Jeremiah) are nevertheless powerful figures with supportive social networks,<sup>61</sup> structures of power that both women in general and women prophets in particular largely lack. There are just four named female prophets in the Hebrew Bible, and two (Noadiah and Miriam) are criticized for their prophecy.<sup>62</sup> In the case of Miriam, the punishment includes both the affliction of leprosy and the temporary expulsion from the Israelite community. Her brother Aaron, though equally culpable, is not punished. This story neatly demonstrates the cultural discomfort with the female prophecy, the efficacy of male power, and the ways in which other men benefit from what R.W. Connell terms the "patriarchal dividend" when this power is exercised.<sup>63</sup> The exercise of power is strongly coded as masculine in ancient Israel, both through patriarchal social formations and through the ideological positioning of the text – consider the masculinity of Yahweh, the privileging of masculine over feminine in the law, and the repeated violence and violation of women in all parts of the Bible.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> The norm in the ancient Near East is the recognition of both male and female prophets. In Mari, for example, both male and female prophets are attested; the Neo-Assyrian prophets are predominantly female. See Herbert B. Huffmon, "A Company of Prophets: Mari, Assyria, Israel," in *Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical, and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. Martti Nissinen (Atlanta [Ga.]: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> On the exclusion of these bodies, see my introduction.

<sup>59</sup> Prophecy, however, sometimes refuses this emphasis on communication and order, as the discussions of Moses and Ezekiel, above, have demonstrated.

<sup>60</sup> 2 Kings 2:19-25

<sup>61</sup> Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*. For the classical account of the relation of prophecy and power, see Weber, "The Prophet."

<sup>62</sup> The other two named female prophets are Deborah (Jud. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chr. 34:22). Noadiah appears in Neh. 6:14; Miriam in the story of Moses (Exod. 15:20-21; Num. 12:1-15, 26:59; Deut. 24:9).

<sup>63</sup> Connell writes, "The number of men rigorously practising the hegemonic pattern [of masculinity] in its entirety may be quite small. Yet the majority of men gain from its hegemony, since they benefit from the patriarchal dividend, the advantage men in general gain from the overall subordination of women." R. W. Connell, *Masculinities: Second Edition*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 79.

<sup>64</sup> For example, Ezek. 16 and 23, Jud. 11, 19:1-30, 21:10-24, Hos. 2, to name but a few egregious examples. On violence against women in the Bible see, among others, Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*; Mieke Bal, *Death and*

Female sound, for its part, is linked in the Hebrew prophets to marriage, to mourning, and to childbirth, all socially charged moments that bring sometimes joy and often pain. Each of these forms of feminine speech, moreover, occurs in the book of Jeremiah. When women are represented in the text of Jeremiah, they usually appear as brides, whores, or expectant mothers; they also figure as mourners, idolatrous worshippers of the Queen of Heaven, and pollutants of the land.<sup>65</sup> The registers of feminine sound are closely associated with these limited representations of the feminine, which center around three uses of voice: the voice of the bride, the voices of the mourners, and the voice of the woman in labor. These sounds, moreover, interrupt and alter the soundscape.

### Forms of Female Sound in Jeremiah

The bride, the mourner, and the laboring woman possess, respectively, the three paradigmatic female voices in Jeremiah. The first trace of threatening female vocality in Jeremiah is קול פלה, *the sound of the bride*, which appears four times in the book (Jer. 7:34, 16:9, 25:10, 33:11), and nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, *the sound of the bride* always appears as part of the longer phrase קול ששון וקול שמחה קול חתן וקול פלה, *the sound of joy and the sound of gladness and the sound of the bridegroom and the sound of the bride*. This parallel structure positions the bride's voice in the larger context of sounds of pleasure and rejoicing, while stripping it of any specific meaning. Instead, the female voice communicates a general emotional response.

The female voice also cries out with great emotional intensity in the context of lament. Such lamentation occurs, for example, in Jer. 9:16-19, the passage discussed above. The activity of lamentation is strongly associated with women and is understood as feminine sound. In Jeremiah, the voices of the mourners are female voices that rise above the landscape of devastation. This interlude of female wailing, moreover, is but one instantiation of feminine sound that emerges at a number of affectively charged points in the book of Jeremiah. Female mourning brings associations of anguish, crisis, and the collapse of the social and/or political order, demonstrated in mourning for loved ones or mourning for Zion. The most famous moment of lamentation in Jeremiah (and perhaps the Hebrew Bible as a whole) comes in Jer. 31:15: קול ברהמה נשמע נהי בכי תמרורים רחל מבכה על-בנותיה; *A voice is heard in Ramallah, lamentation and bitter weeping – Rachel is weeping for her children*.

The third important instantiation of the feminine voice is its association with childbirth, which emerges in a number of textual points. Not insignificantly, the cries of a birthing woman are mapped directly onto the pain of warfare and are frequently used to describe the greatest possible physical pain, as in Jer. 48:41 and 49:22 and 24. The collocation of femininity, suffering, and the anguished sounds of a woman giving birth also appears in Jer. 4:31, where the desolate land of Israel is described as a woman:

<sup>30</sup>*And you, desolate one, what are you doing, dressing in scarlet, decking yourself in gold jewelry, enlarging your eyes with paint?  
In vain you make yourself beautiful, your lovers reject you and seek your life!*

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*Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*, 1st ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>65</sup> For a more complete discussion, see Angela Bauer-Levesque, *Gender in the Book of Jeremiah: A Feminist-Literary Reading*, Studies in Biblical Literature vol. 5 (New York: P. Lang, 1999).

<sup>31</sup>*For I hear a sound like a woman in labor, the anguish of one bearing her first child,  
A sound of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, hands outstretched,  
Aah! I am fainting before murderers!*

Jeremiah speaks the coming desolation, and yet the people cannot hear the warning in time to save themselves. This suffering assumes vivid literary form in the description of Zion as a woman in labor, where labor pains serve as a synecdoche for pain as such. In the final lines, the tenor and vehicle of the metaphor begin to blur, a sort of bleed instigated by the sound of suffering. Zion is crying, gasping for breath, stretching out her hands – but are these the vocal and material signs of childbirth or of martial conquest? For Jeremiah, does such a difference even matter?

The cries of the feminine voice in Jeremiah – in marriage, in mourning, in childbirth, in desire – all share a fundamental vocal structure and affective intensity. They are also all related, more or less closely, to the most basic feminine speech act in the Near East and Mediterranean – the practice of ululation, known in Greek as the *ololyga*<sup>66</sup> and in Arabic as *zagharrīt*.<sup>67</sup> Ululation is a traditionally feminine activity that spans the ancient and modern Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds, including the world of the Hebrew Bible. As Carson writes of ululation, “These words do not signify anything except their own sound. The sound represents a cry of either intense pleasure or intense pain. To utter such cries is a specialized female function.”<sup>68</sup> In signifying only its own sound, the paradigmatic feminine cry of ululation muddles the distinction between quality of voice and use of voice. And in its double association with “either intense pleasure or intense pain,” it represents the intrusion of affect into language without, however, assigning it a specific content. A sound that can represent *either* pleasure or pain, or perhaps a mixing of the two, is a threat to the prudent indexing of sound to meaning. Beyond even the intimate association of ululation with lamentation and death (as well as birth, sacrifice, orgasm), it is this blurring that constitutes its threat. This is the danger of the feminine cries in Jeremiah, the danger that the text works to control by “putting a door” over the gaping female mouth.

The gendered divisions of sound in Jeremiah form the backdrop for the prophet’s complaint in the Confessions. In Jeremiah as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, prophetic speech is by and for men. Prophecy is a discourse with social and political power, and this power at once depends upon and facilitates the exclusion of the feminine voice. Feminine sound, meanwhile, is dangerous, seductive, affective, bound up with the flesh. Yet this still leaves Jeremiah. If masculine performance is bound up with specific forms of discourse and power, then what to make of Jeremiah in his Confessions, crying and crying about the enemies who seek to kill him? What to make of this cry at all? Why does the male prophet choose to express himself with a form of speech that excludes him from the domain of masculine discourse?

The most striking use of sound in the Confessions is the cry, a form of vocality strongly associated with femininity and with female practices of celebration and lamentation. Jeremiah’s cry, like his other moments of sound, resists and refuses the ordinary discursive economy. Jeremiah does not – cannot – speak reasonably. Instead, he moans in pain, laments over his

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<sup>66</sup> Carson, “The Gender of Sound,” 125.

<sup>67</sup> Jennifer E. Jacobs, “‘Unintelligibles’ in Vocal Performances at Middle Eastern Marriage Celebrations,” *Text & Talk* 27, no. 4 (2007): 483–507.

<sup>68</sup> Carson, “The Gender of Sound,” 125.

people, complains to God, and indicts the basic structure of prophetic communication as a cruel and painful trick. Furthermore, by placing this cry in Jeremiah's mouth, the text makes us aware of his body, particularly as he complains of its pains. This is not, moreover, the orderly, signifying male body (as in the circumcised penis, or the carefully monitored body of the male priest), but rather the body as a fluid, fleshy assemblage of sensations and pains – the body as feminine, given the biblical text's insistent associations of masculine embodiment with wholeness, bodily integrity, self-containment, and flattened affect. Jeremiah's feminine cries, as well as his preoccupation with his own body, distance his self-performance from ordinary prophetic masculinity. To speak more precisely, Jeremiah's cries are not so much feminine sound as they are a different, non-normative masculine sound, a masculine voice that takes as its starting point the feminine cry. This is an alternate form of masculinity that moves beyond the hegemonic norms. And importantly, the subversive power of Jeremiah's masculinity has its origins in his use of *sound*.

Against the normal realm of masculine sound, there is something very different happening in Jeremiah's confessions. But if it is easily apparent that Jeremiah's use of sound defies normative gender conventions, it is less clear *why* this is the case. What work does sound perform for the male prophet or for the text? If lament is strongly marked as a feminine speech act, then why does Jeremiah lament, shrieking the cry of pure affect for his people? If pain and suffering are conventionally represented by reference to the pain of the woman giving birth, then why is Jeremiah so concerned with the painful transformation of his own body? To borrow from Hartman's reading of Jer. 20, "Why can't Jeremiah talk in a normal voice? What is the matter with him?" – and, we might add, why does the male prophet cry like a woman?<sup>69</sup>

### **Is the Prophet a Female Impersonator?**

Presented with the problems of gender in Jeremiah's voice, Barbara Bakke Kaiser has argued that the feminine features of prophetic discourse are best understood through the model of gender impersonation. Taking up female language and metaphors for suffering in Jeremiah (including the Confessions) and Lamentations, she argues that in moments of intensity, the poet becomes a "female impersonator."<sup>70</sup> In describing the poet as a "female impersonator," Kaiser seems to open a space for imagining prophecy as a kind of drag, describing the poet/prophet as a man who "felt compelled to *become* the woman bearing her first child, the pollutant female socially and ritually isolated, and the mother bereft of her children."<sup>71</sup> Her argument suggests treating prophecy as a queer performance, an imitation that contains within itself the possibility of subversion.

The politics of drag and gender impersonation have been the subject of much debate in queer theory, and their critical and political significance remain contested.<sup>72</sup> Kaiser does not,

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<sup>69</sup> Hartman, "Jeremiah 20:7-12: A Literary Response," 193–194.

<sup>70</sup> Barbara Bakke Kaiser, "Poet as 'Female Impersonator': The Image of Daughter Zion as Speaker in Biblical Poems of Suffering," *The Journal of Religion* 67, no. 2 (April 1, 1987): 166.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>72</sup> In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler seems to suggest that drag as a form of gender performance offers a destabilizing critical practice. While this idea gained traction in both theoretical and activist circles, Butler's later work offers a more complicated (and less optimistic) attitude. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 1999); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), particularly chapter 8, "Critically Queer."

however, enter into the debate. Instead, she deliberately softens the subversive potential of her own argument, writing,

The portrayal of Jeremiah as a “female impersonator” is, of course, a metaphor suggesting that the prophet seriously and deliberately adopts the female persona Jerusalem in his poem in Jer. 4:19-26, 31 and its companion, 10:19-21. But when one is dealing with a prophet who is depicted as walking around the city with an ox yoke on his neck (Jeremiah 27-28) and burying his dirty underwear on the banks of the Euphrates (Jeremiah 13- either a literal or ‘pretend’ Euphrates), it might not be inappropriate to imagine Jeremiah dramatizing his aesthetic identity with Daughter Zion in some equally shocking way.<sup>73</sup>

In insisting upon gender impersonation as metaphor, Kaiser forecloses the possibility of any real unsettling of gender in the text. Despite the suggestive potential of the term “female impersonator,” Kaiser is primarily interested in the poet’s “persona,” which she describes as “the mask or characterization assumed by the poet.”<sup>74</sup> Throughout her argument, the assumption of the female voice is a deliberate literary choice made by the poet. In this reading, the gender of the poet/poetic speaker remains comfortably masculine, even as his adoption of a female voice confirms the deep association of suffering with the economy of female sound. Instead of a destabilized *masculinity*, she presents the prophet’s adoption of a female voice as an instance of *femininity*, opening a new space of identification for female readers of the text.

However, Kaiser also raises the possibility of a more complicated, richer model for understanding the prophet as “female impersonator.” She describes the poet/prophet not as an artist making a conscious aesthetic choice, but rather as a man who “felt compelled to *become* the woman bearing her first child, the pollutant female socially and ritually isolated, and the mother bereft of her children”<sup>75</sup> In introducing the idea of compulsion – albeit in the final paragraph of her text – Kaiser suggests something richer and more complicated than simply a willful artistic choice. While compulsion perhaps suggests pathology (as when this language is applied to drag practitioners), it also opens the possibility of a more complex relationship between body, voice, and gender performance. Who *compels* this man to become woman? What does this transformation mean?

Having touched upon the issue of compulsion, Kaiser does not pursue it further, returning, instead, to metaphor of impersonation and the underlying assumption of authorial intention. But is not enough to read the feminine features of Jeremiah’s sound as literary embellishment or willing artistic choice. Instead, confronted with this male poet/prophet “compelled to *become*... woman,” I want to insist that a voice is never only a voice, and that the prophet’s speech is intimately related to his experience of – and crisis of – embodiment. The gendering of sound is not an “impersonation” or a “persona”, but rather a complex negotiation between the content and quality of the prophetic sound. I am not interested in the prophet as woman, but in other movements of gender transgression and their relation to vocality. Against the model of “impersonation” that Kaiser proposes, I want to pursue a different direction in negotiating Jeremiah’s seemingly feminine uses of sound. In particular, I will suggest that

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<sup>73</sup> Kaiser, “Poet as ‘Female Impersonator,’” 174.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

hysteria, and the psychoanalytic and post-psychoanalytic discourses surrounding “hysteria,” offer productive continuities with Jeremiah’s aural performance: hysterical discourse. In Jeremiah’s Confessions, prophecy is structured as hysteria.

### III. HYSTERIA AND OTHER EXPERIMENTS IN SOUND

#### Virtuosity, Incoherence, and Somatic Compliance: Reading Prophecy with Hysteria

In the Confessions, *prophecy is structured as hysteria*. In making this claim, I am not arguing that prophecy *is* hysteria; I am not interested in constructing definitions or in subsuming one category into another. I do not introduce this modern category in an attempt to diagnose; I do not see much critical value in such endeavors. Nor am I interested in a practice of “hysterical” reading that pushes Jeremiah into an already strained category of “hysterical narrative” or “women’s writing,” any more than I intend to read the prophet as a “female impersonator.” I am not arguing that Jeremiah is hysterical, but rather that Jeremiah’s *use of sound* bears a meaningful relationship to the sound of hysteria.<sup>76</sup> Hysteria as a discursive act resists the ordinary economy of discourse and pleasure, and in this resistance, it also manifests unexpected similarities with Jeremiah’s speech in the Confessions. Carson suggests a continuity between the disruptive, affective, threatening feminine voices of classical Greece and the discourse of twentieth century hysterics. Hysterical speech forces attention on the body; it directs attention as well to the ambiguities and moments of weakness in ordinary language. Approaching such texts as Jeremiah’s Confessions through hysteria destabilizes normative reading practices and directs attention to the working of gender subversion of the text. Reading the Confessions alongside hysterical discourse emphasizes the complicated relation of desire and resistance between Jeremiah’s cries and the larger aural and ideological force of the text. The stability of Jeremiah’s identity in the Confessions is already disrupted. What remains is understanding how and why this disruption occurs, and what role the feminizing of sound plays on the masculine prophetic.

The prophet Jeremiah, while presented without contest as a male figure, repeatedly refuses to use normative masculine forms of sound and voice. Instead, Jeremiah uses sounds culturally and textually coded as feminine. His cries and non-directional utterances, like the female ululations they resemble, are less an attempt to communicate a specific message than an affective outpouring. Fear, anger, anguish, even pleasure are mixed together in Jeremiah’s utterances. His speech in the Confessions does not just dabble in feminine sound, but also manifests parallels with a specific discourse markedly excluded from masculine sound: the speech of the hysteric. As understood by psychoanalysis, hysteria describes a disorder whose symptoms are audible in speech. A number of the peculiarities of Jeremiah’s speech are best

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<sup>76</sup> “Hysterical narrative” and hysterical reading have already come (and gone) as critical positions in literary studies. Two decades ago, Elaine Showalter wrote, “While the protean symptoms of classic hysteria are now rarely diagnosed in the consulting room, hysterical narrative has become the waste-basket term of literary criticism, applied to a wide and diffuse range of textual techniques, and, most alarmingly, taken as a synonym for women’s writing and the woman’s novel. Sometimes referring to all fictional texts by women, sometimes to writing about hysterical women, sometimes to writing that is fragmented, evasive, and ambiguous, hysterical narrative has taken on disturbing connections with femininity.” At a certain point in literary theory, “hysterical narrative” offered a useful way of rethinking certain masculinist assumption; however, as Showalter indicates, the rapid expansion of the category rendered it largely useless. Elaine Showalter, “On Hysterical Narrative,” *Narrative* 1, no. 1 (1993): 24.

understood by reference to hysteria, and in particular to the hysterical transference of the voice to the body in the process of making meaning.

The Confessions are an unstable text, precariously balanced between sophisticated verbal play and a descent into chaos. Artful play with speakers and sounds and subtle reworkings of conventional images and genres fall suddenly into an unstable morass of paranoid accusation. Sometimes, in the midst of vociferous complaint, the prophet abandons argument entirely, instead giving voice to an anguish that overwhelms ordinary language (for example, Jer. 15:10). The prophet can speak through the conventional, stylized genre of lament, or not at all. And yet all the while, the text plays with paronomasia, with generic convention, with direct address, and with nested structures of speaking and voicing others' words and perhaps selves. Consider, by way of example, Jer. 11:18-23, the first of the Confessions.<sup>77</sup> The text reads,

<sup>18</sup>*Yahweh made known to me and I knew, then you showed<sup>78</sup> me their evil deeds*  
<sup>19</sup>*But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter, and I did not know that they plotted schemes against me:*  
*“Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,<sup>79</sup> and cut him off from the land of the living, and his name will be remembered no longer.”*  
<sup>20</sup>*But Yahweh,<sup>80</sup> righteous judge, the one who tests my kidneys and heart, Let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have disclosed my case.*  
<sup>21</sup>*For thus says Yahweh to the men of Anathoth, the ones who seek your life<sup>81</sup>, saying,*  
*“Do not prophesy in the name of Yahweh, lest you die by our hand!*  
<sup>22</sup>*Behold, I will punish them! Their young men will die by the sword, and their sons and their daughters will die of famine,*  
<sup>23</sup>*And there will be no remnant for them when I bring evil upon the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.*

On a first reading, this Confession seems relatively straightforward. Jeremiah describes, briefly, his calling as a prophet, his initial naïveté, the threats of his enemies against him, and the future vengeance he awaits. And yet there is more to his complaint than this. The text, like many prophetic texts, is curiously fluid, assuming multiple voices (Jeremiah, Yahweh, the men of Anathoth) without clear textual signals marking speakers or shifts. For example, the implied speaker switches in the middle of verse 19, though without a clear textual signal such as the conventional *לֵאמֹר* (usually translated as *saying* but sometimes left untranslated). This is only the

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<sup>77</sup> Diamond argues that 11:18-23 forms a complete textual unit; O'Connor treats 11:18-12:6 as one unit. Compare Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*; O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah*.

<sup>78</sup> *You showed me*: Reading with MT. LXX reads εἶδον = יִּהְיֶה, *I saw*.

<sup>79</sup> *Destroy the tree with his fruit*: the phrase is difficult. MT reads וְהָרַגְתָּ עֵץ לֶחֶם וְשֵׁן, literally “destroy the tree in its food/bread, while LXX has Δεῦτε καὶ ἐμβάλωμεν ξύλον εἰς τὸν ἄρτον αὐτοῦ, reading ἐμβάλωμεν, *let us throw*, for MT וְשֵׁן. LXX reflects an attempt to make sense of the unusual phrase found in MT. Reading with MT, I take וְהָרַגְתָּ to refer to the fruit of the tree.

<sup>80</sup> *Yahweh*: reading with LXX, MT and T have *Yahweh of hosts*. “MT has the tendency to expand divine epithets. Omission in G is preferred.” Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 198n3.

<sup>81</sup> *Your life*: reading with MT, LXX has τὴν ψυχὴν μου, *my life*. “MT preserves the compositional pattern of lament and answer to lament” that G has forgotten. *Ibid.*, 198n4.

first in a series of switches between Yahweh, the men of Anathoth, and the prophet himself.<sup>82</sup> This complicated nesting structure of speakers and auditors, of threats and promises (all of them filtered, ultimately, through the speaker Jeremiah and his implied prophetic audience), is inherently unstable. The alternations between Jeremiah's address to Yahweh, Jeremiah's seemingly directionless laments, Yahweh's responses, and the words of Jeremiah's adversaries all come together to foreclose the possibility of a coherent speaker.<sup>83</sup>

Even when it is clear that Jeremiah is the intended speaker, the text is unstable. The prophetic "I" emerges in 11:18-23 as constructed by others, first as the recipient of Yahweh's knowledge (*Yahweh made known to me and I knew*), then a passive object of violence and desire for the men of Anathoth. This violence, which is pervasive in the Confessions, is also matched by an undercurrent of desire. The coming of the word of Yahweh to the prophet is a sensuous pleasure and a delight (Jer. 15:16), and yet it brings with it bodily pain (15:17) and a threat to life itself (11:19 – not inconsequentially, this danger is represented as a threat to fertility in *Let us destroy the tree with its fruit*). Knowledge is thus positioned in tenuous relation to violence, desire, and the desire for violence. In the final lines, Jeremiah becomes almost frenzied in imagining replacing his own suffering with the suffering of his enemies. Swords, famine, unspecified evil – what the vision lacks in singular focus, it compensates for in general excess. And this is only the first of the "so-called Confessions."<sup>84</sup>

Such complicated literary play as is found in this poem is sometimes understood as "difficult ornament" – often beautiful, often frustrating, but basically secondary to the meaning of the text.<sup>85</sup> In the case of Jer. 11:18-23, such a reading would suggest that the rapid alternation of speakers, the thematization of the prophet's body as an object of knowledge, and the eroticization of the pain of others are all forms of difficult ornament adorning a straightforward message of violence. However, as we have seen, Jeremiah's use of the cry and of other feminine discursive structures undercuts the guarantee of a communicable meaning to be found at the base of prophecy. Nor can Jer. 11:18-23 be reduced simply to a desire for violence. Instead, we are left with something at once stranger and more affecting, an outcry that does not simply resolve itself into graspable meaning. Jeremiah's difficult play with language is not, fundamentally, ornament, but rather suggests a discursive strategy associated with hysteria.

### **Studying the Prophet with the *Studies in Hysteria***

On a general level, the peculiar mixture of virtuosity and failure that characterizes Jeremiah's speech in the Confessions is a defining characteristic of hysterical speech in general. This becomes clear at multiple points in Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer's classic work *Studies in Hysteria*.<sup>86</sup> In invoking Freud and Breuer, I am not proposing an uncritical turn to Freud (or to psychoanalysis) as an explanatory model. Instead, the two doctors – and their text – are useful

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<sup>82</sup> The textual voice returns to Jeremiah in verse 20, then seems to switch to Yahweh in verse 21 (*for thus says Yahweh... saying*), And yet after reading the second half of verse 21, it becomes clear that here the מְרַלֵּא, *saying*, refers not to the introduced subject, *Yahweh*, but rather to the men of Anathoth. Yahweh's voice returns, unmarked by signaling particles (including לְאמֹר) in 22 and 23.

<sup>83</sup> See also A. R. Pete Diamond, "Interlocutions: The Poetics of Voice in the Figuration of YHWH and His Oracular Agent, Jeremiah," *Interpretation* 62, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 48–65.

<sup>84</sup> Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 11.

<sup>85</sup> See Marks, "On Prophetic Stammering," 63–64.

<sup>86</sup> Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, trans. Nicola Luckhurst (New York: Penguin, 2004).



for questioning (and even queering) the gender of sound precisely because their work provides a neat summation of larger trajectories of discourse, including the recurrent constellation of femininity, voice, body, and transgression (or, in modern terms, psychopathology). The *Studies in Hysteria* offer a counterpoint to demonstrate the extent to which Jeremiah's Confessions deviate from the normative organization of gender and sound.<sup>87</sup>

Jeremiah's mixture of play, poetry, and crises of form and meaning alike resembles the speech of hysterics to a high degree. *Studies in Hysteria* is rich with descriptions of the speech of their patients and the ways in which hysteria alters this speech, rendering it difficult and strange. Thus Breuer's famous patient, Anna O., loses the ability to speak her native German, speaking instead in English, French, and Italian – with complete amnesia, moreover, between her English and French-Italian selves. She at once invents puns and forgets how to form infinitives.<sup>88</sup> This is very much like Jeremiah, with his plays with sound and genre even as he insists on the difficulty of producing speech (Jer. 20:7-9). The difficulty in producing sound and in communicating meaning ushers in a scramble, a desperate grabbing for other words and other ways of speaking. In Jeremiah's Confessions – as in Anna O.'s conversations with Breuer – even fraught and fragmented speech seems to form a sophisticated literary assemblage, if not a cohesive and unitary whole.

On a second level, Jeremiah's descriptions of his body, as much as his verbal contortions, associate his speech with hysterical discourse. Importantly, hysterical speech as a discourse is not limited to "proper" speech. Instead, it implicates and contaminates the body as well. The unspeakable – that which is shameful or otherwise inadmissible to the realm of language – is displaced onto the body, which then "speaks" through symptoms. This is the process that Freud terms "somatic compliance."<sup>89</sup> Consider Freud's description of Emmy von M:

She speaks as if it were arduous, in a quiet voice that is occasionally interrupted to the point of stuttering by spastic breaks in her speech. When she speaks she keeps her fingers, which exhibit a ceaseless agitation resembling athetosis, tightly interlaced. Numerous tic-like twitches in her face and neck muscles, some of which, in particular the right sterno-cleido-mastoid, protrude quite prominently. In addition, she frequently interrupts herself in order to produce a peculiar clicking noise, which I am unable to reproduce.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> This is, not coincidentally, also the way the Carson uses Freud in *The Gender of Sound*. She offers an excellent model for negotiating the continuities and points of contest between ancient and modern texts, and my own work is in her debt as I endeavor to follow her here.

<sup>88</sup> Breuer writes in his case history, "A deep functional disorganization of speech set in. The first thing that became noticeable was that she could not find words and gradually this became worse. Then her speech lost all grammatical structure, the syntax was missing, as was the conjugation of verbs, so that in the end she was using only infinitives that were incorrectly formed from a weak past participle, and no articles. As the disorder developed she could find almost no words at all, and would painfully piece them together out of four or five different languages, which made her almost incomprehensible." Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, 28–29.

<sup>89</sup> In "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," the case of Dora, Freud writes that the hysterical symptom "cannot occur without the presence of a certain degree of *somatic compliance* offered by some normal or pathological process in or connected with one of the bodily organs. And it cannot occur more than once—and the capacity for repeating itself is one of the characteristics of a hysterical symptom—unless it has a psychological significance, a *meaning*." Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ('Dora')," 193.

<sup>90</sup> Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, 51–52. See as well Marks, "On Prophetic Stammering," 71–72.

As in the case of Anna O., Emmy von M's difficult speech production is an audible sign of her hysteria. Here, however, the emphasis is not on the peculiar virtuosity of the speech that is produced, but rather on its difficulty and the ways in which this difficulty is manifested in the body. As Emmy von M struggles to speak, her body, twitching, speaks for her (and against her will). Even the "peculiar clicking noise" represents a bodily substitution for the ordered production of words that marks "proper" speech. It is exterior to ordinary language, as Freud makes doubly clear: first, by describing the clicking as an interruption, and second, by his comment that "I am unable to reproduce [it]." Freud, the guardian of the patriarchal discursive order, cannot reproduce the clicking because it is a sound intimately linked to the female body and to Frau Emmy von M's body in particular.

From Emmy von M's case, we can extract a larger principle: hysterical speech refuses to limit itself to the audible voice. Instead, through "somatic compliance," the body conspires to say what the mouth cannot. Hysteria blurs the boundaries between the voice and the flesh by transposing meaning to the body. Dora's nervous cough, Freud famously argues, signals a sexual anxiety.<sup>91</sup> The flesh (which we would do well to remember is consistently associated with the feminine, in the Bible and beyond it) speaks, but exterior to the regulated economy of language, itself strongly marked as male. As Carson asserts, "there is something disturbing or abnormal about the use of signs to transcribe upon the outside of the body a meaning from inside the body which does not pass through the control point of *logos*, a meaning which is not subject to the mechanism of dissociation that the Greeks call *sophrosyne* or self-control."<sup>92</sup> The *sophrosyne* (σωφροσύνη) Carson describes has its analogues in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the emphasis placed upon the whole, self-contained body and in the general attitude of judgment toward excessive displays of the male body (Ham gazing upon Noah, Gen. 9:20-29) or seeming losses of masculine self control (David dancing, 2 Sam. 6:14). Elsewhere in the Confessions, Jeremiah himself displays a high degree of self-control, as when he refuses to compromise in his struggles with the king, with rival prophets, and with the countrymen who seek to take his life. In the Confessions, however, Jeremiah seems to lose control of his message and his body alike. Pain and complaint displace ordinary prophetic speech. Playing on Freud, we might ask, *What does Jeremiah want?* Punishment upon his enemies, to be sure. And yet the centerpiece of the poem is not this vengeance, but rather the opening up of the prophet's body to Yahweh.

Words are not enough, it seems, to communicate Jeremiah's prophetic complaint. Oral disclosure is effective only insofar as it is matched with somatic confirmation. While we began with three distinct parties – Jeremiah, Yahweh, and Jeremiah's accusers – the borders between subjects are rapidly falling away. Yahweh, Jeremiah's righteous judge, is also his oppressor and thus linked to the men of Anathoth. And Jeremiah himself is known as *Yahweh of Hosts* (Jer. 15:16). Even the boundaries of Jeremiah's body are vulnerable, a suggestion here that is elaborated upon in the latter Confessions, in which Jeremiah describes himself as shot through with pain and afflicted by incurable wounds, the edges of his body forcibly opened to the outside world. With the body and the coherent self under threat, the voice assumes a greater significance. At the same time, this voice, unable to speak, is displaced onto the body. The speaking body, as much as the voice that refuses straightforward sound, is closely associated with feminine sound.

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<sup>91</sup> Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria ('Dora')," 195–196, 201.

<sup>92</sup> Carson, "The Gender of Sound," 128.

This crossing over of the body and the voice is an important feature of the Confessions. We have already seen how the text makes heavy use of a vocabulary of violence and pain; now I want to point out how this vocabulary implicates the body. Violence is not only impressed upon the body, but rather the body of the prophet also *speaks* through violence and pain. Put another way, the flesh of Jeremiah – which, here at least, is not wholly continuous with the “self” of Jeremiah – functions as both subject and object. As Dolar writes, “The voice appears as the link which ties the signifier to the body,” and furthermore, “*It is precisely the voice that holds bodies and languages together.*”<sup>93</sup> The voice provides the meeting point between the material body and the immaterial, whether language, the soul, or the self. At the same time, the speaking voice, which connects body to signifier, is displaced by the “voice” of the body itself – somatic compliance is a form of speech without words or sounds. The body “speaks” through pain, but this is a communicative act that short-circuits the ordinary discursive economy. In 15:18, Jeremiah demands, *Why is my pain unceasing? Why is my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?* The body likewise speaks through pain in the moment of the cry. The cry interrupts and challenges the basic assumptions of the discursive realm. Like Emmy von M’s “clicking,” the cry is a sound exterior to language that makes us uncomfortably aware of the body.

But the cry is not the only intrusion of the body in the text. Frequently, Jeremiah refers to his heart, his kidneys, and his bones in order to map out an internal topography of anguish. He complains,

*<sup>8</sup>Whenever I speak, I cry; I call out ‘violence and ruin!’<sup>94</sup>  
For the word of Yahweh has become for me  
A reproach and a derision every day.  
<sup>9</sup>I said, ‘I will not remember it, and I will no longer speak in his name.’  
But it was like a fire consuming my heart<sup>95</sup>, shut up in my bones  
I grew exhausted from containing it, and was not able to do so. (Jer. 20:8-9)*

In the fire in Jeremiah’s heart and bones, we find a clear analogue of the hysterical symptom. Jeremiah’s body speaks what he will not. The passage displays both structure of repression and the somatic return of the repressed: *I grew exhausted from containing it, and was not able to do so.* Like the cry, Jeremiah’s fiery bones foreground the body and the unspeakable. Mladen Dolar describes somatic compliance as a “strange loop, the tie between inner and outer, the short circuit between the external contingency and the intimate.”<sup>96</sup> This blurring of boundaries, the erasure of difference between interiority and exteriority and between language and embodiment, is what Jeremiah experiences vis-à-vis the divine word.

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<sup>93</sup> Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 59, 60. On the relationship between the body and the voice, see further Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 58–81.

<sup>94</sup> *Whenever I speak, I cry; I call out ‘violence and ruin!’*: Reading with MT. G reads ὅτι πικρῶ λόγῳ μου γελᾶσομαι, ἀθεσίαν καὶ ταλαιπωρίαν ἐπικαλέσομαι, *because I will laugh with my bitter speech, I will call upon faithlessness and restlessness*, reflecting a different Vorlage.

<sup>95</sup> *My heart*: reading with MT; missing from LXX, perhaps through homoiarchon with כ and כ. “If MT is an explanatory gloss, it is difficult to see the motivation since the meaning was already clear.” Diamond, *The Confessions of Jeremiah in Context*, 251n3.

<sup>96</sup> Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 132.

## Hysteria or Masochism

The reading I have proposed, treating Jeremiah's speech as hysterical, is not the only approach body and voice in the Confessions to emphasize the modern categories of sexuality. Ken Stone, for example, has argued that masochism offers a productive point of departure for understanding Jeremiah's Confessions, particularly Jer. 20:7-13.<sup>97</sup> Like hysteria, masochism is understood by classical psychoanalysis as a failure of normal sexuality, a perversion that alters pleasure, desire, and the experience of self. Stone's argument for masochism takes as a starting point the words of the prophet in Jer. 20:7-13. He places particular emphasis on verse 7, which reads,

פְּתִיתַנִּי יְהוָה וְאַפְּתָהוּ חֲזַקְתַּנִּי וְתוֹכַל  
הִיִּיתִי לְשִׁחּוֹק כָּל-הַיּוֹם כִּלְּהָ לַעֲג לִי

*You seduced me Yahweh, and I was seduced; you overpowered me and you prevailed.*

*I became a continual laughing stock; everyone has mocked me!*

The word פְּתִיתַנִּי (from the root פתה) I have translated, following Stone, as *seduced*. It is often understood to have a base meaning of *persuade* or *attempt to persuade*; older translations sometimes prefer *entice*.<sup>98</sup> More recent readings, influenced by the following lines *you overpowered me and you prevailed*, emphasize the sexual overtones of the word and treat the text as a description of rape.<sup>99</sup> However, noting that biblical Hebrew lacks an unambiguous term for rape, Stone writes, "It is not at all clear that 'rape' is the most appropriate descriptor for a sexual experience that involves not only power but also, for example, trust. We seem to have something closer to sadomasochism."<sup>100</sup> He thus suggests that "the sexual connotations of Jeremiah 20, such as they are, can be understood in terms of male *homoeroticism*" and of masochism<sup>101</sup> in particular.

Stone's hermeneutic of masochism, like the hermeneutic lens of hysteria, destabilizes the artifice of normative masculinity in the Confessions by foregrounding the body and its pains and pleasures. Reading the verse as a masochistic seduction forces us again to consider the prophet as embodied. The reading likewise situates this body and the sounds it makes in a larger economy of pleasure, suggesting yet another dimension to the cry that I have already described as tearing

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Kohler-Baumgartner only lists meanings related to persuasion (*to persuade or to attempt to persuade*) for the *piel* of פתה and *to let oneself be deceived, let oneself be taken for a fool* for the *niphal*. BDB gives *persuade, seduce, entice*, as well as *deceive*. Carroll and McKane both use forms of *deceive*. See Stone, "You Seduced Me, You Overpowered Me, and You Prevailed": Religious Experience and Homoerotic Sadomasochism in Jeremiah," 106–107. See also David J. A. Clines and David M. Gunn, "'You Tried to Persuade Me' and 'Violence! Outrage!'" in Jeremiah XX 7-8," *Vetus Testamentum* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 1978): 20–27.

<sup>99</sup> Clines and Gunn, "'You Tried to Persuade Me' and 'Violence! Outrage!'" in Jeremiah XX 7-8." It is worth noting as well the use of the word – in the *pi'el* – with the clear sense of *to seduce* in Exod. 22:16 and the suggestive use in Jud. 14:5 and 16:5, where the Philistines urge Delilah to *entice* Samson. See as well Sandie Gravett, "Reading 'Rape' in the Hebrew Bible: A Consideration of Language," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28, no. 3 (March 1, 2004): 279–299.

<sup>100</sup> Gravett, "Reading 'Rape' in the Hebrew Bible."

<sup>101</sup> While Stone uses the term "sadomasochism," I will distinguish between masochism and sadism, treating only the former here. On the argument for separating the two terms, see Gilles Deleuze and Leopold von von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, 6th ed. (New York: Zone, 1991), 13–14.

through the soundscape of Jeremiah – the cry of pleasure. To follow Stone for a moment, Jeremiah experiences violence against his body, particularly in the Confessions. Yet, because he remains male – if not normatively masculine – he is able to experience pleasure in and through this experience of violence. Seduced and overpowered, Jeremiah speaks from a position other than that of active, penetrative masculinity. In doing so, he both challenges the association of masculine sound with phallic male power and opens the possibility of an alternate experience of masculinity.<sup>102</sup>

But while Stone's argument speaks to the text of Jer. 20:7-13, it applies less strongly across the Confessions as a whole.<sup>103</sup> Whatever homoerotic ecstasy there may be in verse 7 is swiftly replaced another complaint about the pains of existence, shattering not the prophet's body but rather the ecstasy of the moment. Instead of turning himself over to pleasure, Jeremiah clings to his complaint (even, as we have seen, at the expense of coherence). He is altogether too caught up in speech and in its impossibilities to give his body over to masochism or other eroticisms. Karmen MacKendrick describes the aim of masochism as "the perverse pleasures of restraint and restrained (ritualized, ceremonial, and especially *stylized*) violence (including the pleasure of pain),"<sup>104</sup> and yet *restraint* is precisely what Jeremiah refuses. Instead, more Job than Masoch, he repeatedly presents, alludes to, and thematizes his own sufferings. Jeremiah, it seems, cannot stop complaining. Similarly, while the text of Jeremiah's Confessions is filled with moments of pain, these pains are not the pains of masochism. This is a very different sort of pain than Jeremiah's. Even when Jeremiah eats the words of Yahweh and finds them a delight (15:16), the pain that follows is the pain of neglect and of oozing wounds, a pain that assumes an intact subject. This is not the ego-shattering experience of extremity that MacKendrick evokes in her description of masochism.<sup>105</sup>

There are, however, interesting continuities between masochism and hysteria. Both are associated with the feminine.<sup>106</sup> In addition to an alignment with the cultural feminine, hysteria and masochism are both exterior to hegemonic masculinity. Freud deemed masochism "the female perversion *par excellence*."<sup>107</sup> And MacKendrick writes, "s/m seems to fit with a cultural feminist sexuality in at least this respect: it diverts energy and desire away from the goal oriented

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<sup>102</sup> See as well Tarlin, "Utopia and Pornography in Ezekiel."

<sup>103</sup> Perhaps supporting this point, Stone presents the article as a study of Jer. 20:7-13, not of the Confessions as a whole.

<sup>104</sup> Tarlin, "Utopia and Pornography in Ezekiel."

<sup>105</sup> Jeremiah's complaint about his incurable wound is particularly significant in relation to Stone's argument. Regarding Yahweh's seduction/overpowering of Jeremiah in 20:7, Stone writes, "Jeremiah never says that he finds this experience of overpowering to be, in itself, unpleasant (though scholars normally write as if this is clearly the case). He does, however, complain about the *social* disapproval that accompanies his status as Yahweh's partner." Stone, "You Seduced Me, You Overpowered Me, and You Prevailed": Religious Experience and Homoerotic Sado-masochism in Jeremiah," 107. In 15:17-18, however, Jeremiah complains not just about social disapproval (*I did not sit in the circle of merrymakers and rejoice. Because of your hand I have sat alone*), but also about physical discomfort (*Why is my pain unceasing? Why is my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Ah! You have become like a dried up well, water that cannot be relied upon*). This complaint, moreover, does not appear erotic.

<sup>106</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem in Masochism," in *The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, vol. XIX [1923-1925], The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (London: Hogarth Press, 1961).

<sup>107</sup> See Tarlin, "Utopia and Pornography in Ezekiel."

genitality so often labeled masculine.”<sup>108</sup> Still, instead of turning to masochism, I want to remain with the question of hysteria in Jeremiah. This is both because hysteria accounts more fully for the literary features of the Confession as a whole and because theorizing male hysteria offers a productive complication of the representation of masculinity in the prophets. However, following Stone’s lead, I will consider the text of the Confessions as exterior to active, dominating, penetrative masculinity without offering an easy resolution of its difficulties through an embrace of the feminine. Jeremiah is not simply impersonating the feminine; his relationship to femininity, negotiated primarily through sound and voice, is more complicated than that. And so to this end, I want to remain with hysteria while considering the possibility of a *masculine* hysteria.

### **Hysteria, Prophecy, and the Male Voice**

In its ancient and modern (psychoanalytic) forms alike, hysteria is strongly associated with women, an association traceable in both the name of the disorder (ὑστέρα is the Greek word for *uterus*) and in the often-repeated (if not fully accurate) story that the Greeks believed hysteria’s cause to be the womb’s wandering through the body.<sup>109</sup> The case studies in Freud and Breuer’s *Studies in Hysteria* are all of women; there is a single mention of the “male hysteric” in Breuer’s discussion of the theoretical issues.<sup>110</sup> The vast majority of subsequent writing on hysteria also concerns women or feminine subjects (though Lacan takes up hysteria in a much broader way.<sup>111</sup>) Indeed, it is this strong association of hysteria with femininity, and in particular the use of hysterical sound as the archetypal feminine sound, that first suggests reading Jeremiah’s Confessions with and through hysteria.

Despite this powerful association of hysteria with the feminine, Jeremiah is not the only male figure to mimic the voice of the hysteric, however. The dominant discourses of hysteria are counterbalanced by the figure of the male hysteric, who has a scattered literary and clinical presence.<sup>112</sup> Male hysteria was a not uncommon occurrence in nineteenth century France, for example, especially among artists. Thus Flaubert, Mallarmé, and Baudelaire each identified themselves themselves, at various moments, as male hysterics. Taking up the “uses” of such male hysteria, Jan Goldstein argues that hysterical self-identification by men is not simply an

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<sup>108</sup> Karmen MacKendrick, *Counterpleasures* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 112.

<sup>109</sup> While this story is frequently repeated, it relies upon a questionable misreading of the ancient evidence. See Helen King, “Once Upon a Text: Hysteria from Hippocrates,” in *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 3–40.

<sup>110</sup> Freud and Breuer, *Studies in Hysteria*, 236.

<sup>111</sup> As Gérard Wajeman writes of Lacan, “Hysteria is an elementary effect of language.... Immersed in language, the subject is hysterical as such. While Freud took hysteria to be the nucleus of all neurotic disorders, Lacan has revealed the speaking subject as fundamentally hysterical: the only subject of psychoanalysis is the barred, unconscious, hysterical subject.” Gérard Wajeman, “The Hysteric’s Discourse,” in *Jacques Lacan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (New York: Routledge, 2002), 88. See as well Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2004).

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Mark S. Micale, “Charcot and the Idea of Hysteria in the Male: Gender, Mental Science, and Medical Diagnosis in Late Nineteenth-Century France.,” *Medical History* 34, no. 4 (1990): 363; Ursula Link-Heer and Jamie Owen Daniel, “‘Male Hysteria’: A Discourse Analysis,” *Cultural Critique*, no. 15 (April 1, 1990): 191–220; Jan Goldstein, “The Uses of Male Hysteria: Medical and Literary Discourse in Nineteenth-Century France,” *Representations*, no. 34 (1991): 134–165; Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity, Weimar and Now* 38 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 213.

attempt to co-opt feminine experience. Instead, it also serves as a critical response to the constraints of *masculinity*.<sup>113</sup> Male hysteria at once borrows from dominant medical discourses – and the ideologies of gender they reflect and sustain – and rejects the repressive power of those same discourses. As Goldstein writes,

If nineteenth-century hysteria was a conceptual space for the conventional, stereotypical definition of femininity, it was also, by the same token, potentially a conceptual space for the subversion of gender stereotypes. Through partaking of the pathological condition “hysteria,” the man Flaubert might also lay claim to the attributes of femininity it had come to epitomize—here, nervous hypersensitivity, vulnerability, self-absorption—and hence implicitly achieve something of the status of androgyny. Applied by men to women, and most typically by male doctors to their female patients, the category “hysteria” was inevitably bound up in relations of power and generally served a stigmatizing, repressive function. But applied by a man to himself, that same category might disclose radical possibilities.<sup>114</sup>

Male hysteria does not simply rework or reimagine femininity. Instead, it participates in a critique of masculine identity and the narrowness with which masculinity is constrained. Goldstein’s reading of Flaubert supports the possibility of reading hysterical masculinity in Jeremiah as a critique of gender, articulated through the use of sound. The very refusal of Jeremiah to conform to ordinary masculine registers of sound offers, in Goldstein’s words, “a conceptual space for the subversion of gender stereotypes.” That this subversive space occurs not in appearance or action, but rather in sound, is fitting for the prophet, as well as in accord with the biblical emphasis on the voice, as marker of presence, as locus of identity, as bond between material and immaterial.

And yet there is also an important difference between the poet and the prophet, one that concerns, as well, the question of hysteria. To be a poet or writer, at least in the mode of Flaubert and Mallarmé and Baudelaire, assumes some level of choice on the part of the author. To be sure, writing is difficult, painful business (as writers so frequently remind us). However, there is nevertheless a degree of choice in pursuing writing as a recognizable, financially viable career in a known social sphere. As represented by the Hebrew prophets, however, prophecy brings with it no such sense of choice.<sup>115</sup> The call comes upon the prophet, as when Yahweh’s words appear to Jeremiah. This question of volition is particularly important with respect to hysteria.<sup>116</sup> If hysteria is an affectation or even a willing choice made by the male poet – or male prophet – then its radical stance is diminished. An important component of the postmodern rejection of “role theory” in sociology is the insistence that the “role” grants too much autonomy to the

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<sup>113</sup> Goldstein, “The Uses of Male Hysteria.”

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–135.

<sup>115</sup> Though the prophets, at least those whose writings survive, later receive social support, as discussed above.

<sup>116</sup> As Jan Goldstein acknowledges, the most damaging critique of male hysteria as critical stance is what Showalter terms “critical cross-dressing.” Goldstein, “The Uses of Male Hysteria,” 156–157. See as well Elaine Showalter, “Critical Cross-Dressing: Male Feminists and the Woman of the Year,” *Raritan* 3, no. 2 (1983): 130–149.

individual.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, male hysteria as a form of “female impersonation” fails to address the underlying problems of impersonation as an interpretive model.

In the case of Flaubert and his contemporaries, Goldstein resolves the problem of female impersonation or “critical cross-dressing” by distinguishing between the ideal and the demands of relative, historically positioned critique.<sup>118</sup> For Goldstein, male hysteria, while not without its problems, offers a critical and “contrapuntal” movement in French discourse.<sup>119</sup> In the case of Jeremiah, the model of hysteria likewise maintains important explanatory value. However, this value comes not from the historically located choice of Jeremiah the prophet/poet to self-identify as hysterical, but rather from two other sources: the relationship of hysteria to power and the relationship between the gender binary and sound. Considering each of these in turn provides valuable insight into the negotiation of masculinity in Jeremiah’s Confessions, complicating and enriching the basic theoretical stance toward masculinity Goldstein finds in the work of Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Mallarmé.

Hysteria is not simply a crisis of language; it is also a problem of power. Drawing out this point, Showalter quotes Martha Noel Evans:

“If the speech of witches and hysterics was universally discounted as mendacious,” she [Evans] writes “. . . it is because women do not have the necessary real power to challenge the word of their colonial masters.” The inability of hysterics to tell Freud a satisfactory narrative is, thus, not “a mark of female pathology, but rather a result of male denial of women as subjects of enunciation.”<sup>120</sup>

Importantly for Jeremiah, the hysterical features of his discourse are intimately linked to his experience of exclusion from social power.<sup>121</sup> Jeremiah repeatedly complains about his own discursive failure, the impossibility of his words being accepted by the community. Like the hysteric, he must repeat, and repeat again, his complaint precisely because he is denied recognition as a subject of enunciation. Jeremiah’s listeners are willing to kill him, but not to listen. This is not so unlike the hysteric. Even Dora, Freud’s famous patient, insisted that Freud did not *listen* to her, preferring instead to project his own opinions upon her.<sup>122</sup> Understood this way, taking Jeremiah’s Confessions as “hysterical” becomes as much a statement about the

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<sup>117</sup> See for example Karen Esther Rosenberg and Judith A. Howard, “Finding Feminist Sociology: A Review Essay,” *Signs* 33, no. 3 (March 1, 2008): 679–681.

<sup>118</sup> Goldstein adds, “In the minds, conscious and unconscious, of the literary men who articulated it, male-hysteria-as-androgyny may not have been a completely laudable or revolutionary doctrine by some absolute, transhistorical standard. But in relative, historical terms—which is to say, within the bounds of its context—it nonetheless retains its nineteenth-century credentials as subversive. It opened up possibilities and alternatives otherwise hidden by the prevailing domestic doctrine that held that “nature” had made the sexes to fit a pattern of strict opposition, with rational, active men commanding the public life and passive but feelingful women consigned to a sheltered private sphere.” Goldstein, “The Uses of Male Hysteria,” 157.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>120</sup> Showalter, “On Hysterical Narrative,” 32. See as well Martha Noel Evans, *Fits and Starts: A Genealogy of Hysteria in Modern France*, First ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991). Evans’ quote is found in her book on page 287.

<sup>121</sup> On this point, see as well Evans, *Fits and Starts*.

<sup>122</sup> Dora’s complaint may have been well founded. See Maria Ramas, “Freud’s Dora, Dora’s Hysteria: The Negation of a Woman’s Rebellion,” *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 3 (1980): 472–510.



workings of power as a simple transformation on the level of gender. Instead of the prophet as critical cross-dresser, we have the prophet as painfully, devastatingly excluded from power.

This reading has the added exegetical benefit of relating the gendering of sound to the persistent question of prophetic pain. In the Book of Jeremiah, and in the Confessions in particular, what emerges most strikingly is the experience of suffering. This suffering figures at multiple points in the text but is voiced most clearly in the Confessions. The experience of pain, moreover, is frequently placed at the center of Jeremiah's prophetic vocation. Cook writes, "Jeremiah knots his utterances about God's warnings through a presentation of his own person...the prophet is both a passive sufferer at God's hands through the people and an active communicator of God's message to the people."<sup>123</sup> Mills likewise argues that Jeremiah's "fraught personal state forms and exact copy of the coming fragmentation and collapse of his community."<sup>124</sup> Even Holladay, who generally takes a historical approach to the prophet, suggests that Jeremiah's suffering is essential to his practice of prophecy.<sup>125</sup> Though they represent different scholarly traditions – Cook is primarily a literary critic, Mills' work is in conversation with critical and cultural theory and studies of embodiment, Holladay is a traditional biblical scholar – all three agree on at least two important points: first, that the prophet suffers greatly; and second, that the experience of suffering is intimately linked to the task of prophecy. The body is the medium of prophecy, and prophecy is a painful business.

As the fate of the people is written on his body, Jeremiah gives voice – especially in the Confessions – to a double pain: the pain of his present suffering and the pain the terrible future he must foretell to the people. That this pain in utterance cannot be sufficiently explained accords all too well with both the aural experiences of hysterics and with Carson's description of feminine sound. In the Confessions, Jeremiah assumes the role that Cassandra plays in Greek literature – not only because his words and sounds refuse the ordinary discursive economy, but also because he is denied the possibility of explaining himself, of exercising control over his utterances. Recall Carson: "Female sound is bad to hear *both* because the quality of a woman's voice is objectionable *and* because women say what should not be said."<sup>126</sup> The same holds true for prophetic sound in the Confessions. Jeremiah both says what should not be said, and speaks in a manner, traditionally marked as feminine, that should not be used for masculine sound.

### **Gendering the Sounds of the Prophetic Voice**

The aural is useful as a site of inquiry into the Prophets precisely because it is exterior to the complex and persistent androcentric organization of visibility.<sup>127</sup> I have argued that sound destabilizes the masculinity of Jeremiah and the stability of the text of the Confessions. The hysterical features of Jeremiah's discourse are not simply deliberate and uncontested artistic choices. Instead, they mark a site of instability in the edifice of prophetic masculinity and masculine subjectivity. In the Confessions of Jeremiah, the ambivalent and ambiguous sexing of

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<sup>123</sup> Cook, *The Burden of Prophecy*, 44.

<sup>124</sup> Mills, *Alterity, Pain and Suffering in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel*, 111.

<sup>125</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 361. Holladay uses "Jrm" to refer to the individual figure of the prophet (as opposed to the book).

<sup>126</sup> Carson, "The Gender of Sound," 133.

<sup>127</sup> Psychoanalysis, and Lacan in particular, has made much of the phallicism of the gaze, the confluence of gaze and phallus, the inscription of normative heterosexuality in and through visibility. The aural offers a useful alternative.

the prophet's voice does not offer an erotic intrigue for the reader but rather uses the aural to destabilize larger assumptions about the text. Still, the relationship between sex and sound is neither simple nor neutral.

In arguing that the aural dimension of Jeremiah's Confessions challenges prophetic masculinity, I am not suggesting that the prophetic voice is "really" feminine, as the preceding chapters of this dissertation have already argued at length. There is no "real" or "authentic" feminine voice in the prophets. Instead of taking the feminine features of Jeremiah's speech as an act of female impersonation, this chapter has insisted that a voice is never only a voice and that the prophet's speech is intimately related to his experience of – and crisis of – embodiment. The gendering of sound is not an "impersonation" or a "persona," but rather a complex negotiation between the content and quality of the prophetic sound (which is clearly marked as feminine) and the prophetic body (which is never presented as other than masculine in the text.) Jeremiah's voice, which brings together the materiality of the body with the disembodied sounds it produces, is not an "authentic feminine." It does, however, pose a challenge to the coherent masculine subjectivity of the prophet. In the case of the Confessions, aurality destabilizes the normative economy of prophetic masculinity.

The destabilized masculine prophetic voice of Jeremiah's Confessions offers one such possibility, however tenuous and threatened, of being otherwise. The hysterical, pained and erotic prophetic voice is not always an easy one to hear, even as that which it says is not easy to speak. Those who give voice to feminine sound and to hysterical feminine sound in particular – Cassandra, Dora, Anna O. – frequently speak from a space of suffering, social alienation, and incoherence. They say what cannot be said aloud, in ways that must not be spoken – with bodies, with wails, with hysteria. The hysterical voice comes from a space outside of the normative organization of bodies and pleasures. And yet this is the dangerous, destabilizing, and perhaps desirable force of the prophetic voice in Jeremiah's Confessions.

## Chapter 4

### THE PROPHETIC BODY AFTER THE PROPHETS: NEGOTIATING MASCULINITY IN REVELATION

#### Is Revelation Also Among the Prophets?<sup>1</sup>

The three preceding chapters of this dissertation have considered the body of the prophet in the Hebrew prophetic literature, specifically the books of Hosea, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. While each chapter has focused upon a different problem of prophetic embodiment (the fantasy of the feminine and the anxiety over masculine embodiment in Hosea, the suffering and unmanned flesh in Ezekiel, the gender transgressing voice in Jeremiah), the prophetic texts also share a number of commonalities. They are all set before (or, in the case of Ezekiel, during) the Babylonian exile, in the age of classical Hebrew prophecy.<sup>2</sup> They are all written in classical biblical Hebrew, with a combination of poetry and prose narrative. In addition to this historical and linguistic background, they share basic understandings of the body, masculinity, and the cultural production of gender. They also share an understanding of prophecy as a religious, political, and social practice, as well as the textual conventions with which this prophecy is normally represented.<sup>3</sup> And in each of these texts, the treatment of the prophetic body becomes a site of critical importance for negotiating masculinity and embodiment alike. In the Hebrew prophetic texts, the instability of masculinity has its point of origin in the prophetic *body*.

In this chapter, however, I turn from the prophetic body to the apocalyptic body, and from prophetic to apocalyptic literature.<sup>4</sup> Apocalyptic literature, even more than the prophetic literature, is full of bodies. Angelic messengers, beasts, talking horns, whores drunk on the blood of the saints, women clothed in the sun – even when we limit ourselves to the book of Revelation, the bodies in apocalyptic literature are striking, terrifying, unforgettable. The bodies in Revelation, the most famous apocalyptic text, have entered into the discourse of contemporary western culture so thoroughly that their modern significations sometimes eclipse their biblical provenance – the sign of the beast, the whore of Babylon, the angel blowing the trumpet at the unrolling of the Seventh Seal.

The menagerie of bodies in Revelation includes, as well, a number of prophetic bodies. The prophets found in its pages include John of Patmos (the text's narrator and purported author), the two murdered witnesses to God in Revelation 11, the false prophets of Revelation 2

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<sup>1</sup> Compare 1 Sam. 10:10-12: *As they were going from there to Gibeah, a band of prophets encountered him, and the spirit of God rushed down upon him, and he began to prophesy in their midst* (וַתֵּצֵל עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים וַיִּתְנַבֵּא בְּתוֹכָם). *When all who knew him from before saw how he prophesied with the prophets, they said to each other, "What is this? What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"* (הֲגַם שְׂאוּל בְּנִבְיָאִים) "A man from the place answered, "Who is their father?" Thus it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" Cf 1 Sam. 19:24.

<sup>2</sup> The compiling and editing of the texts is of course later than the time period in which they are set, though still significantly before the time of the New Testament.

<sup>3</sup> On this question, see the introduction.

<sup>4</sup> A definition and discussion of this genre follows below.

(in the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira), the false prophet of the beast (Rev. 19), and a scattering of other references to prophets, their blood, and their bodies. These prophetic bodies, while modeled upon the Hebrew texts, are also something different. What happens to the instability of the prophetic body when the body becomes even more dramatic, extravagant, and monstrous? Does the critique of masculinity suggested by the prophetic body in the Hebrew Bible emerge fully in the text when the bodily excesses become impossible to ignore?

Within the text of Revelation, the forms and significances that bodies take are essential to the ideological positioning of the text. The prophetic bodies in Revelation at once establish continuity with the Hebrew biblical texts and surpass their predecessors. The bodies in Revelation are stronger, brighter, better at bearing witness, more deeply immersed in suffering. The bodies of the prophets, like the other textual bodies, tell stories; they work to constitute an ideology of prophecy and of embodiment. But unlike in the Hebrew Bible, in Revelation the prophetic body does not threaten the stability of the text, or challenge its normative representations of gender and of embodiment. Instead, the prophetic bodies sustain the dominant gender ideology of the text.

The aim of this chapter is not to give a comprehensive reading of Revelation itself, but rather to trace the permutations of a theme from the Hebrew prophetic literature. While I will survey the range of bodies in the text, my central concern is with the prophetic body as it is reinterpreted in the apocalyptic milieu. The prophetic bodies are, at first glance, among the more ordinary – if anything in Revelation can be considered ordinary – of the bodies in the text. However, this is far from the case. My analysis positions the prophetic bodies in Revelation on two axes: first, prophetic body as a continuation of, and rejection of, the Hebrew prophetic body, and second, the prophetic body as constituted by and against other bodies in Revelation.

In the case of Revelation, these prophetic bodies are modeled upon the bodies of the Hebrew prophets. However, they do not occupy a similarly disruptive position in relation to the text's dominant ideology. Instead, like the other bodies in Revelation, the prophetic bodies in Revelation support the dominant gender ideology of the text, which treats masculinity as violent, aggressive, and brutal. This ideology imitates but exceeds Roman imperial norms of masculinity, while also showing the influence of the early Christians' experiences of violence under Roman imperial rule. As in the Hebrew Bible, masculinity in Revelation depends upon specific forms of the body. However, the crucial body here is not the male body, but rather the body of the (non-masculine) subject that is penetrated and violently opened up in a process that secures the dominant masculinity of the male subject. This ideology of masculinity is modeled most clearly in the case of Revelation by the messianic figures that fill its pages – the one like a Son of Man, the Rider on the White Horse, and the Lamb Standing as if Slaughtered. The prophetic bodies offer support to the masculinity modeled by these messianic figures. Revelation's prophetic bodies serve primarily to connect the New Testament text to its Hebrew biblical predecessors, and to exploit this connection to grant credence to the text's own ideological claims. The prophetic body stands in accord with the larger ideological categories, including an ideology of masculinity founded on violence.

## I. THE BOOK OF REVELATION AND THE QUESTION OF PROPHECY

### A Brief Introduction to Revelation

At first glance, the New Testament seems to be a milder collection of texts than the Hebrew Bible – milder, especially, than the depths of sex and violence and strangeness that we have pursued in the Prophets.<sup>5</sup> The New Testament, after all, is a book composed mostly of gospels and letters, of stories and teachings and words of advice.<sup>6</sup> The exception, of course, is the book of Revelation, which Nietzsche described as “the most wanton of all literary outbursts that vengeance has on its conscience.”<sup>7</sup> The final book in the New Testament, Ἀποκάλυψις (*apokalypsis*) – Revelation or Apocalypse<sup>8</sup> – nearly missed the canon. Unlike all the other texts in the New Testament (but like a number of the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible, as well as non-biblical apocalyptic texts), Revelation is presented as a vision, *the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John* (Rev. 1:1).<sup>9</sup> As the text tells it, this John – often called John of Patmos to distinguish him from the other Johns of the New Testament<sup>10</sup> – is a Christian living on the Aegean isle of Patmos.<sup>11</sup> The book of Revelation contains his arresting vision of the coming end of the world.

Revelation’s place in the New Testament canon has long been contested. The book’s early detractors included Marcion, Eusebius, and Jerome, among others.<sup>12</sup> The ambivalent reception of John’s text outlasted late antiquity. In his German translation of the New Testament, Martin Luther placed the book of Revelation last, refusing to number it or to include “Saint” before John’s name<sup>13</sup> and writing in the preface to his translation, “My spirit cannot

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<sup>5</sup> This view is of course simplified; the gospels and the epistles contain their moments of violence and strangeness (Matthew’s Jesus, to take one example, announces, *Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword!* (Matt. 10:34).

<sup>6</sup> To take a characteristic example: Nietzsche, unsurprisingly, hated the New Testament, writing, “To have glued this New Testament (a kind of *rococo* of taste in every respect) to the Old Testament to make *one* book, as the ‘Bible,’ as ‘the book par excellence’—that is perhaps the greatest audacity and ‘sin against the spirit’ that literary Europe has upon its conscience.” Friedrich Nietzsche, “Beyond Good and Evil,” in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Modern Library Classics (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 256.

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 53.

<sup>8</sup> The original meaning of ἀποκάλυψις is *uncovering, disclosure or revelation*; it is used in Revelation to describe the contents of the book. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2001), ἀποκάλυψις.

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the New Testament are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). I will note meaningful textual variants when they occur. Michael D. Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version*, 4th ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> He is also sometimes known in Christian tradition as Saint John the Divine.

<sup>11</sup> Contrast Elaine Pagels, who argues that John understood himself as a Jew. Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Penguin Group US, 2012), 46.

<sup>12</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>13</sup> The Letter to the Hebrews, the Letter of James, and the Letter of Jude (none of them favored by Luther) were also included in the unnumbered section. The other 23 books were all identified as being written by saints; none of the unnumbered four were. Mark U. Edwards Jr., *Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2004), 113.

accommodate itself to this book.”<sup>14</sup> Luther was far from the only reader to feel this way: Calvin, sharing Luther’s distaste, wrote commentaries on every other New Testament book but skipped Revelation. The present day Greek Orthodox lectionary includes no readings from the text; the selections in the Catholic and mainline Protestant lectionaries are generally minimal.<sup>15</sup> Even today, as Talbert observes, “The book of Revelation is appealed to mostly by fringe groups and figures,” as it has been throughout most of history.<sup>16</sup>

The content of Revelation has hardly helped its case for mainstream acceptance. John’s text begins, after a brief introductory formula and address to *the seven churches that are in Asia* (Rev. 1:4)<sup>17</sup> with a vision. He describes, in language borrowed from Daniel and Ezekiel, the appearance of *one like a Son of Man*,<sup>18</sup> with white hair, fiery eyes, and bronze feet (Rev. 1:13-15). This heavenly apparition, one of three central messianic figures in the text of Revelation,<sup>19</sup> commands John to write what he sees. Before turning to this vision, however, John returns to the seven churches in Asia Minor, criticizing the still-new Christian communities for their religious practices and for their acceptance of false prophets in their midst. Then, with these earthly matters addressed, John turns to heavenly concerns. Most of the book of Revelation is a vision of the destruction and violence that accompany the end of the world. Angels blow trumpets, break seals, and pour out bowls of affliction (Rev. 5-6, 8-9), giant locusts and armed horsemen torment the earth (6, 9), beasts and dragons rise in battle against God’s forces (11:7, 12-13), the whore of Babylon rides on a beast, drinking the blood of the saints (17), and 144,000 righteous male virgins (παρθένοι) wed themselves to a bloody Lamb (7; 14:1-5). Humanity (the 144,000 excepted) fares poorly, suffering famines, plagues, battles, rivers of blood, an attack by man-eating birds, and eternal judgment, with those found lacking cast into a lake of fire (20:11-15). The book ends with a vision of the new heaven and new earth, including a new Jerusalem (21-22).

Most scholars accept that John himself authored the text.<sup>20</sup> John stakes his claim to authority not on the name of a traditional wise man, but rather on God and on his own witness (Rev. 1:1-2; 22:8, 18-20), further supporting his claims of authorship.<sup>21</sup> The text itself is most frequently dated to around 95 CE, under the reign of Domitian;<sup>22</sup> an interpretive tradition that

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann, vol. Volume 35: Word and Sacrament I (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 398–399.

<sup>15</sup> Talbert, *The Apocalypse*, 2. Protestant and Catholic lectionaries have minimal selections from Revelation. The Catholic Church only pronounced the text canonical in the 1546 Canon of Trent.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> These churches include Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. All were located in Western Anatolia (the Roman province of Asia).

<sup>18</sup> Aune writes, “The translation ‘a son of man’ (RSV, NIV; Bratcher-Hatton, *Revelation*, 30; Salter, *BT 44* [1993] 349-350) is more appropriate than ‘the son of man’ (NRSV).” David Edward Aune, *Revelation. 1-5* (Dallas, Tex.: Word Books, 1997), 65.

<sup>19</sup> The other two are Lamb Standing as if Slaughtered and the Rider on the White Horse, both discussed below.

<sup>20</sup> While many late antique texts, especially apocalyptic texts, were pseudonymous, there is no reason to think that Revelation is. David Hill, “Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St. John,” *New Testament Studies* 18, no. 04 (1972): 403; John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 39–42, 271.

<sup>21</sup> Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 271.

<sup>22</sup> Some scholars have argued for an earlier dating. Smalley, for example, dates Revelation to the rule of Vespasian (69-79 CE). Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: a Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*

goes back as far as Eusebius holds that this was a time of intense persecution for Christians.<sup>23</sup> More recent scholarship, however, has challenged this assumption, pointing to the lack of external evidence for persecution of Christians under Domitian and arguing instead for a perceived or even imagined crisis.<sup>24</sup> Beyond a place, a time, and a name, the text only leaves us with hints about its author. John, it seems, was a Palestinian Jew, or at least someone whose native language was a Semitic one (probably Aramaic), and who knew a great deal about the Jerusalem temple and the landscape of Palestine, enough to describe them in detail in his visions.<sup>25</sup>

Many of the differences between Revelation and the other books of the New Testament, which so bothered Luther and so many other readers, become meaningful when we consider the genre of the text. In the case of Revelation, the genre is apocalyptic literature.<sup>26</sup> As apocalyptic literature, it “provides a comprehensive view of the world, which then provides the basis for exhortation or consolation.”<sup>27</sup> The text is likewise “intended to interpret present, earthly

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(London: SPCK, 2005), 3. See as well Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (Milton Keynes, England: Word Publishing, 1994), 49–50.

<sup>23</sup> See Leonard L. Thompson, “Ordinary Lives: John and His First Readers,” in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students*, ed. David L. Barr (Boston: Brill, 2004), 29–32.

<sup>24</sup> In 1984, Adela Yarbro Collins proposed that the crisis in Revelation was *perceived* as a crisis; Leonard Thompson went further and argued that there was *no* crisis, real or perceived, in the Asian Christianity. More recently, scholars including Royalty, Duff, and others have offered various models of internal church conflict to explain John's vitriolic rhetoric of persecution. See Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1984); Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Robert M. Royalty, *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1998); Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?: Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> The identification of John as a native speaker of a Semitic language is based upon minor errors and idiosyncrasies in his use of Greek, though these may also reflect a conscious attempt to imitate Hebrew texts. Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 1; Gregory K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 125; David L. Barr, “The Apocalypse of John,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 640.

<sup>26</sup> Apocalyptic literature has been defined by its new relationship to wisdom, (von Rad), in terms of eschatology (Koch), as part of the ideology of an oppositional social movement grounded in biblical prophecy (Hanson), as the revelation of heavenly mysteries (Rowland), and as the foreclosure of free choice in the “dialogical intercourse between God and man” (Buber). I will follow the definition of apocalyptic literature offered by John J. Collins, Adela Yarbro Collins, and the Apocalypse group of the SBL, discussed below (see notes 20 and 21, below). On the other definitions, see, respectively, Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 302–308; Klaus Koch, *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic: A Polemical Work on a Neglected Area of Biblical Studies and Its Damaging Effects on Theology and Philosophy*, vol. 154 (London: SCM Press, 1972); Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*; Hanson, “Old Testament Apocalyptic Reexamined”; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982); Buber, “Prophecy, Apocalyptic, and the Historical Hour,” 177; Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*; Adela Yarbro Collins, “Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 1–11. Defining apocalyptic literature has long been a popular scholarly activity, and the body of scholarship at times sometimes seems larger than the apocalyptic corpus itself. For a review of recent literature, see Ian Paul, “Ebbing and Flowing: Scholarly Developments in Study of the Book of Revelation,” *The Expository Times* 119, no. 11 (2008): 523.

<sup>27</sup> The quote is taken from John J. Collins' description of apocalyptic literature: “‘Apocalypse’ is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a

circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.”<sup>28</sup> Apocalyptic literature is ideological literature, deeply and intentionally so. It does not simply offer a view of the world, but also works to establish this worldview in the mind of its audience. And essential to this worldview is Revelation’s relationship to prophecy.

### Meet the Prophets

Prophecy is deeply important in the book of Revelation, which presents itself as a work of prophecy.<sup>29</sup> There are multiple prophets in the book of Revelation. In constructing these prophetic figures, true and false alike, John draws upon both the biblical representation of prophecy and the social and cultural milieu in which the text is produced. First among the prophets in Revelation is John himself, whose identification as a prophet emerges primarily through allusions and intertextual references to other, earlier biblical prophets. John repeatedly positions himself as latter-day Ezekiel, beginning with his theophany and tumble in the dust and followed by a number of other allusions and imitative actions.<sup>30</sup> He also characterizes himself in relation to the other prophets from the Hebrew corpus, especially Isaiah.<sup>31</sup> And while he never explicitly claims the title *prophet*, he also avoids correcting the angel who addresses *you and your comrades the prophets* in 22:9; this same angel also refers to the contents of John’s book as *words of prophecy* (22:10), thereby conveniently identifying the genre of John’s text for him. John is likewise commanded to prophesy in Rev. 10:11 (καὶ λέγουσίν μοι· δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ λαοῖς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς; *Then they said to me, “You must prophesy again against<sup>32</sup> many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”*<sup>33</sup>) As the central figure of the text, John doubles as the reader’s point of entry into the world of eschatological visions. On a basic level, the text of Revelation owes its very existence to this prophetic figure. The textual corpus assumes the prophet and his body.

Following John, the most important prophets in Revelation are the two *witnesses* (μάρτυσιν, *martysin*; sing. μάρτυς, *martys*) authorized to prophesy (προφητεύουσιν,

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human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.” John J. Collins, “Introduction: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” ed. John J. Collins, *Semeia Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, no. 14 (1979): 9.

<sup>28</sup> This addition to Collins’ definition was accepted by the SBL Apocalypse Group and reads in full: “In light of the suggestions made by Hellholm and Aune, the following addition to the definition of ‘apocalypse’ in Semeia 14 may be made: intended to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.” Collins, “Introduction,” 7.

<sup>29</sup> See further Adela Yarbro Collins, “Apocalypse Now: The State of Apocalyptic Studies Near the End of the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century,” *Harvard Theological Review* 104, no. 04 (2011): 451.

<sup>30</sup> John W. Olley, “Trajectories of Ezekiel (Part 2): Beyond the Book,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 10, no. 1 (2011): 62–65.

<sup>31</sup> Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, vol. 93, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement (Sheffield Academic Press, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> ἐπί + dative can mean either *about* or *against*; NRSV reads *about*.

<sup>33</sup> As Aune notes, “the plural form of the verb is problematic.” Aune reviews several possibilities and concludes that likely “the indefinite plural is a substitute for the passive,” a suggestion I am inclined to follow. David Edward Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 573.



*prophēteusousin*) for 1260 days.<sup>34</sup> These witnesses are explicitly called prophets in Rev. 11:10 and are the only true prophets (beyond John himself) to appear in any detail in the text; the handful of additional references to true prophecy concern either the prophets of the past as historical individuals or the prophet as a general type of righteous person.<sup>35</sup> More generally, prophets frequently appear as part of a synecdoche for the righteous, as in *your servants, the prophets*,<sup>36</sup> and *God's people*<sup>37</sup> and *all who fear your name* (τοῖς δούλοις σου τοῖς προφήταις καὶ τοῖς ἁγίοις καὶ τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου, Rev. 11:18) or *you people of God*<sup>38</sup> and *apostles and prophets* (οἱ ἅγιοι καὶ οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ προφῆται Rev. 18:20).<sup>39</sup> Here, the prophets stand for the followers of God.

Revelation also has its share of false prophets. In the letter to the seven churches of Asia that precedes his vision, John excoriates the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira for listening to the counsel of false prophets. He chastises Pergamum for tolerating certain individuals *who hold to the teaching of Balaam* (Rev. 2:14). “Balaam,” of course, is a clever reference to the non-Israelite prophet Balaam ben Beori from the book of Numbers (Num. 22-24), and amounts to an accusation of false prophets among the church of Pergamum. John’s words to the church at Thyatira are even harsher, and they, too, rely on a vivid invocation of false prophecy via a predecessor from the Hebrew text. Here, the false prophet he condemns is a woman called “Jezebel,” a name borrowed from King Ahab’s much-vilified Phoenician wife in the book of Kings. While her prophetic credentials are lacking in the Hebrew text, evidence of her perfidy is not – Jezebel is repeatedly reviled for leading Ahab into false (non-Yahwistic) religious practice. As with “Balaam,” John’s naming of his prophetic rival “Jezebel” is also an act of un-naming, and thus of rendering illegitimate, his rival.<sup>40</sup> A third false prophet is found in John’s vision: the prophet of the beast that terrorizes the earth. Eventually, the prophet is cast into a lake of sulfur together with the beast; their followers are consumed by birds (19:19-21).

And so these are our prophets in Revelation. On the side of the good, the true, and the heavenly stand the martyrs of chapter 11; *your servants the prophets*, whose blood secures the divine message; and John himself. On the other side stand the false prophets. Like the overarching worldview of the text, the prophets are split between good and evil, between the armies of the Lamb and the armies of the beast. There are no neutral prophets, no third parties, no well-intentioned but ultimately unsuccessful prophets (or ill-intentioned but nevertheless

<sup>34</sup> The Greek μάρτυς, *martyrs*, originally means simply witness, and only later takes on the meaning of one who dies to testify to religious belief. I will take up this second meaning in relation to Revelation subsequently in this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> Thus the angel who serves as John’s guide refers to *the mystery of God*...[that] he announced to his servants the prophets (Rev. 10:7); connecting the present moment to a historical age of prophecy.

<sup>36</sup> The grammatical structure of the Greek is ambiguous, and may be read either as *your servants the prophets, and the saints* or as *your servants, [namely] the prophets and the saints*. For discussion see Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 292; Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 616–618.

<sup>37</sup> οἱ ἅγιοι. Read as *God’s people* following Aune and Louw-Nida. Louw-Nida § 11.27, cited in Aune, *Revelation. 1-5*, 325n8h. NRSV reads *saints*.

<sup>38</sup> See note 37 above.

<sup>39</sup> Compare as well Rev. 16:6, 18:24.

<sup>40</sup> As Carter writes, on the naming of prophets in the letters: “Renaming them renders them illegitimate. John replaces their actual names with names that evoke biblical traditions involving figures divinely condemned for societal participation (Balaam, Jezebel), including idolatry.” Warren Carter, “Accommodating ‘Jezebel’ and Withdrawing John: Negotiating Empire in Revelation Then and Now,” *Interpretation* 63, no. 1 (2009): 33.

successful prophets, as in the case of Jonah in the Hebrew Bible). Unlike in the Hebrew Bible, prophets in Revelation do not hide in caves (1 Kgs. 18:4) or stand by during showdowns with other prophets (1 Kgs. 18:19).<sup>41</sup> And just as there are no neutral prophets in Revelation, there are no neutral prophetic bodies in Revelation. Instead, the bodies of the prophets participate in a larger economy of meaning that is organized around the body in the text. The prophets of Revelation connect the book and its ideological claims with the Hebrew Bible. The relationship to the Hebrew prophetic texts, as much as the representations of specific prophetic characters, is an essential part of Revelation's rich but complicated relationship to biblical prophecy.

### Prophecy and Revelation

John repeatedly channels, and in some cases transforms, the Hebrew Bible's representations of prophets and prophecy. In addition to drawing names, traits, and experiences for his prophetic characters, good and bad alike, from the Hebrew biblical texts, John fills his text with complicated practices of literary imitation, allusion, and intertextuality. At the same time, Revelation is shaped by a vibrant social context of prophecy, which influences John's use of the biblical predecessors while adding urgency and importance to his visionary appropriations of the prophetic figure. This engagement with prophecy is present, furthermore, from the book's beginning. Rev. 1:3 reads *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy* (τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας), *and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near*. The text reuses the phrase *the words of the prophecy of this book* (τοὺς λόγους τῆς προφητείας τοῦ βιβλίου τούτου) in describing Revelation's contents in 22:10 and 18. John repeatedly names the genre of his work as prophecy, and while he never precisely calls himself a prophet (προφήτης), he makes his relationship to the Hebrew prophets, as well as its significance, clear.

The book of Revelation is animated by repeated allusions to, echoes of, and intertextual parallels with the Hebrew Bible, especially the prophets.<sup>42</sup> Richard Bauckham writes,

John was writing what he understood to be a work of prophetic scripture, the climax of prophetic revelation, which gathered up the prophetic meaning of the Old Testament scriptures and disclosed the way in which it was being and was to be fulfilled in the last days. His work therefore presupposes and conveys an extensive interpretation of large parts of Old Testament prophecy.<sup>43</sup>

As Bauckham suggests, John's relationship to prophecy is both rich and complicated. John "understood" his work to be "a work of prophetic scripture;" it is both more and less than this, of

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<sup>41</sup>The prophets of Asherah are present at Elijah's contest with the 450 prophets of Ba'al do not participate. However, they seem to draw no condemnation from the text, as (unlike the prophets of Ba'al), they are not killed in its aftermath. Thus they seem to represent a neutral third party.

<sup>42</sup> For example, Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, vol. 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Ian Paul, "The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12," in *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of JL North*, ed. S. Moyise, vol. 189 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 256–277; Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 93; Ian K. Boxall, "Ezekiel's Influence on the Book of Revelation," in *The Book of Ezekiel and Its Influence*, ed. H. J. de Jonge and Johannes Tromp (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 147–164. Because the body of scholarship on this question is so rich, I will not offer an in-depth consideration here, but rather only a few key examples.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1998), xi.

course. John consciously imitates the prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible by borrowing both specific language and broad plot points. And yet his zeal to imitate stands in tension with a desire to surpass the earlier texts and to prove himself more prophetic still than the prophets he takes as predecessors. While this tension – perhaps related to an anxiety of influence – is often present in moments of intertextuality, it comes to the fore in Revelation’s relationship to prophecy. John does not simply take preexisting tropes, including the prophetic body, and continue them in his own work. Instead, he at once continues, transforms, and surpasses his source, both in his representation of his own bodily experiences and in his description of other prophetic bodies, true and false alike. Thus John, like the Hebrew prophets before him, swallows a scroll (Ezekiel), encounters an *angelus interpres* like Zechariah and a being with a sword in his mouth like Isaiah, and writes a book, as does Daniel; the witnesses of Revelation 11 bring rains of blood like Moses and heavenly fire like Elijah, and even the false prophet of the beast is cast down, like so many unflavored prophets from Jeremiah to John the Baptist.

Unusually, Revelation includes no explicit quotations from the Hebrew Bible, even though it contains more allusions to it than any other book in the New Testament.<sup>44</sup> A great many of these allusions are to the Hebrew prophetic books. The opening scenes of the book, for example, evoke the openings of the books of the Latter Prophets.<sup>45</sup> The first verse, describing *the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave... by sending his angel to his servant John*, follows the model of the Hebrew prophetic texts by describing the message, the recipient, and its divine source. As I have already suggested, the one like a Son of Man who appears to John is a great deal like the interpreting angel who comes to Zechariah (Zech. 1:9ff). In case this parallel is not enough, John also includes his own prophetic call narrative (Rev. 10:8-11). He first hears a voice from heaven, and then swallows a scroll, finding it, like Ezekiel and Jeremiah, *sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter* (Rev. 10:10). As Stephen Smalley and others note, these similarities to the Hebrew prophets are not simply a straightforward (or cynical) adaptation of generic conventions. Instead, according to his own understanding, “John stands in the line of Old Testament prophets; and in the Apocalypse there seems to be at times a conscious attempt to make this connection clear.”<sup>46</sup> John’s engagement with the prophetic literature is not limited to the scene of his own calling. Many of his most famous visions rely heavily on images and mythic motifs borrowed from the Hebrew prophets, among them the whore of Babylon (compare Ezek. 16 and 23, as well as the general prophetic trope of city as woman), the battle with Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38-39), the throne vision of Rev. 4 (combining elements from Daniel’s two visions in ch. 7, Ezek. 1, and Isa. 6), and the New Jerusalem (Ezek. 40-48, but also with elements from Isaiah).<sup>47</sup>

The parallels with the Hebrew prophetic literature extend beyond the use of specific words and type-scenes to include broader modes of perception. The books of Ezekiel and Daniel are among the most visual in the Hebrew Bible, certainly in the prophetic literature.<sup>48</sup> As is

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<sup>44</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 115:14.

<sup>45</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> See further Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 115:; Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*; Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 93: . Beale offers a systematic listing of the eight ways that John uses the Old Testament (75-125).

<sup>48</sup> Zechariah, sometimes considered proto-apocalyptic or early apocalyptic, is also a strongly visual text.

typical for apocalyptic literature, Revelation is likewise filled with strong visions and striking images, with angels and beasts and visions of God. But John's heavy use of these prophetic images suggests an emotional connection between the text and John's sense (historically validated or otherwise<sup>49</sup>) of writing within persecution or exile. Ian Boxall writes,

It should not surprise us that particular influence upon John's visionary book has come from those who were considered exiled prophets of the past: Jeremiah, Daniel, and especially Ezekiel. These have, as it were, provided the raw materials and the interpretative lens for making sense of John's current situation, and for his urgent message for the churches...John has 'devoured Ezekiel's scroll' (10:8-11), consuming it and transforming it as he makes it his own.<sup>50</sup>

John's use of prophetic literature thus reflects not simply the general relationship between prophetic and apocalyptic genres, but a specific historical impetus. The rich visuality of the text creates a connection to Ezekiel and Daniel, associating Revelation as well with those books' own concern with the pain of exile or political oppression.

The prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible is not the only prophetic influence on the book of Revelation. In addition to drawing on these literary texts, Revelation is written within, and informed by, a dynamic social context of prophecy. It was once a popular belief, seemingly substantiated by accounts in the rabbinic literature, that prophecy "ceased" sometime after the exile; Malachi is taken as the last of the prophets.<sup>51</sup> However, as with Mark Twain, reports of prophecy's death proved greatly exaggerated,<sup>52</sup> and the rabbinic accounts of its demise tell us more about the rabbis' own anxieties over their authority than about the social and religious reality of first century Palestine.<sup>53</sup> Instead, as modern scholarship has shown, Second Temple Judaism and the early years of Christianity were marked by a glut of prophets.<sup>54</sup> John's strong sense of himself as a prophet and of his book as a prophetic work is thus influenced, not just by reading of the Hebrew Bible, but also by the historical moment in which he lived.<sup>55</sup>

The book of Revelation contains the influence of a number of forms and practices of prophecy. The literary representation of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible provides John with a series of textual forms and conventions with which to represent and to render culturally legible his visionary experiences. The contemporary social context of prophecy in Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity likewise provide John with cultural traction in recounting his experiences. Revelation draws on these multiple discourses of prophecy and, importantly, works

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<sup>49</sup> See my discussion above.

<sup>50</sup> Ian K. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 11.

<sup>51</sup> Frederick E. Greenspahn, "Why Prophecy Ceased," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108, no. 1 (April 1, 1989): 37.

<sup>52</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 93:26. It is also worth noting an ideological motivation for the Rabbis to emphasize the "death" of prophecy as a form of consolidating their own authority. See Greenspahn, "Why Prophecy Ceased."

<sup>53</sup> Greenspahn, "Why Prophecy Ceased."

<sup>54</sup> Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 93:26.

<sup>55</sup> As Fekkes notes, "The rise and decline of early Christian prophecy is generally set within a time frame of c. 120 years (30-150 CE)," but "the paucity of literary material relating to prophecy in this historical period makes much of any reconstruction tentative." *Ibid.*, 93:23-24. See also Christopher Rowland, "Prophecy in the New Testament," in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 410-430.

to transform them. John's aim is not simply to write another work of Hebrew prophecy, but rather to use the Hebrew prophets, and to go beyond them. In order to do so, he positions the prophetic body within a larger discourse of masculinity in the book of Revelation. The prophetic body offers an important perspective not just on prophecy, but also on the construction of meaning and of masculinity in the text as a whole.

## II. MOMENTS OF PROPHETIC EMBODIMENT IN REVELATION

### The Prophetic Body of John of Patmos: Masculinity as Imitation and Replication

The prophetic bodies in the book of Revelation are an important part of the textual construction of a norm of masculinity. While the bodies of the prophetic figures (such as of John, the witnesses of chapter 11, the various false prophets) are not the most spectacular or dramatic bodies in Revelation (the book includes, after all, a bloody Lamb, multiple beasts, and locusts with human faces, to name but a few), they are central to the text's ideological production. In particular, John uses prophetic bodies to constitute and justify an ideal of hegemonic masculinity in the text. John constructs the parallels with the Hebrew prophetic bodies to provide textual and corporeal support to the vision of the book of Revelation, including its dominant discourse of masculinity.

The most central prophetic body in Revelation is the body of John himself. In representing his own body in the text, John models it on the bodies of the Hebrew prophets. As even a brief consideration makes clear, John's body is foremost a repetition of Ezekiel's body.<sup>56</sup> There is, however, one important difference: whereas Ezekiel's pained, unstable, excessive body, opened by the prophetic word, opposes the dominant masculine discourses of the Hebrew Bible, John's body has no such subversive effect. Instead, its role in the text is to perceive and to offer the reader access to other, more dramatic masculine bodies, such as the messianic masculinities embodied by the Rider, the one like a Son of Man, and even the virilized Lamb. John's prophetic body does *not*, however, to destabilize these other exemplars of masculinity in Revelation. Instead, John's body facilitates other, more dramatic masculine scenes of embodiment.

The relationship between John and Ezekiel, enacted primarily through the body, is present from the beginning. John opens his book by mimicking Ezekiel's social and geographical positioning. The Hebrew prophet begins, *In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw divine visions* (Ezek. 1:1). John, for his part, writes,

*<sup>9</sup>I, John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and my witness to Jesus.<sup>57</sup> <sup>10</sup>I was in the spirit on the Lord's day,<sup>58</sup> and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet <sup>11</sup>saying, "Write<sup>59</sup> in a*

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<sup>56</sup> I will focus on Ezekiel in relation to John because I have already discussed Ezekiel's body at length in chapter 2; my discussion here builds upon that reading. However, Ezekiel models himself on other prophets as well; on Isaiah, see especially Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 93:. See as well Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*; Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 115:.

<sup>57</sup> *My witness to Jesus*. NRSV: *the testimony of Jesus*.

<sup>58</sup> That is, Sunday. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 203.

*book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”*<sup>12</sup>*Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden menorahs,*<sup>60</sup><sup>13</sup>*and in the midst of the menorahs I saw one like a Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. (Rev. 1:9-13)*

Like his predecessor, John begins in exile and upon the edge of a body of water. And for John, as for Ezekiel, the body first enters the text as a perceptive apparatus, receiving (and passing on to the reader) divine visions. The close parallels between the scenes are not simply imitation for imitation’s sake, but rather an intentional effort to bring the two texts into a closer relation. John aims to use Ezekiel’s prophetic status to authorize Revelation’s claims. He likewise models himself on Ezekiel (and other prophets from the Hebrew Bible) to authenticate his own visionary experience and to substantiate his authority.

A similar moment of imitation to alternate ends occurs when John, again imitating Ezekiel, finds his body opened up by prophecy. John, like Ezekiel, is compelled to open his mouth and to eat a scroll:

*<sup>8</sup>Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, “Go, take the scroll (βιβλίον<sup>61</sup>) that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.”*<sup>9</sup>*So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll (βιβλαρίδιον); and he said to me, “Take it, and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.”*<sup>10</sup>*So I took the little scroll (βιβλαρίδιον) from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.*<sup>11</sup>*Then I was told,*<sup>62</sup>*“You must prophesy again about many peoples and nations and languages and kings.” (Rev. 10:8-11; compare Ezek. 2:8-3:3).*

For John, as for Ezekiel, the prophetic word comes tasting sweet as honey; its consumption is a necessary preliminary to prophecy. This scene of imitation, far from subtle, links John to Ezekiel, and John’s visions to Ezekiel’s prophecies. Prophetic imitation serves as a practice of legitimacy.

However, John’s imitations of Ezekiel, while successful repetitions of the earlier prophet’s actions, also fail. More specifically, John’s repetitions erase or neutralize the instability and uncertainty that accompany Ezekiel’s actions in the Hebrew text. Thus John, like Ezekiel,

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<sup>59</sup> Aune writes, “The aor. imper. *γράφον* is used here because the author has in mind the specific complete action of writing a revelatory book.” Aune, *Revelation. 1-5*, 64n11d.

<sup>60</sup> *λυχνία* (singular *λύχνος*), *lampstands* in the NRSV. The noun is anarthrous, suggesting it is not intended as a common or familiar noun. Aune suggests that John “conceives of this scene in 1.9-20 as a heavenly revelation reflecting the archaic patterns of temple imagery characteristic of such revelations in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition,” making *menorahs* a more effective choice. *Ibid.*, 65n12d.

<sup>61</sup> *βιβλίον* and *βιβλαρίδιον* are both diminutives of *βιβλος*, *scroll* or *book* (as, indeed, are *βιβλίδιον* and *βιβλιδάριον*). Whether and which diminutives maintained their meaning in John’s time is a much debated question; see, to begin, Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 552n84; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 243–244. As the size of the scroll is not a determining factor here, I have maintained the NRSV translation.

<sup>62</sup> *Then I was told: καὶ λέγουσίν μοι, then they said to me* (NRSV); however, the construction is an impersonal passive.

falls into the dust before a heavenly apparition, but the narrative that follows is different. Ezekiel is sent as a prophet to a people who will not understand him, and this difficulty is reflected in his performances. John, for his part, is commanded to *write*, which he does without difficulty. Prophecy is no longer preordained in the text to failure and its fruits are no longer limited to the ephemera of the prophet's body.

Similarly, in swallowing the scroll, John succeeds – perhaps he succeeds too well – in conventionalizing what is strange and disturbingly embodied in Ezekiel. When Ezekiel eats the scroll, it is something shocking and new – and unsuccessful, as the hardheaded Israelites refuse to heed his prophecy. When John swallows the scroll, he marks himself as a prophet in the spiritual lineage of Ezekiel. We can understand John's body because other texts, including Ezekiel, have already taught us how to read it. There is also a slippage concerning the taste of the scroll: John, like Ezekiel, finds *it was sweet as honey in my mouth* but adds *but when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter*. Though Ezekiel's prophetic experience is without a doubt frequently bitter, he tastes no bitterness when he eats the scroll. John's perception of bitterness thus betrays his familiarity with the prophetic narrative he imitates. When swallowing the scroll becomes recognizable as a conventional prophetic action, it loses its primary significance as an opening of the body. The action is no longer an action about the *body*, but rather an initiation into a spiritual genealogy of prophecy. And further, because of the associations between the scroll that John swallows and the Revelation that he writes, the scene also inscribes the authority of John's text, and by extension of the dominant discourses of masculinity found within it.

Ezekiel's body, in its pain and extremity, stands in tension with the dominant ideologies of masculinity and prophecy. John's body, however, helps authorize the ideas of masculinity found in the book of Revelation. This is the second function of John's body in Revelation: to serve as a perceptual apparatus that introduces other, more dramatically masculine bodies. Again, as with Ezekiel, John's first vision is of a spectacular divine body. The prophet's body facilitates the text's gaze upon the first messianic figure that John sees, *the one like a Son of Man* (ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου). Overwhelmed by beauty and power; describes,

*<sup>14</sup>His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, <sup>15</sup>his feet were like bronze smelted in a furnace,<sup>63</sup> refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. (Rev. 1:13-15)*

Following the generic conventions of prophecy, John tumbles to the ground before this apparition, whose appearance recalls multiple divine and angelic figures from Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah, as well as the robes of the priest.<sup>64</sup> As does swallowing the scroll, John's actions remind us that he is a prophet, and that his body acts according to established expectations of prophetic experiences of theophany. But it is precisely because John does exactly what is expected that his actions and his body attract little interest in the text. Instead, it is the spectacular, monstrous body of the one like a Son of Man – a figure whom Tina Pippin describes as “elucidat[ing] the extremity of monstrous in the Apocalypse”<sup>65</sup> – that becomes the central

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<sup>63</sup> *Like bronze smelted in a furnace*: χαλκολιβάνω ὡς ἐν καμίνω πεπυρωμένης. NRSV *like burnished bronze*. See Aune COMM 1 65-66n15a. As Beale notes, “The mention of the ‘furnace’ (v 15b) again echoes the description from Dan. 3:25 (93, Theod.), although Ezek. 1:27 perhaps also lies near.” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 210.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 208–212; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 54–55; Aune, *Revelation. 1-5*, 93–98.

<sup>65</sup> Tina Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies: The Biblical End of the World in Text and Image* (London: Routledge, 1999), 88.

focal point of the text. This, in turn, directs attention away from John and toward the ideology of masculinity that the Son of Man expresses on and with his body.

And this performance of masculinity, like the appearance of the one like a Son of Man, is ferocious. His body, which combines features of the *Ancient of Days* (עתיק יומין)<sup>66</sup> and the original *one like a Son of Man* (כְּבָר אֲנֹכִי) in Daniel 7:13, as well as the body of God and of the temple guide in Ezekiel (1-2 and 40:1-3), is coded as divine, powerful, and desirable.<sup>67</sup> The flame and bronze suggest both traditional biblical images of power (cf Ezek. 1, 40; 1 Enoch 46) and the impenetrability of armor. The double-edged sword that issues from his mouth, an image borrowed from Isaiah 11:4, is a less subtle martial touch.<sup>68</sup> Still, the Son of Man's primary role in the text involves words, not swords, as the Son of Man is to serve as mediator and explicator for John, doubling the role that John occupies in relation to the reader. As such, in his first appearance in the text, he represents a restraint and mastery of discourse that accords with both Hebrew biblical and Roman ideals of masculinity. This ideal is likewise enacted by the form of his body, which invites the gaze and exudes masculine power but also restraint.

This opening scene, which introduces the Son of Man in the text, also establishes a norm of masculinity. As John's body becomes a perceptual apparatus, that which John perceives – the body of the one like a Son of Man – gains importance. The parallels between this scene and scenes of theophany in the Hebrew Bible, so carefully established, heighten the exemplary status of the Son of Man's gender performance and his form of embodiment. Even when John tumbles to the ground, the momentary entry of his body into the text serves only to redirect attention back to the more fantastic and monstrous masculine form of the one like a Son of Man. The prophetic body thus shores up the dominant representation of masculinity, enacted here by a messianic body. Meanwhile, insofar as John's body evokes Ezekiel, the association with the Hebrew prophet grants credence to John's text. The similarity of John's prophetic body to other, familiar prophetic bodies becomes a legitimating mechanism for the vision as a whole. It is through John's body – his eyes, but also his other senses – that the reader experiences the vision, and in particular the spectacular masculine bodies it contains. The Son of Man emerges as a paradigm of masculinity precisely because his body is witnessed by John himself. While John's personal performance of masculinity is largely unremarkable, especially when compared to figures such as the one like a Son of Man, his body does important work to legitimate these more drastic masculine performances. John uses his body to craft a textual norm of masculinity.

### **The Bodies of the Two Witnesses: Masculinity Through Martyrdom**

John's body, like his book, offers access to the vision he experiences. His perceptions frame the text and render its textual norms about masculinity and embodiment accessible and

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<sup>66</sup> The *Ancient of Days* (עתיק יומין) is likewise described with hair as clothing as white as snow and immaculate woolen garments: לְבוּשָׁה כְּתֹלַגְתָּן וְשַׁעַר רֵאשִׁי כְּצֹמֵר נֶקֶא (Dan. 7:13).

<sup>67</sup> Dan. 7:9: *As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne, his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire:* Dan. 7:13-14: *As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.* Compare Ezek. 1:27-28 (discussed in my chapter 2) and 40:3 (the description of the “man” who shows Ezekiel the restored temple.)

<sup>68</sup> Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 277.



convincing to his audience. The bodies of the two witnesses in chapter 11 imitate the bodies of the Hebrew prophets, including appearing, briefly, in a vision to the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 4:14). However, far more than is the case with John's body, the witnesses' bodies also exemplify the ideals of masculinity and male prophetic embodiment in Revelation. While John's body provides a guarantor of the truth of his prophecy, the bodies of the witnesses offer a fantasy of prophecy and power.

These two witnesses appear only in chapter 11, where their story occupies most of the chapter. God announces, *I will grant my two witnesses authority to prophesy* (καὶ δώσω τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν μου καὶ προφητεύσουσιν<sup>69</sup>) *for 1260 days, wearing sackcloth* (Rev. 11:3). The number of days works out to three and a half years, a unit of time drawn from Daniel that represents a period of tribulation<sup>70</sup> and corresponding as well both to the length of Jesus' ministry and to Elijah's withholding of the rain.<sup>71</sup> During this period of prophecy, the witnesses are granted incredible power. Like Elijah, they are able to stop the rain and to destroy their enemies with fire – though doing Elijah one better, this fire comes forth directly from their mouths. (Rev. 11:5). Like Moses, they are also able to turn water to blood and to strike the earth with plagues (11:6).<sup>72</sup> And then,

*<sup>7</sup>When they have finished their testimony, the beast<sup>73</sup> that comes up from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,<sup>8</sup> and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that is prophetically<sup>74</sup> called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.<sup>9</sup> For three and a half days members of the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb;<sup>10</sup> and the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and celebrate and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth.<sup>11</sup> But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and those who saw them were terrified.<sup>12</sup> Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud while their enemies watched them. (11:7-12)*

<sup>69</sup> This construction imitates the Hebrew הָיָה. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 578n3b.

<sup>70</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 274. See Dan. 7:25; 12:7, 11. The use of days instead of months or years to mark time is simply a literary variation (Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 218.)

<sup>71</sup> Luke 4:25; Jas. 5:17. The length of time for Elijah's ministry of judgment comes from James; the amount of time in Kings is shorter. See Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 584.

<sup>72</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 275.

<sup>73</sup> The use of the definite article with the noun (τὸ θηρίον, 'the beast') suggests that the symbol is familiar to John's audience;" however, θηρίον appears without an article in Rev. 13 and 17, suggesting the opposite. Ibid., 280. See further Smalley's discussion.

<sup>74</sup> πνευματικῶς ; *spiritually*, though closer to the Greek πνεῦμα, has lost the specificity of meaning. *Prophetically* better fits the sense of *in a manner connoting prophetic speech*, *prophetic* is here opposed to non-prophetic or ordinary speech. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 581n8e.

With their time of prophecy completed, the bodies of the witnesses shift from prophetic agents to prophetic signs. Murdered by the beast and left in the streets for three and a half days,<sup>75</sup> the witnesses are then resurrected, proving the truth of their words and anticipating the final triumph of the righteous. Their resurrection is followed immediately by a deadly earthquake (Rev. 11:13), with the opening of the earth mirroring the opening of heaven as God calls back his prophets.

This account of the two witnesses, though brief, contains three distinct accounts of the prophetic body: the living, prophesying body; the dead, witnessing body; and the glorious resurrected body. When the witnesses first appear, their bodies are rich with power. Called to testify to God, they speak fire against their enemies and bring destruction upon the land. The figure of speaking fire comes from the Hebrew Bible, where, as Aune puts it, “The motif of fire emanating from a person’s mouth was used as a metaphor for speaking forth the word of God, usually in a situation of rebuke and condemnation”<sup>76</sup> (Jer. 5:14, 23:29; Ezek. 21:31). Speaking fire thus links the two witnesses to a preexisting prophetic tradition. And yet, in Revelation, the fiery speech of the witnesses is a weapon, and not simply a metaphor (as it is in the Hebrew prophets), because it has the power to kill the witnesses’ enemies.<sup>77</sup> The motif of speaking fire thus not only positions the two witnesses within a prophetic genealogy, but also suggests that they, with their divinely given powers, have succeeded it. Other prophets speak words *like* fire; the witnesses speak fire itself.

This same structure of imitation and supersession of the (Hebrew) biblical prophetic body appears in relation to Moses and Elijah. Though Moses’ body is sometimes opened and contested in its masculinity, it also functions as a paradigmatically masculine body, especially when it serves as a model and a fantasy object for the latter prophets.<sup>78</sup> Elijah is likewise a paradigm of prophecy and prophetic embodiment. The two witnesses possess the same bodily powers as their Hebrew predecessors. Furthermore, the witnesses of chapter 11 share equally in the powers of Moses and Elijah, thereby exceeding each prophet’s individual strength. The witnesses become hybrid super-prophets, embodying a fantasy of prophetic power.<sup>79</sup> They possess a degree of authority and power that is rare indeed among prophets, including the physical power of fire. These witnessing prophetic bodies are thus magnificent, powerful bodies – bodies of fantasy.

The shift from living, prophesying bodies to dead, signifying corpses is a crucial moment in the text. When the 1260 days of prophecy are over, the witnesses lose their extraordinary bodily power. They are no longer endowed with the power to destroy, but instead become objects of destruction, as the beast from the pit conquers and destroys them. Their murdered bodies lie in the street for three and a half days, unburied, gazed upon by the entire world. Even here, the prophetic imitation continues; Aune observes a similar incident in the Apocalypse of Elijah, in which “Elijah and Enoch are killed and lie dead for three and one-half days in ‘the

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<sup>75</sup> Aune comments, “The author is extremely fond of the number 3 ½, which he expresses in a variety of ways.” Ibid., 611. The interval recalls the time of the witnesses’ testifying, as well as perhaps Christ’s three days in the grave, as well as Lazarus’ four.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 613.

<sup>77</sup> Jer. 15:16-18; Ezek.2:8-3:3.

<sup>78</sup> On the opening of Moses’ body, see further my introduction. For another, less critical reading of Moses’ masculinity than my own, see Clines, “Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34.”

<sup>79</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 276; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 575.

market place [Coptic *tagora ntn mpolis*] of the great city.”<sup>80</sup> Even in death, the prophetic bodies of Revelation are imitative bodies. At the same time, the suffering of this prophetic body – the text uses a grammatically singular form, τὸ πῶμα, *the corpse*, though the meaning is likely distributive<sup>81</sup> – associates the witnesses with the suffering of another central figure in Revelation, the Lamb Standing as if Slaughtered, who is also wounded and violated.<sup>82</sup> The body, wounded, opened, even killed, takes on significance beyond itself. As in other, more fully developed discourses of martyrdom, the suffering of the body signals the truth of its message.

Revelation is a text that stands in close relation to martyrdom; Virginia Burrus describes it as “proto- if not even hyper-martyrological.”<sup>83</sup> And in martyrological discourses, death frequently becomes the ultimate masculine performance. In an analysis of martyrdom in 4 Maccabees, Moore and Anderson argue that the suffering and glorious deaths of the martyrs are gendered as masculine, part of a larger appropriation of masculine power to a martyred body.<sup>84</sup> Self-mastery, especially self-mastery to the point of willing death, becomes the ultimate masculine practice. This new understanding of the male body in pain fixes the meaning of bodily suffering while reinforcing the hegemonic structures of masculinity. A similar practice of martyrological masculinity is at work as well in Revelation. The prophetic bodies of chapter 11 do not simply mark continuity with the Hebrew prophetic bodies or offer a point of readerly entry into the text, as the body of John does. Instead, the coding of the prophetic body as a martyrological body (consider again the original meaning of *martyr*, *witness*, used as a synonym for prophecy) shores up the textual association of masculinity, violence, and mastery. This constellation of ideas is not original to Revelation, but rather reflects the dominant understandings of Roman gender ideology. Thus while the explicit struggle in Revelation, including chapter 11, is against imperial domination, the martyrs’ death reinscribes imperial virtues. As Anderson and Moore write of the martyrs in 4 Maccabees, “The victory over oppression...is therefore double-edged. On the one hand, the oppressed have triumphed; on the other, they have been implicated in a contest of manhood that is itself inherently oppressive.”<sup>85</sup> The witnesses’ major ideological function in the text is to shore up an ideology of masculinity as a practice of violence and domination, even against the self.

This relationship of bodily suffering to truth, already present in the dead bodies of the witnesses, receives further vindication in their resurrection. Filled with the divine *breath of life* (πνεῦμα ζωῆς<sup>86</sup>), the witnesses rise from the dead (here the Ezekiel reference is to the dead bones whose resurrection the prophet observes, rather than to the experience of the prophet himself (Ezek. 37)). Summoned by a loud voice, the witnesses ascend to heaven in a cloud.

<sup>80</sup> Aune notes, “In a similar account found in the Apoc. Elijah, Elijah and Enoch are killed and lie dead for three and one-half days in ‘the market place [Coptic *tagora ntn mpolis*] of the great city” Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 580–581n8c.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 580n8a. The singular could also be taken as a collective (Smalley) or corporate (Beale) noun. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 283; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 594.

<sup>82</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 280.

<sup>83</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame: Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 18.

<sup>84</sup> Moore and Anderson, “Taking It Like a Man,” 272.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>86</sup> The same phrase is used in the Greek version of Ezek. 1:21 to translate רוח הַחַיָּה and in 37:1 for רוח (in the context of Yahweh’s address to the bones; הַחַיָּה אֲנִי מְבִיא בְכֶם רוּחַ וְחַיִּיתֶם). Compare as well the Ugaritic storm god Baal and the association of the Babylonian Marduk with the storm.

Resurrection confirms the equation of suffering with truth, already established through the witnesses' dead bodies, and replaces these dead bodies with new, glorious ones. The resurrected witnesses, we learn from the text, are terrifying – more so even than when they breathed fire in their first life. Their bodies are also coded as divine by the text; the cloud that bears them to heaven is a traditional marker of divinity in the ancient Near East, the Hebrew Bible, and the New Testament alike (Isa. 6:1-13, Ps. 68:4, Rev. 10:1).<sup>87</sup>

The bodies of the true prophets in Revelation imitate and repeat the bodies of their Hebrew predecessors. Revelation's true prophetic bodies also confirm the truth of their prophecies, providing a material confirmation of the message in the form of prophetic flesh. The death and resurrection of the true witnesses of chapter 11 confirm the truth of their prophecy (and, moreover, persuades a great number of spectators of this truth). Elsewhere in the text, *the blood of the prophets* (Rev. 16:6, 18:24) – the body reduced to its most basic material – serves as a guarantor for the truth of the message throughout Revelation, including the text's norms of masculinity. The prophetic body plays an important role in establishing and securing Revelation's discourse of masculinity.

### **Jezebel and False Prophecy: Sexing the Truth**

The body of the prophet John stakes claims of authority in and on behalf of the text. His body serves primarily to mediate another, more spectacular masculine body in Revelation, belonging to the one like a Son of Man; John's body also secures a link between his vision and the texts of the Hebrew prophets. The bodies of the witnesses in chapter 11 fulfill another function: they give material form to a representation of masculinity as a practice of violence and domination. Their experience largely restages the dominant ideas of masculinity in Roman imperial discourse. The bodies of these true prophets are not the only prophetic bodies to contribute to the ideological edifice of the text, however. Instead, the bodies of false prophets also figure in the text in ways that sustain the dominant ideology of masculinity in Revelation.

Within John's vision, the false prophet of the beast inverts the role played by the true witnesses. Just as the glorious resurrection of the witnesses ultimately vindicates the truth of their message, so does the eternal suffering of the beast's prophet in the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20) confirm the falsity of his promises. Thus, perversely, the flesh of the false prophet, no less than the bodies of the true prophets, upholds the overarching ideology of the text, including its representation of masculinity as predicated upon violence. The false prophetic body that matters most, however, is the body of Jezebel. The interpretive traditions that surround Jezebel make clear the link between false prophecy and wrong – read *female* – embodiment, as well as the association, already powerfully asserted in the Hebrew Bible, between open female sexuality and religious transgression.<sup>88</sup> John's use of the figure Jezebel adapts a gendered discourse from the Hebrew Bible to demands of empire, ultimately shoring up the rigid, violent masculinity of the book of Revelation and its attendant denigration of the feminine. The violence that constitutes masculinity must be exercised against an object, and this object, all too frequently, is the female body.

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<sup>87</sup> On clouds, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 523; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 284.

<sup>88</sup> See as well my chapter 1.

In the interpretive imagination, Jezebel functions as the classic example of the confluence of female sexuality, female agency, and bad religious practice.<sup>89</sup> In the book of Kings, Jezebel is murdered by Jehu, who casts her out of a window; her body is eaten by dogs and only her hands and head remain (2 Kgs. 9:10, 29-37). The disgrace of her death signifies the iniquity of her life (which, in Kings, concerns mostly false religious practice). Notably, this disgrace is specifically inscribed on her body, which is presented both as an object of violence and as the object of the gaze.<sup>90</sup> In her many textual rebirths following her death at Jehu's hands, Jezebel is repeatedly associated with loose sexuality and sexual transgression,<sup>91</sup> despite the fact that in the original texts in Kings, neither she nor her crime is described in these terms.<sup>92</sup> This association is certainly present in John's condemnation, which makes clear reference to adultery and fornication, and even includes a call for the murder of her children. It is significant that John's excoriation of Jezebel of Thyatira is centered on the body, and in particular on the gendered body. This Jezebel is not simply to be rejected, she is to be thrown onto the couch.<sup>93</sup> If this is not straight-out rape, then it is at least a scene of sexual violence as punishment that works also to articulate a close link between the female body, female sexuality, and false prophecy.

John's threats to "Jezebel" speak as well of the ideas of gender that underlie his understanding of prophecy. As I have suggested at length in chapter 3, the Hebrew Bible treats prophecy as a masculine form of speech, subject to certain gender norms of voice and sound production. Prophecy is likewise socially coded as a masculine institution; female prophets are rare and, when they occur, often marginalized. Written centuries after the texts of the Hebrew prophets were compiled, John's text expresses no relaxation of these gender roles. Instead, while a classic prophetic text such as Jeremiah contains a degree of play with the gender of sound (in Jeremiah's case, particularly in the Confessions<sup>94</sup>), in Revelation the gendering of prophecy has become more rigid. Female prophetic speech is not simply marginalized, but condemned, and condemned through strongly negative sexual associations.

The violence against Jezebel, not unlike the violence against the gynomorphized Israel in Hosea 2, sustains the normative ideas of masculine embodiment in the text. The performance of masculinity requires exercising violence against the bodies of others – in this case, throwing Jezebel down and opening up her body. This violence, furthermore, anticipates the consequences of Revelation's rigid ideology of masculinity for feminine figures and female bodies in

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<sup>89</sup> On Jezebel, see Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 32–41.

<sup>90</sup> Jezebel, immediately before her death, gazes out the window, and this attempt to appropriate the gaze and shift from its object to its subject is perhaps another action demanding her punishment. Jezebel in the window is also an allusion to the classic Near Eastern "woman in the window" motif. See Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 188, 201; Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel*, 1st ed. (Anchor Bible, 1998), 121–180.

<sup>91</sup> Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 32–38. It is also of course not neutral that "Jezebel" is a frequent term used to categorize and dismiss black women. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>92</sup> The association of Jezebel with loose sexuality and sexual transgression may have its roots in Jezebel's final moments before her murder. As Jehu comes to murder her, her final act is one of defiance: *She painted her eyes and adorned her head and looked out of the window.*

<sup>93</sup> Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 92. The sense of sexual violence is amplified, as Pippin notes, by the associations between Jezebel and the Whore of Babylon in chapter 19.

<sup>94</sup> See my chapter 3.

Revelation. The violence against Jezebel anticipates the violence that John foresees against the whore of Babylon, who is likewise *thrown down*, violated, murdered, and – recalling the fate of Jezebel from the Hebrew Bible – eaten.<sup>95</sup> This violent treatment of women is the flipside of the rigid ideology of masculinity.

Nor do the female figures that occupy “positive” positions in the text fare much better. Thus, in chapter 12, we find the Woman Clothed in the Sun, whose main capacity in the text is reproductive – she gives birth to a child in the wilderness. When this action is finished, she vanishes from the text, though not before being chased by a dragon. In the final scenes of John’s vision, the new Jerusalem is described as a bride, though this feminization of space is matched, as many scholars have noted, by the total exclusion of women from the utopia it represents (Rev. 21:2-9).<sup>96</sup> This womanless utopia is positioned, moreover, in opposition to the gaping mouth of the abyss, which Pippin argues represents a vaginal opening and a terrifying otherness.<sup>97</sup> The feminine body is the antithesis of utopia. Confronted with this violent and violating treatment of the female body on every front, Pippin’s assessment of the text from *Death and Desire*, her first book, still holds:

In the Apocalypse women are disempowered in every way, especially in the erotic dimension. Female desire is displaced and controlled. The social construction of gender in the Apocalypse leaves the female body as the object of male desire.<sup>98</sup>

Revelation is no place for women – mothers, brides, whores, and gaping pits alike. Instead, the text offers an entirely masculine vision of utopia, a fantasy that uses women as material while excluding them from subjectivity, from significance, from entry into the gates of the New Jerusalem, a utopian city reserved for men.

Given the treatment of Jezebel and the other female characters in Revelation, Luce Irigaray’s description of women under masculine theories of subjectivity describes, as well, the role of women in the text:

She is the reserve of ‘sensuality’ for the elevation of intelligence, she is the matter used for the imprint of forms, gauge of possible regression into naïve perception, the representative representing negativity (death), dark continent of dreams and fantasies, and also eardrum faithfully duplicating the music, though not all of it, so that the series of displacements may continue, for the ‘subject.’<sup>99</sup>

Irigaray’s words speak, as well, to the ideology of masculinity in Revelation, as well as the ways that the feminine is constructed to complement and sustain this masculine ideology. The Book of Revelation, (like the Hebrew prophets) is a masculine fantasy, a textual space that wholly excludes and abuses the feminine except insofar as it is necessary to sustain the male figures in the text; or in Irigaray’s words, to fulfill “man’s needs as mother, matrix, body (both living and

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<sup>95</sup> Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 92.

<sup>96</sup> Tina Pippin, “Eros and the End: Reading for Gender in the Apocalypse of John,” *Semeia* 59 (1992): 200–205; Jorunn Økland, “Why Can’t the Heavenly Miss Jerusalem Just Shut Up?,” in *Her Master’s Tools?: Feminist and Postcolonial Engagements of Historical-Critical Discourse*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Todd C. Penner (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 327.

<sup>97</sup> Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 73.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>99</sup> Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, 141.

as container-sepulchre), nurse.”<sup>100</sup> This is precisely the role of Jezebel, the false female prophet, and of the other female bodies in Revelation. They support the discourses of the masculine body, and the text’s fantasy of masculinity. Just as the first Jezebel must be thrown from a window and murdered so that Jehu can secure his kingship, so must the second Jezebel be thrown down and violated to allow true prophecy to come forth. Jezebel’s body becomes the ground upon which masculine violence is exercised. As an object of violence, her threatened and hurt body sustains the rhetoric of masculinity in the text.

### III. CONCEIVING OF A THEORY OF MASCULINITY IN REVELATION

The bodies of prophets in Revelation do important textual work to establish and support a discourse of masculinity. Instead of challenging or subverting the dominant ideology of masculinity, as the prophetic bodies in the Hebrew texts sometimes do, the prophetic bodies in Revelation align with the larger ideological form of the text. John’s body, while closely modeled on the bodies of the Ezekiel and other Hebrew prophets, plays an important role in granting authority to the book as a whole. The bodies of the witnesses enact a violent, martyrological masculinity. And the revilement of “Jezebel,” cast largely in bodily and sexual terms, reinforces the understanding or prophecy as an exclusively masculine space.

In my analysis of John’s own body, I have suggested that the opening scene not only positions John as a latter-day Hebrew prophet, but also, like Ezekiel in Ezek. 1-2, uses the body of the prophet to direct attention to another, more spectacular masculine body – the body of the one like a Son of Man. John’s own relatively unremarkable embodiment – John is spared, after all, the depths of suffering and abjection that Ezekiel must experience – makes the body of the Son of Man and his masculine performance all the more fascinating in the text. As John’s witnessing continues in the text, his observations become the foundation of a pervasive discourse of masculinity in the text: messianic masculinity. While the prophetic bodies in the text offer some basic suggestions of the textual masculine ideal, the messianic bodies are the repository of Revelation’s most powerful and compelling ideology of masculinity. These messianic bodies are harder, faster, stronger, more violent, and above all, more masculine.

The one like a Son of Man who John encounters in chapter 1 is the first of a triumvirate of messianic figures in the text. Subsequently, John encounters two additional messianic figures, the Rider on the White Horse who judges, makes war, and slays multitudes with the sword coming forth from his mouth (19:11-16), and the Lamb Standing as if Slaughtered, with seven eyes and seven horns (Rev. 5-8:1, 14:1-4, 10; 17:14, 19:7, 21:9). These figures build upon the norms of masculinity established by the prophetic bodies, even as they challenge the representation of violence. In the case of the messianic bodies, the excesses of masculinizing violence in Revelation produce an excessive masculine body.

#### **Spectacular Male Bodies and the Construction of Norms**

Revelation is not simply the end of the world; it is the end of the world in lurid, bloody color, filled with monsters, good and evil alike. Its terrifying, wicked figures include two beasts, a dragon, giant locusts, evil frogs, birds who prey on human flesh, and the Whore of Babylon, drunk on the blood of the saints. The triumvirate of messianic figures in the text, representing

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<sup>100</sup> Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, 121.

God and his army, are hardly less terrifying. Of the messianic figures, the one like the Son of Man and the Rider on the White Horse each combine a monstrous, more-than-human body with the successful exercise of masculine violence, power, and authority.<sup>101</sup> We have already encountered the one like a Son of Man with his white hair and fiery eyes. In his initial encounter with John, the one like a Son of Man maintains restraint. Though a sword protrudes from his mouth, he comes to interpret, not to shed blood; his masculine mastery is a mastery of meaning. But when the one like a Son of Man appears again in chapter 14, he bears a sickle and comes to judge the inhabitants of the earth (14:14-15). Though there is some confusion with the subjects in the verses that follows – whether the sowing is done by the Son of Man or another angel remains ambiguous – what is clear beyond doubt is the violence of the scene:

*So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and he threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God.<sup>102</sup> And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a distance of about two hundred miles. (14:19-20)*

Abandoning all restraint, the body becomes entirely an agent of violence. As Conway writes, “The harvesting imagery barely conceals the bloodbath that this judgment involves.”<sup>103</sup> The body, reduced to blood, becomes a pure sign of the violent power of God’s forces, as well as associating the masculinity of the Son of Man with the monopoly on violence that constitutes an important feature of Roman masculinity.<sup>104</sup>

Such bloody violence also characterizes the second messianic figure in the text, the Rider on the White Horse. Like the one like a Son of Man, a two-edged sword emerges from his mouth; unlike his colleague, he wears a robe dipped in blood, rules the nations with an iron rod, and oversees the so-called “great supper of God,” in which the followers of the beast are eaten by birds (though only after the Rider has slain them with his sword (Rev. 19:11-21)).<sup>105</sup> The Rider, like the one like a Son of Man, represents a masculinity founded upon violence and given dramatic form through the monstrous male body. Perhaps to counterbalance this excess of violence, John goes to pains to recount that the Rider judges the earth righteously (19:11), and that his name is *Faithful and True*. While this detail offers a nod toward Roman ideologies of masculinity, as Conway notes, this momentary restraint is clearly at odds with the larger arc of the character of the Rider, as well as with the ideology of masculinity as unbridled violence that he represents.<sup>106</sup>

The final and most important masculine messianic figure is the Lamb Standing as if Slaughtered. The Lamb, another monstrous body – this one with seven eyes and seven horns, as well as being a lamb – first appears in the throne room, where he alone can open the seven seals

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<sup>101</sup> For an in-depth reading of the masculinity of these figures, see Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 159–174.

<sup>102</sup> *The great winepress of the wrath of God*: τὴν ληνὸν τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν μέγαν. There is a problem with agreement here, as ληνὸν (*winepress*) is feminine while μέγαν (*great*) is masculine. However, *the great winepress* remains the preferred reading. For discussion, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 779–780; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 790–791n19c.

<sup>103</sup> Conway, *Behold the Man*, 162.

<sup>104</sup> Moore and Anderson, “Taking It Like a Man.”

<sup>105</sup> Compare also the Rider in Zechariah 1:8

<sup>106</sup> Conway, *Behold the Man*, 164.



on the scroll. The body of the Lamb, wounded and opened, dripping blood, at first seems to subvert the expectations of hegemonic masculinity. Chris Frilingos argues that the Lamb first enters the text as a non-masculine, culturally feminized figure because of his wounded body and his passive stance.<sup>107</sup> However, the Lamb shifts from violated and feminized victim to a masculinized agent of violence when he breaks the seals (Rev. 6-8:1), unleashing great violence over the earth. The virilization of the Lamb advances further in chapter 14, where he presides over a torture-chamber for his enemies – a fundamentally masculine act. As Frilingos writes, this “commanding performance of virility ‘masculinizes’ the Lamb,” insofar as his actions conform to the culturally conditioned expectations of masculinity as an exercise of power, violence, and domination of the body of the other.<sup>108</sup> What seems to begin as an alternative to the hegemonic norm of masculinity as domination and violation ends up conforming this very norm. The non-masculine, suffering, opened Lamb is vigorously repositioned as an agent of violence against others, thereby restoring him to control of masculine violence and masculine plenitude.<sup>109</sup> For all its battles and bloodshed, the basic plot of Revelation is the marriage plot, and the text ends with the marriage of the Lamb. As numerous studies of Roman society have shown, marriage and control of the household are important masculine acts.<sup>110</sup> The marriage of the Lamb draws on this tradition.<sup>111</sup>

The Lamb, like the Rider and the Son of Man, represents a violent excess that goes beyond the power and suffering of the witnesses in chapter 11 or John’s own relatively mild performance of prophetic masculinity. The messianic masculinity they embody likewise goes beyond the norms of masculinity and violence in Roman imperial ideology. And because of the exemplary status of the messianic body in Revelation, this discourse becomes paradigmatic of masculinity as such. The association of masculinity and battle is not unique to Revelation, or even to the Hebrew biblical legacy, but rather is shared across the ancient and antique Mediterranean world. However, Revelation takes up the intimate connection between violent action, masculine performance, and the masculine body, elevating it to new heights unseen in its textual and cultural predecessors.

### **Discourses of Masculinity in Revelation**

Drawing together these messianic masculinities with the earlier discussion of prophetic masculinity, we can now offer a more complete picture of masculinity in Revelation as a whole.

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<sup>107</sup> Chris Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” in *New Testament Masculinities*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 297–318.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>109</sup> Frilingos cautions that this virilizing transformation is only partial, as the Lamb is subsequently re-feminized in relation to the other messianic figures in Revelation (the Son of Man and the Rider on the White Horse.)<sup>109</sup> I will return to the possible masculine instabilities of the Lamb later in this chapter; for now, I want to emphasize that by the conclusion of the book of Revelation, the Lamb again occupies a secure masculine position.

<sup>110</sup> Mary Rose D’Angelo, “‘Knowing How to Preside over His Own Household’: Imperial Masculinity and Christian Asceticism in the Pastorals, Hermas, and Luke-Acts,” in *New Testament Masculinities*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 265–296.

<sup>111</sup> Lynn Huber argues that the marriage subverts Roman discourses of masculinity because the “bride” of 144,000 male virgins contradicts the Roman imperative to have children and create a family. Without rejecting Huber’s interesting argument about the 144,000, I want only to argue that *from the perspective of the narrative of the Lamb*, marrying a bride is an act that secures dominant ideas of masculinity. Contrast Lynn Huber, “Sexually Explicit? Re-reading Revelation’s 144,000 Virgins as a Response to Roman Discourses,” *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* 2, no. 1 (2008): 3.

This picture requires, however, a third important component: the discourse of empire. The text of Revelation is a complex and even contradictory text filled with multiple ideological positions, including theological arguments about the still-new Christian religion and critical responses to the experience of imperial domination.<sup>112</sup> The ideological discourse most relevant to this project, however, is the text's discourse of masculinity, which is largely negotiated, as in the Hebrew prophets, on and through the body. Subjected to and employed as agents of extreme violence, the bodies of Revelation enact an ideology of violent masculinity that imitates but exceeds Roman imperial discourses of masculinity. The resulting discourse of masculinity in the book of Revelation is starker and more violent than anywhere else in the New Testament.<sup>113</sup> John's text incorporates Roman imperial ideologies of gender and power, while also reflecting the lived experience of violence under empire.

In many ways, including its pervasive misogyny,<sup>114</sup> the book of Revelation seems to present a clear endorsement of the hegemonic masculinity of its time, bringing together the Hebrew Bible's internal theories of gender and embodiment<sup>115</sup> with contemporary Roman discourses of sex, gender, and the family.<sup>116</sup> Roman imperial discourses of masculinity, like Roman imperial society at large, valorize martial prowess, violence, and domination. As Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, reviewing an extensive bibliography on Greek and Roman masculinity, conclude,

It is now possible to hazard a broad definition of the hegemonic conception of masculinity in the ancient Mediterranean world. Mastery—of others and/or of oneself—is the definitive masculine trait in most of the Greek and Latin literary and philosophical texts that survive from antiquity. In certain of these texts, as we shall see, a (free) man's right to dominate others—women, children, slaves, and other social inferiors—is justified by his capacity to dominate himself.<sup>117</sup>

In these discourses of masculinity, military strength and power become increasingly important to the successful performance of masculinity. This power and violence is grounded, however, in mastery of the self.<sup>118</sup> Such self-control justifies violence, even intense violence, against the other, whether a total stranger or a member of the household.

From all the components of Roman discourses of masculinity, violence is of particular concern to Revelation. Elsewhere, Moore writes of John's text,

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<sup>112</sup> Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*; Huber, "Sexually Explicit?"; Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>113</sup> Conway, *Behold the Man*, 180.

<sup>114</sup> Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*.

<sup>115</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, "Resurrection."

<sup>116</sup> Frilingos, "Sexing the Lamb"; Huber, "Sexually Explicit?"

<sup>117</sup> Moore and Anderson, "Taking It Like a Man," 249–250.

<sup>118</sup> Naturally, see as well Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1988).

Messianic war is a prominent theme in the Christian arch-apocalypse, the Book of Revelation. (A hint as to where this might be leading: warfare was widely conceived of in antiquity as the quintessential performance of masculinity.)<sup>119</sup>

As Moore demonstrates in his work at length, the battle rhetoric of Revelation fundamentally concerns masculinity. Violence permeates the central drama of the text, the battle between the armies of the Lamb and the armies of the beast, on every level. God's witnesses speak fire and kill all who oppose them. Giant locusts torture the people of the earth until *they seek death but will not find it* (Rev. 9:3-10). The armies of the beast wage war on the saints and the New Jerusalem and are consumed by fire (20:7-10). The Lamb, the most important soteriological figure of the text, has a body battered by violence – he is described as *standing as if slaughtered* – but he, too, enacts violence, presiding over a torture chamber for his enemies (14). Even John, otherwise mostly constrained to his role of witness, threatens to strike dead the children of the false prophet Jezebel, and perhaps to rape her as well (2:22-23).

And in this drama of violence, blood is everywhere – the moon turns to blood (Rev. 6:12), blood mixed with hail and fire falls from heaven (8:7), a third of the sea becomes blood (8:9), the prophets turn water to blood (11:6), blood flows from the winepress (14:20), the seas and rivers and springs become entirely blood (16:3-4), the people drink blood (16:6), the whore of Babylon drinks the blood of saints and witnesses (17:6), and God's champion, the Rider on the White Horse, wears a robe dripped in blood (19:3). Unsurprisingly, avenging shed blood – often through further violence – is a major preoccupation of the blood (6:10, 19:2); blood likewise ransoms the people for God (5:9, 12:9). But aside from the whore of Babylon, who clearly represents a grotesque, deviant femininity, the taking of blood is always associated with masculine figures. Furthermore, actively shedding blood in battle (as, for example, the Rider on the White horse does) is a more strongly gendered act than simply pouring out bowls of blood, as the angels do in the text. Bloodshed becomes a definitive masculine act. Masculinity, in turn, becomes a discourse of fluidity, but only insofar as masculinity depends upon the blood of the other; the male body itself remains whole and unpunctured. The body matters greatly to this discourse – but not the body of the masculine figure, which may take any number of forms (a slaughtered Lamb, a Rider, a fiery-eyed Ancient of Days). Instead, the body that is crucial is the body that is *acted upon*, like Jezebel cast down on the couch in Rev. 2. Masculinity is an affair of punishing and opening up the bodies of others. Even the Lamb, whose own body is initially open and wounded in the text, achieves masculine subjectivity when he gains the power to open and wound the bodies of others.<sup>120</sup> And all of this structure is communicated through John's witnessing body, which offers the material perceptual frame.

While military prowess and domination are fundamental to Roman ideals of masculinity, the bloody excess of Revelation exceeds and even violates the basic principles of restraint that are also a part of the Roman imperial rhetoric of violence and masculine self-control. This is a process of colonial mimicry.<sup>121</sup> But as Colleen Conway argues, the imitation in Revelation is not

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<sup>119</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and Around the Bible*, 1st ed. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>120</sup> Frilingos, "Sexing the Lamb."

<sup>121</sup> Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 125–133.

simply an adoption of Roman cultural ideals of masculinity, but rather “the mimicry of imperial violence.”<sup>122</sup> Conway contends,

For all the pretensions to an imperial masculine ideal—justice, peace, and the Roman way—the fact remained that Rome, like all empires, was built on the unseemly foundation of blood.... In this way, Revelation exposes the gap between Roman masculine ideology and imperial practice.<sup>123</sup>

In its obsessive interest in violence – enacted by and upon the bodies in the text – Revelation exceeds the Roman discourses it imitates. According to this Roman discourse, excessive, unmoderated violence is emphatically *not* the ideal of imperial masculinity.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, in emphasizing such violence, Revelation also exposes the bad conscience of Roman imperial discourse by exposing its disjuncture from imperial practice.<sup>125</sup> This is part of the critical work of the discourse of masculinity in Revelation, though it comes at the expense of flooding Revelation itself with brutality – brutality enacted, moreover, by the central messianic figures such as the Lamb, the Rider on the White Horse, and the one like a Son of Man. The violence in Revelation – deadly plagues, rivers of blood, robes dyed red with blood – goes far beyond the Roman imperial ideal of masculinity as restraint and into something more violent and brutal.

The violence in Revelation likewise exceeds the use of violence in the Hebrew Bible, which, while certainly present, is by no means all encompassing. Thus in the Hebrew Bible, violence, while often a masculine trait, is not the definitive sign of masculinity; Abraham raises his knife against his son, but also argues against God’s desire for violence against Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 22, 18). The other patriarchs likewise succeed at masculinity more through cunning than through brute violence.<sup>126</sup> There are also critiques of extreme violence in the prophets, such as the command to beat swords into plowshares in Isa. 2:4 and Mic. 4:3.<sup>127</sup> Revelation, however, is steeped in violence. This rhetoric of masculinity, enacted most dramatically by the messianic bodies but sustained by the prophetic bodies as well, overwhelms all limits in the texts. In Revelation, masculinity is a violent practice, soaked in the blood of the other.

#### **IV. IS THERE A SPACE FOR ALTERNATE MASCULINITIES?**

##### **The Male Body in Pain**

In the Hebrew prophets, I have suggested, the prophetic body challenges the dominant demands of masculinity and embodiment in the text. Prophecy offers the possibility of doing masculinity differently. In Revelation, as we have seen, the prophetic body shores up the dominant ideology of masculinity, which is manifested most dramatically on the bodies of the

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<sup>122</sup> Conway, *Behold the Man*, 162.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 165, 174.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Haddox, “Favoured Sons and Subordinate Masculinities.”

<sup>127</sup> Though, of course, there is plenty of extreme violence to be found in the prophets as well, such as Joel’s reciprocal command to beat plowshares into swords (Joel 3:10), and Yahweh’s bloodstained robes in Isa. 63:1-6 (an image that informs the blood-dipped robes of the Rider on the White Horse in Rev. 19).

messianic figures in the text – the Son of Man, the Rider, and the Lamb. These bodies, with their violence, their bloody materiality, and their mastery over word, self, and other, all sustain Revelation’s violent hypermasculine ideal. But is there still the possibility of challenging the dominance of this masculine ideal? The edifice of masculinity in Revelation cannot be wholly impenetrable, especially when masculine performance primarily entails penetrating the bodies of others and drawing their blood.

It is this second set of bodies – the bodies pained and opened through the successful exercise of masculinity by others – that contain the greatest possibility of destabilizing or subverting the dominant masculine paradigm in Revelation. As in the Hebrew prophets, there are bodies – excessive, unruly, overly material bodies – that challenge the dominant ideology of gender and embodiment in the text. In the case of the Hebrew prophets, this body is the prophetic body. In Revelation, however, the “male-body-in-pain”<sup>128</sup> is the body that comes closest to fulfilling the possibility of an alternate masculinity and male embodiment.

The “male-body-in-pain” and its relationship to hegemonic masculinity has been explored in detail by Kent Brintnall.<sup>129</sup> Brintnall argues that pained, tortured, and wounded male bodies – and here the sexed specificity of the body is an important component of his argument – threaten what he terms “masculine plenitude” (and what I have been calling hegemonic or normative masculinity). Bringing together Georges Bataille, Jesus Christ, and the battered male bodies of contemporary action films, Brintnall insists that the display of the suffering male body counters the dominant construction of masculine power and wholeness. He writes,

Dominant fantasies of masculine power depend on the display of the male body to secure their claim to truth, but display of the male body also reveals the striving behind this ideological construction. The deep instability of such display means that virtually any representation—including the suffering male body, which primarily signifies vulnerability, or the strong male body, which primarily signifies invulnerability—is open to another reading, another deployment, another signification.<sup>130</sup>

Brintnall makes two important points. First, “the suffering male body, which primarily signifies vulnerability” disrupts the primary signification of the male body.<sup>131</sup> Second, the effect of this realization (brought about by witnessing such a pained male body) is to destabilize all representations of masculinity in a text, work, or cultural space. The body no longer simply substantiates “myths of masculine power and privilege,” but rather challenges these myths.<sup>132</sup>

Brintnall builds his argument with readings of Freud, Robert Mapplethorpe, and Francis Bacon. Of Bacon’s crucifixion paintings, he argues,

Far from being an ideal worthy of envy and emulation, Bacon’s masculine subject hovers on the brink of annihilation....The male body on the cross is lacerated, bleeding, pierced, thirsty, immobile, and dying; this male body at this particular

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<sup>128</sup> Kent L. Brintnall, *Ecce Homo: The Male-Body-in-Pain as Redemptive Figure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

moment cannot emblemize plenitude, impenetrability, or capacity. The male body on Bacon's canvases and Christianity's cross is not capable of securing a stable self. It is, rather, "the domain where the self is contested and ultimately lost."<sup>133</sup>

As Brintnall argues, this death on the cross that Bacon paints, like the tortured bodies of the action film and other pained male bodies, presents a male vulnerability that undermines the culturally sanctioned images of masculinity as domination. Instead, this is a different sort of male body, one that, in its pain, cannot do the work of upholding the hegemonic categories of masculine power and plenitude. There is a similar kind of vulnerability and instability found in certain of the masculine bodies in Revelation. First among them are the bodies of the witnesses from chapter 11. Though the sequence with the witnesses begins by constructing a narrative of prophetic power, complete with breathing fire and calling down plagues, the death of the witnesses brings about a crisis for this narrative. The power of the prophets, and with it their extraordinarily successful prophetic masculinity, is forced to cease. Instead of prophetic power, we have prophets, in Brintnall's terms, "bleeding, pierced, thirsty, immobile, and dying," and they can no longer shore up a narrative of masculinity as violence and prophecy as strength. We might add the "myths of prophecy and prophetic power" to the narratives destabilized by the vulnerable, exposed bodies lying in the street.

To be sure, Revelation 11 can be read, as I have suggested with reference to Anderson and Moore's reading of 4 Maccabees, as a typical narrative of martyrdom and thus a confirmation of hegemonic masculine ideals of violence and power, reconfigured into power over and against the self.<sup>134</sup> However, in Revelation, the text itself cannot fully commit to a narrative of martyrdom. The very fact that the witnesses in Rev. 11 must be resurrected points to an unwillingness in the text to take the body in pain as the final word on suffering, embodiment, and masculinity. And this unwillingness, in term, reflects just how destabilizing the male body in pain is. It is not the suffering and death of the witnesses that brings about the mass conversion of the onlookers, but rather the resurrection that follows and replaces their deaths. The time of suffering and death, unlike the time of resurrection, remains a time of insecurity, liminality, and openness. It is in this moment, when the prophetic bodies are stripped of their powers and left for dead in the street, that the body in pain illuminates the price of the dominant masculine ideology, as well as the fact that this ideology is constructed and not "natural" or preordained. But this moment is only temporary, and the narrative of resurrection wins out before the chapter's end.

The bodies of the witnesses are not the only male bodies whose pain betrays the instability of the edifice of masculinity in Revelation. The Lamb, too, has a tortured body and, consequentially, an unstable relationship to masculinity. This is not any Lamb, but a Lamb *standing as if slaughtered* – a vulnerable, wounded, and open body, dying but not yet dead, suspiciously un-masculine in its first appearance in the text. In this first scene with the Lamb, the creature's form of embodiment – a violated, body – threatens the text's dominant ideas of masculinity. As Frilingos writes of the Lamb, "If we locate this figure inside the Roman penetration grid, the pressure applied to the manly narrative by the wounded Lamb becomes palpable."<sup>135</sup> The Lamb's threat to masculinity depends upon the pain of the body, which at once

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>134</sup> On martyrdom and masculinity, see Moore and Anderson, "Taking It Like a Man."

<sup>135</sup> Frilingos, "Sexing the Lamb," 308.

renders him as a masculine subject vulnerable and pushes him outside the bounds of hegemonic masculinity. But while Frilingos calls the Lamb “feminized,” I want to reframe his reading to take the Lamb’s body as suggesting a different sort of masculinity. A failure to perform hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily suggest femininity. The Lamb seems to offer, rather, a masculinity that is not founded upon wholeness, power, and violence toward the other. Importantly, this moment of alternate masculinity is given corporeal form not by a wounded man (as elsewhere in Christian texts), but by a wounded animal, a lamb.<sup>136</sup> While there are of course manifold significances to the Lamb as a symbol, this blurring of species may well suggest the anxiety that a discourse of masculinity engenders in the text. A Lamb that fails to perform hegemonic masculinity, even a Lamb clearly represented as male, remains less threatening to the dominant order than a man who does so. To offer a different sort of masculinity, the male body must be not a human body, but a Lamb.

Ultimately, however, the Lamb fails to disrupt the practice of masculinity in Revelation. Instead, the unstable, threatening potential of the Lamb is quickly neutralized as the text deemphasizes his suffering and instead privileges a narrative of his masculine “successes” in torture and marriage. As Frilingos notes, the original, vulnerable, “feminized” (or alternately masculinized) body of the Lamb cannot be sustained by the text. Instead, the text repeatedly works to virilize the Lamb, most dramatically by positioning him to preside over a chamber of tortures for his enemy. What could be more masculine in Revelation than bringing pain upon the bodies of others? As Frilingos writes,

The Lamb presides over the punishment of these prisoners, a scene that thus transforms the creature from *passive* to *active*. In the Roman world such a development would have been viewed as a gendered mutation from effeminacy to masculinity... Here the Lamb *performs* power, controlling and tormenting the enemies of God. The meanings assigned earlier to the passive flesh of the ‘slain’ Lamb are thus transferred to the unfortunate bodies that writhe ‘in the presence of angels and of the Lamb.’ Most important, the Lamb harnesses the ‘power of the gaze’ in this scene: the Lamb is not the viewed but the viewer.<sup>137</sup>

The Lamb becomes masculinized and powerful, but at a price: the potential of the Lamb’s body as an alternate incarnation of masculinity is lost.

The failure of the Lamb to provide a sustained critical alternative to the textual norms of violent masculinity likewise anticipates the problem with the pained male bodies of the witnesses as well. The witnesses are pained, murdered, shamed – and then resurrected. The resurrection of the prophets restores the dominant discourse of masculinity as power in the text. Brintnall writes, “Resurrection narratives sustain cultural understandings of a masculine subject as totally without vulnerability or weakness. The triumph of life over death in the previously brutalized, but eternally male, body of God funds a particular fantasy of masculine plenitude.”<sup>138</sup> Open, pained, vulnerable male bodies can no longer destabilize when they are returned to wholeness. Whatever threat the prophetic bodies as dead bodies pose to the ideology of prophetic power, embodiment, and masculinity, this threat is lost in the scene of their resurrection.

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<sup>136</sup> See further Brintnall, *Ecce Homo*.

<sup>137</sup> Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 314.

<sup>138</sup> Brintnall, *Ecce Homo*, 62.

The resurrection of the witnesses also supports a second narrative in the text, that of the power of the prophecy. This is an important theme in the Hebrew Bible, though not always a theme that the prophetic body itself sustains.<sup>139</sup> But in sustaining this narrative of prophetic power – and in doing so to a degree that exceeds even the Hebrew Bible – the account of the witnesses in Revelation forecloses the possibility of continuing another prophetic theme, that of the prophetic body as a site of gender and corporeal instability and anxiety. The resurrection of the witnesses, while it brings about a scene of mass deliverance in the text (all those not destroyed by the earthquake), also closes a space of productive vulnerability – of bodies, of significations, of narratives – in the text.

The possibility of a prophetic body that rejects normative masculinity – suggested by the Hebrew predecessors and perhaps even present, for a moment, in the un-resurrected, shamed bodies of the witnesses – is no longer viable in the book of Revelation. The text consistently replaces images of masculine weakness, openness, or death with traditional markers of virility and powers. In the case of the murdered witnesses, in the moment of resurrection the open vulnerability of the body is reversed and the plenitude of the male body is restored. A similar process occurs with the Lamb. The subversive potential of his wounded body is likewise negated by his aggressive performance of other acts of hegemonic masculinity, first among them inflicting pain upon the bodies of others. While the male-body-in-pain offers a momentary alternative to the rigid ideology of masculinity in Revelation, this critique cannot ultimately find support in the text. The pained bodies, like the prophetic bodies, end up endorsing and upholding the dominant textual understanding of masculinity and the male body.

### **The Prophetic Body After the Prophets**

The prophetic body, in all its instabilities, is an important part of the legacy of the Hebrew Bible. This prophetic body is marked by its vulnerability, its openness, and its failure to perform hegemonic masculinity. And so when John of Patmos sets out to write down his Revelation – and, in so doing, to establish its relationship to the Hebrew texts – the prophetic body is necessarily a part of this account. Not simply John's own prophetic body, but also the bodies of other prophetic figures, good and bad alike, become an important part of the world he creates. These prophetic figures have strong connections to their Hebrew predecessors that are thematized in the text. Often, the relation of imitation is so strong that, as in the case of the witnesses of Rev. 11, the prophets of Revelation exceed and supplant their predecessors.

But despite this emphasis on prophecy, John's use of prophets in Revelation demonstrates a significant shift in the use of the prophetic body. Unlike in the Hebrew Bible, the bodies of prophets no longer occupy a space of instability and resistance. In Revelation, the prophetic body does not provide material ground in the text to negotiate and to critique normative textual ideas of gender and embodiment. Instead, in Revelation, the negotiation of masculinity and embodiment – significant concerns for the Hebrew prophetic body – are displaced onto other bodies in the text, first among them the messianic bodies of the Lamb, the Son of Man, and the Rider. The male prophetic body no longer serves to disrupt gender, embodiment, or other dominant ideologies in the biblical text. Instead, questions of masculinity

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<sup>139</sup> Consider, for example, the tension between the repeated statements of Moses' power and his bodily experience of weakness, the disjoint between Ezekiel's failed bodily performances in the sign acts and his strident rhetoric elsewhere, and the tension between Jeremiah's anguished complaints in the Confessions and his display of power against the king.



and embodiment are staged on other, more amenable bodies, first among them the body of the Lamb. The prophetic body becomes secondary, and its primary function in the text is to establish a relationship of imitation and supersession that positions John's vision in the tradition of Hebrew prophecy. But while the prophetic bodies establish this link – John swallows the scroll, the witnesses vamp like Moses and Elijah, every false prophet is a “Balaam” or a “Jezebel” – they no longer present a space of resistance or of gender transgression in the text. The tenuous but perhaps hopeful critique of masculinity that the male prophetic body offers in the Hebrew Bible is a critique that no longer finds a body in the book of Revelation.

Written in the shadow of empire, the book of Revelation offers a stark view of gender and gendered embodiment. Masculinity in Revelation is a harsh, violent affair, centered upon exerting power over the other; the male body, even more than in the Hebrew prophets, is firm, powerful, penetrative but impenetrable. Within Revelation, the representation of bodies is essential to the ideological positioning of the text and its production of a discourse of masculinity. And these bodies include the bodies of prophets. The prophetic bodies in Revelation at once establish continuity with the Hebrew biblical texts and exceed their predecessors. In Revelation, the bodies of the prophets, like the other textual bodies, tell stories that work to constitute an ideology of prophecy and of embodiment. Unlike in the Hebrew Bible, in Revelation the prophetic body does *not* threaten the stability of the text, or challenge its normative representations of gender and of embodiment. The critique of masculinity in the Hebrew prophets, centered on the prophetic bodies, is instead diminished and displaced onto other, still-stable bodies.

More than any other category of body in Revelation, the male body in pain – exemplified chiefly by the Lamb and the witnesses of chapter 11 – seems to embody an alternate experience of masculinity, one predicated upon vulnerability and openness. But like the prophetic body, the male body in pain is ultimately subsumed into the dominant ideology of the text, and into the larger, ideologically stable category of the messianic body. In the final analysis, both categories of bodies, prophetic bodies and pained bodies, help sustain the discourse of masculinity as violent domination and of the male body as a powerful, vulnerable, impenetrable whole. There are prophets in Revelation, just as there is bodily pain – pain to excess, even – but there is no viable alternative to the dominant discourse of masculinity. Whatever critical promise of destabilizing masculinity and embodiment the Hebrew prophetic writings contain or suggest, that promise is lost on the bloody battlefields of the book of Revelation.

## Conclusion

### MONSTROUS BODIES AND DEMONSTRATIVE BODIES

The Hebrew Bible is filled with stories that reinforce the importance of order and boundaries, especially concerning the body. God speaks to create the world in Genesis 1, and this creation begins with the division of categories. A book later, in Exodus, God gives the Torah to Moses on Mount Sinai, and many of the laws it contains are laws that regulate and contain open, deviant, leaky, and damaged bodies. This regulation of the body is also carried out on a narrative level, as the Bible is filled with stories of non-conforming bodies being singled out, separated, and punished in the text. But then there are the Hebrew prophets. The prophetic body disrupts the ordinary organization of biblical masculinity and embodiment, suggesting, instead, something unstable, painful, irregular, and threatening to the normative categories that the text works elsewhere to construct. Instead of conforming to the norms of embodiment that are set up throughout the biblical text, the prophetic body offers an excessive, norm-defying model of embodiment that also destabilizes the ideology of gender in the biblical text.

The Hebrew prophets transgress masculine categories; their bodies fail to perform normative biblical masculinity. Their bodies, like the bodies of women in the biblical text (and the postbiblical imagination), are too dangerously open and fleshly. Like the beastly or animal body, the prophetic body is too messily material, impossible to limit through language or self-restraint. The prophetic body, like the androgyne and the cyborg, likewise transgresses boundaries; this is no space of bodily purity. Most importantly, the prophetic body is a destabilizing body. Of her own work on strange, interruptive bodies in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Donna Haraway writes,

Inhabiting all of these pages are odd boundary creatures—simians, cyborgs, and women—all of which have had a destabilizing place in the great Western evolutionary, technological, and biological narratives. These boundary creatures are, literally, *monsters*, a word that shares more than its root with the word, to *demonstrate*. Monsters signify.<sup>1</sup>

As Haraway emphasizes, monstrous bodies are, most basically, *demonstrative* bodies. The bodies of simians and cyborgs and women – and saints and martyrs and androgynes and transgenic mice<sup>2</sup> – at once demonstrate and challenge ideologies and narratives of power, primary among them narratives of sex, gender, and the body. The prophetic bodies, too, occupy a “destabilizing place” in the narratives of embodiment and masculinity in the Hebrew Bible. With actions and anti-actions, speeches and silences, the prophets oppose and challenge the work of the dominant discourse of gender. And this destabilizing function depends upon the body.

The instability of the prophetic body functions differently at different points in the biblical text. In the opening chapters of Hosea, it is not the prophet’s body that attracts the attention of the text, but rather the female bodies of Gomer, Hosea’s wife (and notorious *wife of*

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<sup>1</sup> Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 1990), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia Burrus, *Saving Shame : Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*; Donna J. Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan\_Meets\_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience*, First ed. (New York: Routledge, 1997).

*whoredom*) and the gynomorphized Israel. But the motivating problem in the book of Hosea is not female embodiment or femininity; feminine experience, as I have argued, is “specular” in the text. Instead, the female bodies offer a figure to “think with,” and to think the problem of masculinity in particular. The text of Hosea is seized by two anxieties, an anxiety over fertility and the role of the male body (and husband), and an anxiety over the openness that prophecy demands. The first anxiety emerges primarily through the interlocking metaphors of *woman as land* and *land as woman* that Hosea employs. While both metaphors reflect a lengthy literary and cultural tradition, the book of Hosea erases all suggestion of female sexual pleasure in the plowing of the land and body, using the metaphor instead to rein in, at least in principle, the fertile female body. This concern over fertility leads as well to the anxiety of male openness. The female body and land are subjected to violence, even torture, in the text of Hosea as a way of negotiating the danger and promise of open masculinity.

The Book of Hosea is the oldest of the Hebrew prophetic writings considered in this dissertation, and in many ways it sets the course for the texts that follow. In Hosea, prophetic masculinity and embodiment are at once central to the text and almost impossible to speak about. This problem of the male prophetic body, cautiously articulated in Hosea, emerges in its full form in the book of Ezekiel, particularly in the opening five chapters. While Hosea’s body is mostly absent from the attentions of the text – Gomer and Israel’s bodies provide fertile substitutes – Ezekiel’s body is all too present. Called as a prophet in one of the most spectacular scenes of theophany in all the Hebrew Bible, Ezekiel begins his prophecy by saying nothing and instead offering a series of bizarre performances. These performances direct attention to the prophet’s body. Ezekiel’s actions are neither artful, intentional scenes of communication nor symptoms of a deeper psychopathology. Instead, Ezekiel’s actions, disrupting the ordinary scene of prophecy, bring the fore the impossible demands prophecy places upon masculinity and embodiment alike. This instability is deeply threatening to the norms of order in the text, which ends with a fantasy of a restored body – but the body of the temple. However, the concluding chapters of Ezekiel fail to address or to compensate for the bodily suffering of the prophet that lingers on from the book’s opening chapters, and the possibility of an alternate prophetic masculinity, while foreclosed, is not fully forgotten.

Ezekiel’s crisis of prophecy is staged upon the prophetic body as a whole. In the case of Jeremiah’s Confessions, this crisis is experienced not on the form of the body, but rather on the and through the voice. Jeremiah refuses to speak according to the normative expectations of masculine sound in the text. Instead, crying and shouting out, he voices sounds that the text clearly marks as feminine. Jeremiah cannot speak, it seems, in a masculine way. Furthermore, the bodily suffering that he experiences – the prophet speaks repeatedly of the pain he feels – suggests a process of somatic compliance, in which the body “speaks” what the voice cannot say. Jeremiah’s discourse, it seems, is hysterical discourse, and stands in a destabilizing relation to masculinity and embodiment alike. And so in the Hebrew prophets, the prophetic body has a raw, disruptive power. It opposes the dominant ideology of masculinity and of bodies alike. The prophetic body threatens the structures of order that otherwise dominate the text; it likewise suggests the possibility, however briefly, of a different organization of sexes and bodies.

As a presence in the text, the prophetic body is compelling, and it is not surprising that this figure attracts attention even after the prophetic literature. Thus the book of Revelation is also filled with prophetic bodies. But even as these bodies are modeled assiduously on the prophetic bodies of the Hebrew Bible, they occupy a different ideological position in the text.

Bodies in Revelation exist to tell larger stories; they are figures of ideology, not instability. The harsh gender norms that the text establishes are sustained, not undermined, by the construction of bodies in the text, including that traditional site of instability, the body of the prophet. This rigidity of embodiment precludes the challenge to normative biblical masculinity, which is displaced, instead, to the male body in pain. Even the pained male body fails to provide a critical alternative, however. Instead of challenging the dominant ideology of masculinity and embodiment in the text – in Revelation, an ideology that draws heavily on Roman imperial ideology, as well as the experience of living under imperial violence – the bodies in Revelation sustain the dominant worldview of the text. The prophetic bodies function in the text to uphold a violent masculinity.

As Haraway suggests, “monstrous” bodies are monstrous not simply because their forms of embodiment are excessive, disconcerting, and *other*, but because they *demonstrate*, signifying both the norms and the weaknesses of the system. The bodies of martyrs and saints teach us about desire, shame, and abjection.<sup>3</sup> The bodies of simians and cyborgs and transgenic organisms challenge and complicate the boundaries of the category of the human.<sup>4</sup> And the prophetic body challenges normative ideas of masculinity and embodiment in the Hebrew prophets. The prophetic literature, including the prophetic texts, has its own internal set of norms for embodiment and for masculinity. These norms include a male body that is firm, strong, closed-off, beautiful, skilled in combat with words and hands alike. Measured by this standard, the Hebrew prophets are a sorry lot, failing to perform hegemonic masculinity. However, the prophetic body does something else in the text – it offers a space of resistance to, if not outright critique of, the biblical norms of masculinity and embodiment. The bodies of the prophets offer the possibility of a different sort of organization of masculinity, a masculinity that begins with an open body, with opened registers of voice, with a move beyond directional, effective performance into messy, inchoate embodiment. This is the hope, the danger, and the promise of the Hebrew prophetic body.

There are a number of consequences to thinking about the Hebrew Bible, and Hebrew prophecy, beginning from the male prophetic body. Emphasizing masculinity and embodiment offers new ways of approaching prophecy – new wine in old wineskins, or perhaps new readings in old (prophetic) bodies. Taking up the prophetic body complicates, for example, the ongoing discussion over prophecy and social power. While prophets undeniably possessed social power, the prophetic body offers instead a site of weakness and involuntary experience, complicating the figure of the prophet. Reading from and for embodiment likewise offers an alternative perspective to the social and sociological one, allowing a closer focus on questions of phenomenology, gender, and the negotiation of identity.

Considering the prophetic body as a *male* body is part of an important project, moreover, of sexing the masculine, of refusing to let the category of *woman* stand in for *gender* while men, male bodies, and masculinities pass untouched and unsexed. The prophetic body, for all its problems of masculinity, is a sexed and sexually contested body. Approaching prophecy from the starting point of the *male* body assumes the sexing of the masculine and renders it a part of the ongoing critical conversation. The female body and the feminine have been much more

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<sup>3</sup> Burrus, *Saving Shame : Martyrs, Saints, and Other Abject Subjects*.

<sup>4</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*; Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan\_Meets\_OncoMouse*.

thoroughly discussed and theorized in biblical studies than the male body, as I discuss in chapter 1. However, emphasizing (sometimes to the point of exclusivity) the female body allows the male body to pass unsexed, thereby falsely claiming either universality or neutrality.<sup>5</sup> Beginning with the male body is a way of sexing the male body, and thus serves as both a political and a critical act.

Finally, the readings of the unstable and disruptive male prophetic body in this dissertation have, I hope, complicated the idea of hegemonic masculinity with which the dissertation itself began. While the Hebrew Bible offers strong norms of masculinity, male embodiment, and masculine practice, it also contains narratives and suggestions of other sorts of masculinities. These alternate masculinities are only rarely made central in the text. Instead, the non-hegemonic, critical, *plural* masculinities emerge through strategies of displacement, of allusion, and through the description of inexplicable action. Perhaps the strongest alternate masculinity I have considered is the gender-transgressing *voice* of Jeremiah. Not insignificantly, this is a transgression that cannot be *seen* in the text. Elsewhere, the critique of hegemonic masculinity (and the possibility of an alternative) is primarily carried out either through perplexing excess (as in Ezekiel) or through linguistic displacement onto other, female bodies (as in Hosea). And the destabilizing critical potential is lost entirely by Revelation. Still, the very presence, however fleeting, of such suggestions of alternate masculinity, is critical to acknowledge.

For all its challenges to hegemonic gender categories, the prophetic body is no cyborg or androgyne. It is likewise no animal body, no techno fantasy, no mythical creature. But the prophetic body is a body in travail. The prophetic body is suffering, pained – but also productive. It bears forth, in its struggle, the possibility of understanding masculinity otherwise, of a masculinity not built upon strength and violence and wholeness, but rather upon vulnerability and openness. Complicating biblical masculinity, complicating masculinities built upon biblical categories, the prophetic bodies of the Hebrew Bible bring forth much in their travail.

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<sup>5</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (Columbia University Press, 1993).

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