

'You Shall Know Yahweh':

Divine Sexuality in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond

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## ABSTRACT

The relationship between the chief Israelite deity Yahweh and his people is often figured in terms of the so-called 'marriage metaphor', by which Yahweh is husband and Israel wife. The sexual language used to describe Yahweh's body and his attitude towards Israel is taken to be a convenient method to outline the thoughts, feelings and expectations Yahweh has of his people in terms of religious practice. However, this has led to various interpretations in which divine sexuality in itself has been labelled 'pagan', an activity which Yahweh supposedly 'transcends'.

The aim of this thesis is to question these interpretations. In the first part, an examination of other ancient West Asian literature from Sumer, Ugarit and Egypt, each depicting divine sexuality in stark terms, is completed in order to set a historical mark by which the biblical texts themselves can be judged. In the second, a selection of biblical passages is examined: some from the texts which are structured by the marriage metaphor (as from Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah) and others not (texts about bones, temples, urination, circumcision and loins).

Ultimately, one discovers that Yahweh is in fact embroiled within sexuality, whether in the marriage metaphor or not, rather than transcendent above it and that Yahweh's body, described in heavily masculine terminology throughout the Bible, while indeed sexualized, phallic and perhaps even penised, is nevertheless, ambiguous, liminal or 'multigendered' as to the features of his body. It is argued that this does not impede Yahweh's masculinity but may even work to strengthen it.

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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This is a thesis about the sexual and gendered features of Yahweh's body. Within the Protestant and Western cultural contexts in which I write, such a topic might provoke confusion, amusement, or downright hostility. After all, it is a commonly held idea that God, if God exists, has neither body nor genitals; some may even decry these ideas as heretical and heterodox. Scholars of the Hebrew Bible, however, have not shied away from asking these types of questions and exploring just how the biblical writers present the body, gender and sexuality of the Israelite deity Yahweh. It is no secret that the Bible uses heavily masculine-coded language to talk about Yahweh. Among other things, this god is described as a 'man' (אִישׁ), a 'warrior' (גִּבּוֹר), a 'husband' (בַּעַל) and a 'father' (אָב), while the use of the he/him pronoun set is ubiquitous in our discourse about God. What, then, does the body of a deity described in such terms look like? Do these masculine images and the ideologies surrounding them extend to every area of the divine body? What would one see, for instance, if Yahweh were to reveal what was under the 'hem of his robe' (Isa. 6.1) and would it coincide with what one would expect given the masculocentric focus of the Hebrew Bible? In short, what is the sexual and gendered form of Yahweh in the Israelite imagination and why is it so?

Scholars themselves are divided on these issues. Tikva Frymer-Kensky strongly opposes the notion of a sexual Yahweh, writing that Yahweh 'is not at all phallic, and cannot represent male virility and sexual potency'.<sup>1</sup> According to Frymer-Kensky, the deity neither 'behave[s] in sexual ways', nor is he 'imagined below the

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<sup>1</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 'Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible', *Jewish Explorations of Sexuality*, ed. Jonathan Magonet (Providence; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1995), 3-16: 4.

waist'.<sup>2</sup> It may be the case that Yahweh is envisioned as a husband to Israel in the prophetic writings, but this, she argues, is metaphorical as the biblical writers utilize no 'physical descriptions' to express this relationship between Yahweh and Israel.<sup>3</sup> She goes as far as defining divine sexuality as 'pagan',<sup>4</sup> a revealing equation in itself, but one that is certainly part of historical biblical scholarship.<sup>5</sup> In a similar vein, Mark Smith writes that 'Israelite society perceived Yahweh primarily as a god embodying traits or values expressed by gendered metaphors yet transcending such particular renderings'.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, Smith is critical of the arguments put forward by Stephen Moore and Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, the former for his claims of androgyny for Yahweh and the latter because he detects a homoeroticism underlying the relationship between Yahweh and his male followers. In Smith's view, gendered imagery used of Yahweh is 'not so concerned with divine sexuality [...] the issue is divine-human interpersonal relations'.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, Lyle Eslinger argues that some biblical texts portray Yahweh as a sexual deity. For instance, in Isaiah 6.1-4, a text I shall examine later, Eslinger claims that the prophet sees God's penis.<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this vision, he argues, is not to show that Yahweh is 'a man with a male member',<sup>9</sup> but that this theophany, this naked self-revelation of God, is not the 'sanitized experience' of deity one would expect in light of the cultic regulations circumscribing acceptable religious practice.<sup>10</sup> One might

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<sup>2</sup> Frymer-Kensky, 'Law and Philosophy', 4.

<sup>3</sup> Frymer-Kensky, 'Law and Philosophy', 4.

<sup>4</sup> Frymer-Kensky, 'Law and Philosophy', 4.

<sup>5</sup> Ken Stone, 'Queering the Canaanite', *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God and Politics*, ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 110-34: 119-21.

<sup>6</sup> Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University, 2001), 91.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 92.

<sup>8</sup> Lyle Eslinger, 'The Infinite in a Finite Organical Perception (Isaiah VI 1-5)', *Vetus Testamentum* 45.2 (1995), 145-173: 157.

<sup>9</sup> Eslinger, 'The Infinite', 158.

<sup>10</sup> Eslinger, 'The Infinite', 159.

wonder whether, if the purpose of the vision is emphatically not to reveal that Yahweh is a god with genitals, the writer of the text and the intended audience already presume the deity is a genitaled one.

Feminist biblical scholars have also drawn attention to Yahweh's sexuality. Mary Shields, for example, in her discussion of Ezekiel 16's portrayal of Yahweh and the god's violent relationship to a female-depicted Israel, notes that many commentators avoid discussing Yahweh's sexuality in the text,<sup>11</sup> which so viscerally describes the 'gang rape' and 'mutilation' of an apparently 'ungrateful' and 'whoring' young woman (Israel).<sup>12</sup> All the punishments mentioned are meted out by an affronted Yahweh, incensed that he is not the sole focus of female Israel's sexuality. In refusing to ignore these details, one finds it difficult to accept Smith's claim that Yahweh, in the view of certain Israelites, somehow transcends the 'gendered metaphors' used to describe him rather than being embroiled within them. That Ezekiel 16 may be metaphorical does not obviate the fact that the biblical writer is heavily invested in the imagery he uses and is content to characterize Yahweh by it. The writer also displays no unease in ascribing such behaviour, which is inextricably bound up in gendered and sexual expectations, to Yahweh.

Smith's claim that monotheistic Yahwism 'is beyond sexuality yet nonetheless expressed through it'<sup>13</sup> is at odds with the sexually charged and gendered portrayal of the male-female relationship that orders a large part of the prophetic narratives concerning Yahweh. Furthermore, the idea that gendered metaphors are less about sexuality than 'interpersonal relations' does not take seriously the claim that gender

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<sup>11</sup> Mary E. Shields, 'Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16', *Journal in Feminist Studies in Religion* 14.1 (1998), 5-18: 15 n. 34.

<sup>12</sup> Shields, 'Body Rhetoric', 6.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 91.

and sexuality as social structures set the limits and permissibilities of relationships themselves. Linda Singer notes that the organization of these relationships is 'conflictual' insofar as social differences between subjects position them as dominant or passive and thus create a context permeated by inequality.<sup>14</sup> For example, in a context where men are valued more than women, 'interpersonal relationships (particularly of the heterosexist variety) will always be characterized by rupture, refusal, conflict and disappointment'.<sup>15</sup> This is particularly true in the case of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel which, in Ezekiel 16, takes on considerably violent tones; it is this violence, as Beauvoir might argue,<sup>16</sup> that creates, contributes to and sustains Israel's status as other. If the environment of the text is structured around this gendered image of violation, such that violation becomes a defining feature of what it means to be male in the narrative, then the argument for transcendence falters. Indeed, the biblical texts which describe Yahweh's relationships with others are written in a similar male-privileged context; it is therefore unlikely that gendered descriptions of the deity have little sexuality-related content to convey especially when cultural ideas of what it means to be a man or a woman are invested in sexuality and sexual norms. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne note that one of the 'implicit premises' in the standard use of 'male' and 'masculine' is the combination of 'anatomy, learned behaviour and desire' such that 'normal' male identity is heterosexual.<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler also argues that a 'compulsory and naturalized' heterosexuality orders cultural understandings of gender in which the 'differentiation [of the masculine term from the

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<sup>14</sup> Linda Singer, 'Interpretation and Retrieval: Rereading Beauvoir', *Women's Studies International Forum* 8.3 (1985), 231-238: 236.

<sup>15</sup> Singer, 'Interpretation and Retrieval', 236.

<sup>16</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), 108.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne, 'Dislocating Masculinity: Gender, Power and Anthropology', *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*, ed. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 11-47: 11.

feminine] is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire'.<sup>18</sup> Monique Wittig, for whom 'sex' is to be understood as 'a mark that is somehow applied by an institutionalized heterosexuality',<sup>19</sup> recognized this entanglement of desire and gender when she wrote that the lesbian 'is *not* a woman' precisely because she refuses heterosexuality: 'what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man'.<sup>20</sup> The 'sexual regulation of gender'<sup>21</sup> that Butler writes about is also a useful tool in reading the Hebrew Bible's attitudes towards gender. The woman, for instance, is brought into existence juxtaposed with the man from whom she is taken (Gen. 2.23); for this reason, איש and אשה will be joined together to become 'one flesh' (Gen. 2.24). Not only is there a social relation between the אשה and איש through sex and family ties, but the אשה is literally constructed (בנה) from him (and later in Genesis 2.16 is defined by the desire she is forced to orient toward him).

A similar ideology is found in Leviticus 18.22 in which male addressees are commanded not to 'lie with a man' (את-זכר לא תשכב) in the 'lying downs of a woman' (משכבי אשה). Theodore Jennings argues that this prohibition is addressed to men who are penetrated, who are willingly making themselves 'like women'; this, he notes, is in opposition to similar texts in other ancient West Asian legal documents where the concern is the male penetrator.<sup>22</sup> Saul Olyan, however, on the basis of a similarity between 'the lying downs of a woman' and 'the lying downs of a man (זכר)' in other biblical texts, argues rather that the message in Leviticus 18.22 is directed at the

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<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 31.

<sup>19</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Monique Wittig, 'One is not Born a Woman', *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), 103-109: 108.

<sup>21</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore W. Jennings, Jr, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (New York; London: Continuum, 2005), 209.

penetrating male.<sup>23</sup> Thus the structure of the text naturalizes the idea that men should lie with women and makes the sexual penetration of women a defining characteristic of what it means to be a man. For this reason, *both* parties, not just male penetrates, are forfeiting their social masculinity in that it is not just penetration *per se* that is conceived of as a male attribute. The penetrator-penetrated relationship of Leviticus 18.22 (and 20.13) is not regarded in terms of a 'normal' male-female coupling where the penetrator is seen as the man and the penetrated the woman since in fact *neither* of the parties in Leviticus 18.22 or 20.13 is adhering to masculine roles.

If Yahweh can be called a man (אִישׁוֹכֵר), how does this 'sexual regulation of gender' apply to him? After all, the gendered metaphor in which Israel is depicted as Yahweh's sexual partner/victim raises the issue of whether Yahweh had a divine consort. Epigraphical discoveries from Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet 'Ajrud attest to the possibility that Yahweh did indeed have a parhedra, namely, the goddess Asherah,<sup>24</sup> and hints of her presence in the biblical texts suggest that she was, at one time, a normative part of the temple-based Israelite cult.<sup>25</sup> In Ugaritic mythology, this goddess (Athirat) was the consort of the high god El, with whom she had seventy divine sons.<sup>26</sup> A comparable theology is found in Deuteronomy 32.7-12 which may preserve an older

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<sup>23</sup> Saul M. Olyan, "And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying down of a Woman": On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13', *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5.2 (1994): 179-206.

<sup>24</sup> William G. Dever, 'Recent Archaeological Confirmation of the Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel', *Hebrew Studies* 23 (1982), 37-43; Ziony Zevit, 'The Khirbet el-Qôm Inscription Mentioning a Goddess', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 255 (1984), 39-47; Judith M. Hadley, 'The Khirbet el-Qom Inscription', *Vetus Testamentum* 37.1 (1987), 50-62; J. A. Emerton, "'Yahweh and His Asherah": The Goddess or Her Symbol?', *Vetus Testamentum* 49.3 (1999), 315-337.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Ackerman, 'At Home with the Goddess', *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina: Proceedings of the Centennial Symposium, W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and American Schools of Oriental Research, Jerusalem, May 29-May 31, 2000*, ed. W. G. Dever and S. Gitin (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 455-468; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, "'Popular" Religion and "Official" Religion: Practice, Perception, Portrayal', *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah*, ed. Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 37-58: 42-43.

<sup>26</sup> Tilde Binger, *Asherah: Goddesses in Ugarit, Israel and the Old Testament*, JSOT Supplement Series 232 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 58.

Israelite theology in which Yahweh is actually El's son,<sup>27</sup> and, if the analogy to Ugaritic mythology holds throughout, is potentially Asherah's son as well.<sup>28</sup> John Day argues that Yahweh's later identification with El in the biblical texts led to Yahweh also appropriating Asherah as his consort.<sup>29</sup> In the move towards monotheism, however that might be conceived in terms of the Hebrew Bible, James Anderson contends that Yahweh appropriated the qualities of this female consort, giving rise to the so-called 'feminine dimension' of Yahweh that one sometimes observes in the Bible.<sup>30</sup>

This thesis, however, will not explicitly focus on Asherah in its exploration of gender and sexuality as it applies to Yahweh. For one, there are no biblical texts which tell of Yahweh's sexual relationship with this goddess; even in passages where she is potentially present (see Deut. 33.2, for example, where it may mention 'Asherah at [Yahweh's] right hand'), the context is not conducive to a positive sexual interpretation.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the sonship of other divine beings (בני האלהים) is not linked to a goddess as it is in Ugaritic material where these beings are named 'the seventy sons of Athirat'. John Day remarks that the later Jewish tradition of there being seventy guardian angels over the nations of the earth can probably be traced back to this earlier Ugaritic theology.<sup>32</sup> In conjunction with this later Jewish tradition, he furthers that the declaration in Deuteronomy 32.8, that the Most High separated the nations

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<sup>27</sup> James S. Anderson, *Monotheism and Yahweh's Appropriation of Baal* (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 26.

<sup>28</sup> Tilde Binger has presented arguments to the effect that Asherah could be the mother of El as well; see Binger 1997: 77, 82, 90)

<sup>29</sup> John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 265 (London; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 47.

<sup>30</sup> Anderson, *Monotheism*, 26; see also Patrick Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, *Library of Ancient Israel*, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 30, 36-37.

<sup>31</sup> Although it may be the case that objects and places traditionally associated with Asherah are mentioned, the paucity of positive occurrences of her name in the Hebrew Bible speaks to the writers' general negative attitude towards the goddess.

<sup>32</sup> John Day, 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105.3 (1986), 385-408: 387.

according to the number of divine sons,<sup>33</sup> directly connects the text to Athirat's seventy sons.<sup>34</sup> J. J. M. Roberts and Kathryn Roberts also argue that presence of בני האלהים in the biblical texts favours connecting Yahweh with a consort since these divine beings began life in Ugarit as El and Athirat's sons;<sup>35</sup> however, one must be careful not to assume that the existence of heavenly sons presumes the (formerly acknowledged) existence of a mother goddess since methods of conception and birth in West Asian ideas of the divine realm may not always mirror how such acts happen in the terrestrial sphere. In Greek myth, for example, Zeus gives birth to Athena from his head and to Dionysos from his thigh,<sup>36</sup> while the Hurro-Hurrian god Kumarbi becomes pregnant by biting off and consuming Anu's penis.<sup>37</sup>

Although Day uses Deuteronomy 32.8 to solidify a link between Athirat's sons and the sons of God, several textual features of Deuteronomy 32 suggest that one need not posit a mother goddess behind its theology. Deuteronomy 32.15-18 contains a diatribe against Israel for abandoning Yahweh and worshipping foreign gods; according to the writer, the Israelites 'forgot the rock that bore [them], the god who fathered [them]' (v. 18). The Hebrew terms ניל and ילד appear together in just a handful of verses; in Isaiah and Micah, they occur in passages describing women or female figures in labour (Isa. 13.8; 26.17-18; 45.10; 54.1; 66.7-8; Mic. 4.10), often to evoke feelings of anxiety, pain or expectancy. They also describe animal birth in Job 39.1-4 and the creation of the world in Psalm 90.2. In this latter verse, the deity is pictured

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<sup>33</sup> Although the MT reads 'sons of Israel', 4QDeut(j) ('sons of God') and LXX (ἄγγελοι θεου) both presuppose an original reading of בני אל(הים).

<sup>34</sup> Day, 'Asherah in the Hebrew Bible', 387.

<sup>35</sup> J. J. M. Roberts and Kathryn Roberts, 'Yahweh's Significant Other', *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World: An Introduction to Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Katharine Doob Sakenfeld*, ed. Linda Day and Carolyn Pressler (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 176-185: 177.

<sup>36</sup> Nancy Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece* (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins University, 1994), 134.

<sup>37</sup> Barry P. Powell, *The Poems of Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days and The Shield of Herakles* (Oakland, CA: California University, 2017), 12.

'giving birth' (ותחולל) to the world, explicitly drawing upon the language of pregnancy and delivery; the LXX, however, understands the verb as a passive and translates *πλασθεναι* ('was formed, moulded'); here the LXX pictures the potter deity rather than a begetting god. Both the active and passive translation of ותחולל is possible, yet the Septuagint's decision to move away from the imagery of childbirth altogether (τῷ in the same verse is rendered with the verb *γινομαι* rather than *γενναω*) could imply a deliberate obfuscation on the translator's part. It is easier to explain why birthing imagery would be downplayed for a male deity than it is to ascertain why Masoretic tradition would add it.

In terms of Deuteronomy 32.18, the deity is compared to a begetting rock; on the face of it, this may be an unusual picture for us to understand, yet ideas of fertile rocks and stones are employed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and appear to be grounded in the role standing stones and commemorative stele played in Yahweh's cult.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, while the verb ילד (used in Deut. 32.18 and Ps. 90.2) does characterize both men and women in the biblical texts, for the former it is principally found in genealogies and generally in the *hiphil* form (that is, men cause women to ילד); for the latter, however, it is simply in the straightforward *qal* stem (as in Deut. 32.18). As it does not appear in the *hiphil* in either Deuteronomy 32.18 or Psalm 90.2, and since these two terms describe women in the Hebrew Bible, it is perhaps tempting to argue that the Israelites envisioned Yahweh as a Father-Mother divinity. It remains the case, however, that Yahweh is nowhere called אב by the biblical writers (in Deut. 32.6, he is אביך קנך, 'your father who procreated you'). This direct lack of 'mother' language for Yahweh leads to the argument that language assuming a wombed image

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<sup>38</sup> J. Gerald Janzen, *All the Families of the Earth*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 193; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Role of Ancestor Worship in Biblical Land Claims* (New York; London: T&T Clark International, 2010), 41-42.

of the deity is metaphorical in nature. With reference to Proverbs 8.22-25, which describes Wisdom as a creation 'brought forth' (לִּי) by Yahweh, Bruce Waltke writes:

It bears repeating, however, that no mythological reality is intended in these texts, for the LORD has no spouse, and without a female partner a mythological reality is impossible (cf. Ps. 90:2).<sup>39</sup>

Eilberg-Schwartz makes a similar argument, writing that 'a monotheistic God can have no sexual experience'.<sup>40</sup> These statements are true only as far as one presumes a certain type of body for Yahweh. What if Yahweh's body is so constituted that he does not need a goddess to procreate?<sup>41</sup> What stops interpreters accepting the 'mythological reality' of a male deity who gives birth? Aversion to this imagery is no doubt informed by our own cultural constructions of what men and women are and do; moreover, this avoidance, I would argue, is what makes it easy to claim that Yahweh's so-called 'feminine' aspects are the result of Yahweh's appropriation of an early goddess's attributes rather than original to Yahweh himself. Is it possible that part of the negative attitude towards Asherah in the Hebrew Bible arises from the idea that Yahweh is complete—perfect—in himself, therefore needing no consort; in which case, the texts may be a battleground for two competing theologies of Yahweh's body—a battleground where 'monotheism' will eventually prevail because God is one with himself, unlike primal humanity who become one (ἓνα) only by uniting bodily with one another (Gen. 2.23-24).

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<sup>39</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 1-15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 412.

<sup>40</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, 'The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book', *Reading Bodies, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, ed. Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn, Biblical Limits (London: Routledge, 1997), 34-55: 48.

<sup>41</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz (1997: 55) imagines a possibility where God is 'androgynous', but still maintains that 'an androgynous deity does not procreate or have a sexual experience'.

### **The Materiality of Yahweh's Body**

In the previous paragraphs, I have suggested that there is something about Yahweh's body that makes it peculiar and different from what readers today would expect given the masculocentric focus of the Hebrew Bible. The purpose of this section is thus to explore Yahweh's materiality and note whether its constitution is what permits his body to be imagined in such a way. The use of anthropomorphic language of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, however, is a contested area, no doubt in part because classical theology understands God as an immaterial being.<sup>42</sup> Language, therefore, about the deity's face, eyes, mouth and hands must be contrivances to allow people to speak of the deity despite his incorporeality. With this understanding, references to God's body parts must indicate divine characteristics based on the metaphorical domains occupied by those self-same parts: God's face, eyes, mouth and hands would signify, respectively, divine presence, knowledge, communication and action.<sup>43</sup>

E. LaB. Cherbonnier acknowledges that anthropomorphic imagery used for the deity is a mainstay of, and normative in, the biblical texts, writing that Yahweh is 'as anthropomorphic as any [deity] in the Greek and Roman pantheon' and that the invectives against foreign gods in the prophetic books are rooted in their not being anthropomorphic enough.<sup>44</sup> Cherbonnier draws attention to two specific chapters in this regard: Isaiah 46 and Psalm 115. In the former, the non-Yahwistic cult statues are described as lifeless and unable to move (Isa. 46.5-7), while in the latter the Psalmist decries them for being unable to speak, hear, or see (Ps. 115.2-8). The point

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<sup>42</sup> See William J. Wainwright, 'God's Body', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42.3 (1974), 470-481: 471-473 and relevant footnotes for an overview of these arguments and in which texts they can be found.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Mark Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 92.

<sup>44</sup> E. LaB. Cherbonnier, 'The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism', *The Harvard Theological Review* 55.3 (1962), 187-206: 187.

expressed here, Cherbonnier argues, is that while the ‘false gods’ cannot act as humans do, Yahweh does so to the utmost degree.<sup>45</sup>

Benjamin Sommer, too, recognizes anthropomorphic language as a biblical mainstay and consequently opens his book about divine embodiment with the following simple statement: ‘The God of the Hebrew Bible has a body’.<sup>46</sup> While Sommer states that the standard model of Israelite theology posits God’s embodiment, he argues the biblical writers understood their deity as having various bodies located in various places.<sup>47</sup> Sommer’s idea of body, however, does not necessarily include materiality,<sup>48</sup> and he suggests that for some biblical writers God’s body remained anthropomorphic while not being composed of the same substance as human bodies. God’s body might be understood, he writes, as ‘energy rather than matter’.<sup>49</sup> I will argue for a similar point later, though will disregard the notion that a humanlike deity cannot have a material body unless he is composed of the same substance humanity is.

Esther Hamori distinguishes between several types of anthropomorphism in the Hebrew Bible and argues that each type ‘serve[s] different narrative and theological functions’.<sup>50</sup> She lists five different instances of anthropomorphism: (1) concrete, (2) envisioned, (3) immanent, (4) transcendent, and (5) figurative.<sup>51</sup> Concrete anthropomorphism portrays the deity as having a ‘realistic human nature’ and ‘concrete physical embodiment’,<sup>52</sup> such as Genesis 18 and 32 in which God appears

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<sup>45</sup> Cherbonnier, ‘Biblical Anthropomorphism’, 192.

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2009), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Esther Hamori, ‘*When Gods Were Men*’: *The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 26.

<sup>51</sup> Hamori, ‘*When Gods Were Men*’, 28-33.

<sup>52</sup> Hamori, ‘*When Gods Were Men*’, 29.

'in the literal, physical body of a man'.<sup>53</sup> The immanent variety of anthropomorphism is distinguished from this by degree of explicitness; immanent anthropomorphisms are those which portray the god in human terms but do not 'explicitly depict [God] as physically embodied'.<sup>54</sup> Texts which Hamori would classify here are those where Yahweh speaks but appears in (or as)<sup>55</sup> a cloud, fire, or light, rather than unambiguously in/as a concrete humanesque body (Exod. 33.9; 34.5-6; Deut. 5.4). Due to the tension in these texts between God's bodied actions (speech, sight, hearing, etc.) and the lack of explicit reference to a human form, it is impossible to tell whether the biblical writers in these instances thought that God was concretely bodied but also veiled, or whether the deity is to be wholly identified with the cloud, fire, or light. As noted above, however, a silence regarding whether God is concretely bodied cannot be taken *prima facie* as a statement to the effect that God is bodiless; rather, such a silence may denote the presupposition of the biblical writers that God is indeed a corporeal being.

Similarly, Mark Smith argues that the Hebrew Bible presents three different bodies of God: (1) the natural 'human' body as in Genesis, (2) the superhuman 'liturgical' body (as in Exodus and Isaiah), and (3) the cosmic 'mystical' body (as in the later prophets).<sup>56</sup> The first of these Smith attributes humanlike physicality, though the physicality of the other two are more akin to the physicality of light or fire.<sup>57</sup> Smith claims that it is in Genesis 2-3 that one finds the first mention of God with a physical body like that of humans:

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<sup>53</sup> Hamori, 'When Gods Were Men', 3.

<sup>54</sup> Hamori, 'When Gods Were Men', 30.

<sup>55</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 42.

<sup>56</sup> Mark S. Smith, 'The Three Bodies of God in the Hebrew Bible', *JBL* 134.3 (2015): 471-88.

<sup>57</sup> Smith, personal communication, 19 April 2016.

In this story, God “breathed into his [Adam’s] nostrils the breath of life,” perhaps in the manner of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. In Gen 2:8, God plants a garden, a rather physical, human activity. There is also “the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of the day” (Gen 3:8 NJPS). Here God seems like a great king in his royal garden, and the description perhaps conjures up depictions of kings not uncommonly represented in ancient Near Eastern art as taller than their royal subjects. This divine body would seem to be on the scale of human bodies, only somewhat taller.

At the same time, several details in Gen 2–3 about God, such as speaking, making, and taking, do not require a physical body.<sup>58</sup>

In consigning Genesis 1.1-2.4a to the ‘cosmic “mystical” body’ and categorizing the divine body in Genesis 2.4b-3 as a ‘natural “human” body’, Smith appears to privilege certain activities as more indicative of physicality than others. The main activities said to set apart the god in Genesis 2.4b-3 (Yahweh) from the one in Genesis 1.1-2.4a (Elohim) are breathing and garden planting, even though Elohim creates (v. 1), moves (v. 2), speaks (v. 3), sees (v. 4), names (v. 5), separates (v. 7), places objects (v. 17), blesses (v. 22), and rests (2.2). Why are these too not ‘rather physical [...] activit[ies]’?

It is also curious that Yahweh’s breathing into  $\alpha\mu\chi$  is counted towards the deity’s physicality but Elohim’s speech is not, even though both speech and breath require humanlike materiality to some degree (after all, if the human form is what the biblical writers use to construct their image of divinity, it is a pertinent question to ask why one should discount activities that suggest physicality in humans for the divine).

Smith proposes a correlation between the deity’s physicality and his size/location.<sup>59</sup> In Genesis 2-3, he argues, God is pictured as earthly in that he is only somewhat taller than humans; on the other hand, in texts like Exodus 33-34 (where Moses meets Yahweh) and Isaiah 6 (where the prophet sees Yahweh in the temple),

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, ‘The Three Bodies of God’, 473-74.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, ‘The Three Bodies of God’, 472.

the context is liturgical and set apart from the mundane realm and thus God is imagined as vastly bigger than his creatures. Smith also writes that implicit in the account of Genesis 1.1-2.4a is the idea that the top the firmament is the location of God's abode (similar to his Mesopotamian counterparts). Since this cosmic body is a reimagination of the second type of divine body (a body of glory rather than flesh),<sup>60</sup> one may conclude that God's cosmic body, as imagined by Smith, is not physically like human bodies. The only body to which Smith attributes humanlike physicality is the 'natural' body he discusses in regard to certain Genesis texts (save Genesis 1).<sup>61</sup>

While the human body and the human form are normatively used to describe Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, and while he acts in ways that suggest his material presence, is Yahweh's materiality similar to or indeed different from that of humans; is it possible to attribute flesh to Yahweh? If Yahweh is corporeal in that he has *corpus*, a body, how is this corpus materially organized? Some expressions using body language for Yahweh are metaphorical (his strong arm, for example), but Moses' sighting of Yahweh in Exodus 33.21-23, in which the deity tells him he may see the divine 'back parts' but not the divine face (פנים), demonstrates that there are instances of body-related language that are not to be read in a metaphorical way. For example, פנים can refer metonymically to Yahweh as a whole and therefore his presence and being with or before others; yet, in Exodus 33.21-23 such a meaning would make no sense as Yahweh distinguishes between what is observable in his presence before Moses (his back parts) and what is not (his face).

On the other hand, Deuteronomy 4.10-19 has been identified as a concrete example of a text that promotes the immaterialist view. In the passage, the biblical

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<sup>60</sup> Smith, 'The Three Bodies of God', 481-87.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, 'The Three Bodies of God', 472.

writer reminds his audience that the Israelites saw no divine ‘form’ (תמונה) at Horeb when Yahweh spoke to them (vv. 12, 15). Gordon Wenham uses Deuteronomy 4.15 as an example of the ‘OT’s stress on the incorporeality and invisibility of God’,<sup>62</sup> though what Wenham overlooks is that Yahweh’s voice is also mentioned in Deuteronomy 4.10-19: ‘you heard the sound of words (קול דברים), but saw no form’ (v. 12)—does a voice not suggest an embodied form? On what grounds should one discount speech as an indicator of corporeality (compare Smith’s view above)? Moreover, that the Israelites did not see God’s תמונה does not mean that God does not have one; invisibility does not of necessity require incorporeality.<sup>63</sup> This point must also be stressed with regard to the aniconistic tendencies of the Yahwistic cult.<sup>64</sup> Although statuary depicting Yahweh may have been used in earlier periods of the cult,<sup>65</sup> one cannot assume that its decline inevitably corresponds with an emerging understanding of Yahweh as immaterial or nonphysical. Indeed, throughout the Hebrew Bible in texts of varying provenance and period, material and bodied representations are, as previously stated, normative for the deity.

Although Yahweh’s body appears in human form, the Hebrew Bible demarcates a division between divinity (אל) and fleshy humanity (בשר). In Genesis 6.3, for example, flesh (בשר) is contrasted with Yahweh’s spirit (רוח):

Yahweh said, ‘My spirit (רוח) will not strive with humankind (אדם) forever, for they are flesh (בשר)’

<sup>62</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC 1 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 30.

<sup>63</sup> Robert P. Gordon, “Comparativism” and the God of Israel”, *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Versions: Selected Essays of Robert P. Gordon* (Aldershot; Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 180-196: 190; Stephen Moore, *God’s Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York; London: Routledge, 1996), 83.

<sup>64</sup> Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, 15-23.

<sup>65</sup> Herbert Niehr, ‘In Search of YHWH’s Cult Statue in the First Temple’, *The Image and the Book: Icon Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of the Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1997): 73-95.

Elsewhere, *בשר* is characterized as weak (2 Chr. 32.8; Job 6.12), transient (Isa. 40.6; Ps. 78.39) and opposed to divine *רוח*.<sup>66</sup> Take Isaiah 31.3:

The Egyptians are *אדם* and not *אל*,  
Their horses are *בשר* and not *רוח*.

Not only is there parallelism between *אדם* and *בשר*, *אל* and *רוח*, but the two word pairs also stand in contradistinction to one another: humankind is unequivocally connected with its flesh and God with his spirit. While the term *בשר* opposes *אל*, it also contrasts with other terms associated with 'spiritual life', such as *נפש* ('life, vitality, living being') and *לב* ('heart, mind, will'),<sup>67</sup> both of which are predicated of humankind *and* the deity, unlike *בשר* (see Gen. 6.6, 8.21; Lev. 26.11, 30; Judg. 10.16; 1 Sam. 2.35; 1 Kgs 9.3; 2 Kgs. 10.30; Ps. 11.5; Prov. 6.16; Isa. 1.14; Jer 5.9, 29, 15.1; Ezek. 23.18). Furthermore, for Job, flesh and its deteriorable nature are not part of Yahweh's embodiment:

Are your eyes flesh (*עיני בשר*)?  
Do you see as a human does (*אנוש*)?  
Are your days the days of a human (*אנוש*)?  
Your years like the years of a man (*גבר*)?  
(Job 10.4-5)

Yahweh does not share *בשר* with humans, neither does he have *דם* ('blood') or *עצם* ('bone') in common with them. What both do partake of are *נפש* ('vitality'), *לב* ('heart, mind') and *רוח* ('spirit'); of these qualities, *רוח* is given by, and has its origins in, Yahweh (Gen. 6.3; Zech. 12.1; Job 27.3; Isa. 42.5), while human *נפש* is contingent upon Yahweh's breath (*רוח, נשמה*) and the blood within them (the two being identified in Lev. 17.11 and Deut. 12.23-24).

<sup>66</sup> Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 30-31.

<sup>67</sup> G. Gerleman, '*bāšār*', *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 1:283-285: 284.

Though Yahweh appears not to have that which is essential to living *human* bodies (namely, flesh, blood and bones), even in their absence, deity and humanity, according to Genesis 1.26-28, share צלם ('image') and דמות ('likeness'). What can it mean however to be created in the image and likeness of a fleshless, bloodless and boneless god if his creations are fleshy, bloody and bony? The reticence to attribute such anatomical features to Yahweh may be, as with בשר, because they are associated with *potential* weakness: bones can be broken (Isa. 38.13; Lam. 3.4), shaken (Job 4.14), crushed (Ps. 51.8), brittle (Ps. 31.10) and unclean (Num. 19.16); blood also occupies a precarious position in that it can be spilled and in its spilling connotes violence.

Nevertheless, blood and bones can also be invested with a degree of divinity. Often a sign of death, bones also appear connected with new life, as in Genesis 2.21-23, the account of Eve's birth from Adam's rib bone, and 2 Kings 13.21 where one finds a dead man brought back to life by contact with Elisha's bones. Like bone, blood too is related to both life and death; it has the power to cleanse and protect but also to render impure.<sup>68</sup> It is used in a purificatory manner in atonement rituals,<sup>69</sup> it protects against death (Exod. 12.23) and indexes the connection between humanity and divinity (Gen. 9.6). On the other hand, a menstruating woman is unclean on account of her blood flow (Lev. 15.19) and blood that is shed pollutes the land upon which it falls (Num. 35.33; 1 Chr. 22.8; Ps. 106.38; Ezek. 21.32). While liminality is often characteristic of divinity, the straddling of blood and bone between divine power and potential destruction becomes a site of anxiety for if they were admitted of the deity's body, it would place that body in a very precarious position indeed. A similar rhetoric

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<sup>68</sup> Pamela Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005), 96; David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christian* (Berkeley: University of California, 2007), 10-11.

<sup>69</sup> William K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore; London: John Hopkins University, 2004), 170.

may be at play in the prohibitions that surround cultic statuary in so far as the proscription ensures Yahweh (i.e., his cultic statue) cannot be seized or captured from his temple by foreign enemies; in this sense, the disuse of cult statues protects the integrity of Yahweh's body and shields it from the destruction and 'ritual mutilation' that captured god-statues often underwent in ancient West Asia.<sup>70</sup> Likewise, in not attributing blood or bones to Yahweh's body, the biblical writers shield it from the risk of disintegration and violent fragmentation.

Although blood does index the divine-human connection (Gen. 9.6), it does so not on the basis of the blood *per se*, but because the body (whose life inheres in the blood) recalls the image God and humanity share. The use of צלם elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible demonstrates that this connection between humankind and divinity is indeed grounded in materiality. In many instances, it denotes foreign or illegitimate cultic statuary; it is utilized to describe Canaanite (Num. 33.52) and Baalistic images (2 Kgs 11.18), the deity Saturn and his representations (Amos 5.26) as well as the statues with which Israel is said to 'play the harlot' (Ezek. 16.17, cf. 23.14). דמות, with which צלם appears in Genesis 1.26-28, underscores the idea that what these Genesis verses describe is a physical resemblance between God and humans. The term is used of altar plans (2 Kgs 16.10), the resemblance between Adam and his son (Gen. 5.1-3, דמות || צלם) and throughout the book of Ezekiel to describe what the prophet sees in his visions (1.5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, 28; 8.2; 10.10, 21, 22). Though Ezekiel's visions may not be physical, דמות nevertheless expresses similitude in terms of visual resemblance.

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<sup>70</sup> Theodore J. Lewis, 'Syro-Palestinian Iconography and Divine Images', *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Neal H. Walls, ASOR Book Series 10 (Boston, MA: ASOR, 2005), 69-107: 101.

Since צלם is generally portrayed negatively in the Hebrew Bible in its connection with foreign and thus illegitimate cultic statues, its positive use in Genesis 1.26-28 can be understood as an invective against the lifeless nothingness attributed to these statues. In other words, in contrast to the 'idols' who have mouths that cannot speak, eyes that cannot see, ears that cannot hear, hands that cannot feel and feet that cannot walk (Ps. 115.2-8), the beings whom God creates are *living* statues—ones that *can* speak, *can* see, *can* hear, *can* feel and *can* walk. This same rhetoric informs Genesis 2.7 where Yahweh forms (יצר) the earthling from the ground; in Isaiah 43-45 the same verb is used to describe those who form (יצר) 'idols' (44.9, 10, 12) and the prophet places them in opposition to Yahweh, who forms (יצר) his people Israel (43.1, 7, 10, 12; 44.2, 21, 24; 45.11).

Here again one finds the juxtaposition between staticity and vitality; Yahweh is able to form living representations of himself, whereas 'idol' makers are unable to create living representations of the gods. The reason they are unable to do so, according to prophetic logic, is because the gods they attempt to (re)present do not exist in any real sense. This means there is no דמות or צלם for them to fashion a cultic statue after; therefore, though these statues are material, they are an image of nothing (Isa. 41.24). Isaiah even calls them תהו (41.29), used in Genesis 1.2 to describe the desolate earth before God organizes it; Katherine Murphey Hayes argues תהו here in Isaiah 41.29 is an abstract concept ('worthlessness') and so refers to the uselessness of the cult statues and perhaps the disorder they bring.<sup>71</sup> While this sense can be seen in Isaiah's diatribes, John Goldingay and David Payne describe תהו as 'something that exists but lacks any form, order, or meaning'.<sup>72</sup> In this sense, I would argue that

<sup>71</sup> Katherine Murphey Hayes, *The Earth Mourns: Prophetic Metaphor and Oral Aesthetic* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2002), 153.

<sup>72</sup> John Goldingay and David Payne, *Isaiah 40-55: Volume 1*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 109.

Isaiah's theology of cult statues recognizes them as *material without materiality*. In other words, they are physically present but without material consequence; they are nonactors who cannot produce effects and as such there is no legitimate space for them to be(come) real in Isaiah's theology.

In Egypt and Mesopotamia, on the other hand, these god-statues have the materiality they lack in the Hebrew Bible: Egyptian texts refer to the flesh and bones of their deities as the precious metals and stones used in the statues' production,<sup>73</sup> as does literature from Mesopotamia.<sup>74</sup> The deities are thought to inhabit, or be present by, these cultic statues and as such may be equated with the statues themselves.<sup>75</sup> In order for these images to function, that is, for them to be or present the deity, they must undergo rituals to materialize them, to change them from crude material to materially effective and consequential objects/subjects. In Mesopotamia, these rituals, the *mis/pît pī*, ('Opening of the Mouth') rites, divinized the statue and gave it the power of taste and smell,<sup>76</sup> senses necessary for divine interaction with worshippers and their offerings. If foreign deities, however, are equated with nothingness, such that they lack embodiment (their statues being senseless and therefore not bodies), then Yahweh must necessarily be the antithesis of nothingness. To be a deity proper, therefore, is inescapably to have material presence.

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<sup>73</sup> Stephen Quirke, *Exploring Religion in Ancient Egypt* (Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 2015), 89.

<sup>74</sup> Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 214.

<sup>75</sup> Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Michael B. Dick, 'Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image', *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 1-53: 40.

In Genesis 1.26-28, this material presence is humanity,<sup>77</sup> legitimate cult statues through whom the deity is present in the terrestrial world. The earthy nature of these living statues is emphasized in Genesis 2.7 which pictures Yahweh forming humanity from the 'dust of the ground'. Imagery of the potter god is further found in Isaiah 64.8 and Job 10 and 33; in the former, Yahweh's fatherhood is contingent upon his role as a potter, and in the latter two chapters, Job describes Yahweh 'pressing' humanity into existence as a potter presses clay (10.9), while Job's friend Elihu remarks that he too was 'pinched (קָרַץ) from clay' (33.6).

The idea that the gods created humankind from clay is common in ancient West Asia.<sup>78</sup> The goddess Aruru in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, for example, creates Enkidu by 'pinching off' clay and throwing it into the wilderness (2.30-40), while in the *Babylonian Theodicy*, the deity Zalammar digs out (*kariš*, cf. Heb. קָרַץ) the clay from which the human being is made (276-278). Though there is some consonance between these texts and accounts of humankind's creation in the Hebrew Bible, there are nevertheless stark differences between the biblical texts and other ancient West Asian creation narratives. In particular, both the *Atrahasis Epic* and *Enuma elish* present creation accounts that involve divine blood. In *Atrahasis*, humankind is formed when the goddess Nintu combines clay with the blood of a slain god so that divinity and humanity might be comingled (210-220; 225-230). Similarly, in *Enuma elish*, Marduk plans to form humankind from blood and bone (6.5-7) and, at Ea's suggestion, they are created from the blood of the rebellious god Qingu, put to death for his part in the rebellion against Marduk (6.13-35). These ideas of creation are also found in a trilingual tablet from Assur dating to c. 800 BCE; it describes the creation of two human

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<sup>77</sup> Stephen L. Herring, *Divine Substitution: Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 124.

<sup>78</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 27.

beings, Ulligarra and Zalgarra, from the blood of craftsmen deities who are slain for exactly that purpose.<sup>79</sup> In the tablet, the cuneiform determinative for deity precedes the names Ulligarra and Zalgarra, implying their godlike status (no doubt, Alexander Heidel suggests, because they are made from divine blood).<sup>80</sup>

In these ancient West Asian sources, flesh and blood are emphatically not denied to deities and are even used to create humanity in some myths; the bodies of gods and humans are therefore similar to some degree in flesh(like) constitution. In Genesis 2.7, however, Yahweh does not use divine blood, but rather נשמה ('breath') takes its place. Yahweh's breath, his נשמה, is strongly associated with רוח in a number of passages where the two terms are placed in construct state (נשמת רוח) (Gen. 7.22; 2 Sam. 22.16; Ps. 18.15) or in parallel to one another (Job 4.9; 27.3; 32.8; 33.4; Isa. 42.5).

The way that divine image and breath are used in Genesis 1.26-28 and 2.7, that is, to signal, among other things, the human's dominion over the animal kingdom, mirrors the function of blood in the other mythologies mentioned. In the trilingual tablet from Assur, for instance, the tasks apportioned to humankind ('to make the field of the Anunnaki produce plentifully [...] to increase ox, sheep, cattle, fish and fowl')<sup>81</sup> bear a striking similarity to the benediction of Genesis 1.28 and occur in the text immediately following the Anunnaki's pronouncement to create humanity from the blood of the craftsmen deities. Similarly, the reproductive blessing of Genesis 1.28, which calls for humans to reproduce and dominate the animal kingdom, is positioned just after God's declaration to create humanity in his image.

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<sup>79</sup> Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago, 1963), 68-71.

<sup>80</sup> Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 68.

<sup>81</sup> Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 70.

A similar pattern occurs in *Enuma elish* where Marduk proclaims he shall 'alter the organization of the gods' after creating humankind from divine blood, and though the gods be honoured as one, 'they shall be divided into two' (6.9-10). Since humans are to bear the work of the gods, Marduk reorganizes heaven and the underworld, for which the Anunnaki are thankful (6.39-58).

In these texts, blood works to effect the kinship relations between the gods themselves. Although Tzvi Abusch argues that blood was not overtly important in the context of an urbanized Mesopotamia and attributes its presence in these myths to a general West Semitic influence, it still reflects what Abusch characterizes as the purpose of blood sacrifice; namely, to create and maintain kinship and clan groups.<sup>82</sup> Whether or not the deaths of the craftsmen deities or of Qingu can be regarded as an act of sacrifice, they effect the distinction between creator(s) and created, restructure the cosmic order and cement the type of relationship that ought to exist between divinity and humanity.

God's רוח and צלם thus function in an analogous manner to this divine blood. While blood is the way human nature partakes of both heaven and earth in these myths, in the Genesis texts, heaven and earth are admixed by clay and divine breath/spirit. That these deities possess blood strongly implies their existence as material beings; although God's breath and spirit replace blood as a tool of creation, this does not immaterialize the deity and רוח remains a very material presence in the Hebrew Bible. In Genesis 1.1-2.4a, רוח אלהים is God's activity in the materially ordered cosmos and in other texts represents divine inhabitation in material agents and environments (Gen.

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<sup>82</sup> Tzvi Abusch, 'Sacrifice in Mesopotamia', *Sacrifice in Religious Experience*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 39-48: 46.

41.38; Ezek. 2.2; 3.24). In Ezekiel particularly, רוח demonstrates its materiality when it lifts the prophet into רוח אלהים (11.24), an action that also occurs in chapter 8 after Ezekiel sees the fiery likeness (דמות) of Yahweh: the deity stretches out his hand, taking Ezekiel by the hair, and the רוח raises him upwards in between heaven and earth (8.3). In this particular incident, Yahweh's hand and רוח are so intimately connected that רוח can be understood as a material extension of the deity's supersize body.

In humans, רוח is the centre of their emotional and intellectual lives. It can be, among other things, agitated or troubled (Gen. 41.8), weak (Isa. 61.3), unruly (Prov. 25.28), stirred up (1 Chr. 5.26) and willing (Ex. 35.21). In construct form, it denotes mental attitudes or dispositions, such as 'the spirit of jealousy' (Num. 5.14) or 'the spirit of understanding' (Isa. 11.2). As the emotional register of the Hebrew Bible is frequently indexed by body parts,<sup>83</sup> it is difficult to separate these states from the body in which they are experienced. A. W. Argyle speaks of the 'psychology' of the Hebrew Bible in which the 'soul' is understood as a 'quasi-physical entity'<sup>84</sup> in recognition of the biblical writers' holistic approach to the human person. In this unified conception of human beings, רוח is a materially experienced presence.

The use of רוח to denote wind (Gen. 8.1; Exod. 10.13, 19; 14.21; Num. 11.31; 1 Kgs 18.45; 19.11; 2 Kgs 3.17, *et al*) implies a quality about רוח that characterizes the difference between divine רוח and human רוח: its extensibility. Humans are only able to feel and experience רוח, to be acted upon by it, unlike God, from whom it originates. Human רוח is self-contained and unable to go outside of itself to affect others, unlike

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<sup>83</sup> David B. Mumford, 'Emotional Distress in the Hebrew Bible: Somatic or Psychological?', *British Journal of Psychiatry* 160 (1992), 92-97.

<sup>84</sup> A. W. Argyle, 'The Christian Doctrine of the Origin of the Soul', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18.3 (1965), 273-293: 274.

God's, which is able to occupy more than one place at one time and extend where it will. This differentiation is observed especially in the story of Elisha and Elijah in 2 Kgs 2.1-15; in this episode, Yahweh is about to take Elijah up to heaven in a divine whirlwind, yet—before Elijah leaves—Elisha requests a 'double portion' (פּי־פּוֹרְתַיִם) of Elijah's spirit (רוּחַ) (2 Kgs 2.9). It is not until *after* his translation that Elisha is able to receive his spirit, and Elijah's 'mantle' (עֲדָרְתוֹ), which remains behind, is how the prophet's רוּחַ is bestowed on Elisha. In 2 Kings 2.15, the bestowal is described using the preposition על ('upon'); such usage is usually reserved for the coming of God's spirit upon others (often in a prophetic capacity).<sup>85</sup> In this way, Elijah's רוּחַ is comparable to God's, and just as Yahweh's hand is associated with the material working of his רוּחַ in Ezekiel 8.3, so too is Elijah's עֲדָרְתוֹ, the remaining material presence of the prophet himself, connected with his own רוּחַ. It is no wonder then that the biblical writer can speak so easily of רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, with its evocation of רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, when Elijah's translation renders his materiality divine and his רוּחַ extendable, a godlike quality.

Again, the translation of רוּחַ as 'wind' in appropriate contexts highlights the issue of visible and invisible (im)materiality. The wind cannot be seen, but it can be felt, but does that mean it should be regarded as immaterial? William Cusack-Smith, writing in 1835, explored the same question and used these categories to explain the illogicality of immaterial spirit:

*Invisible materiality* I can, of course, conceive: but *visible immateriality* is less to be comprehended.—Did Saul not see, and recognise that of Samuel, the spirit which the witch of Endor raised? [...] From these passages it might be inferred, First, that a disembodied spirit, "not having flesh and bones," may present itself to, and be perceptible by, the embodied spirits of living men. Secondly, that it may be visible to them, and in so far share the

<sup>85</sup> See, Num. 27.16; Judg. 3.10; 11.29; 14.6, 19; 15.14; 1 Sam. 10.6, 10; 11.6; 19.20, 23; 2 Chr. 15.1; 20.14; 24.20; Isa. 11.2; 42.1; 44.3; 59.21; 61.1; Ezek. 11.5; 39.29; Joel 3.1-2.

qualities of—and resemble what we call matter [...] The word [...] which our translation renders “spirit,” is—in the original—*πνευμα*,—of which at least one of the meanings designates that material substance, a *breath*.<sup>86</sup>

The equation of God and spirit with immateriality has a long history, especially within philosophy and Christian theology.<sup>87</sup> However, in the imagination of the biblical authors, the category of ‘visible immateriality’ (or visible nonphysicality) appears to be nonsensical; the vitriol in Psalm 115 and Deutero-Isaiah directed against cult statues is a polemic designed to highlight the uselessness of the statues’ materiality; they are supposed to be physical representations of the gods yet they do not act as embodied beings, therefore upending the supposition that their divine materiality would enable them to act in/on the earthly realm. Their materiality is deceptive, they are עלילים—‘nothingness’—precisely because that is what it is to be matterless; they have no power to act.

Yahweh, on the other hand, acts in and to reveal his powerful materiality in the world (as I discuss later in reference to Isaiah 6). Although passages such as 1 Kings 8.27, 2 Chronicles 2.5, 6.18, and Jeremiah 23.24, which talk about God’s inability to be contained (כול), might suggest that God is nonphysical because he is uncontainable by materiality, another interpretation which does not force immateriality into the text (especially when the vast majority of theomorphic references are founded in corporeal and bodied imagery) would understand God’s uncontainability in the context of a supramateriality. In other words, God cannot be contained by the heavens and the earth because his total materiality *exceeds* the terrestrial realm’s capacity to hold it, just as Solomon’s sacrificial offering of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep in 1 Kings

<sup>86</sup> William Cusack-Smith, *Metaphysic Rambles* (Dublin: Milliken and Son, 1835), 114.

<sup>87</sup> Malcom Jeeves, ‘The Emergence of Human Distinctiveness: The Story of Neuropsychology and Evolutionary Psychology’, *Rethinking Human Nature: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Malcom Jeeves (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 176-205: 190.

8.64 cannot be held (כֹּל) by the temple's bronze altar due to the sacrificial overabundance.

For Stephen Moore, this excessively material deity raises the issues highlighted before, those of Yahweh's masculinity and gender. He writes that Yahweh 'emerges [as] a God who, from all eternity, has been intent on amassing the defensive trappings of hegemonic masculinity, preeminently an awe-inspiring physique'.<sup>88</sup> God's gigantic body, Moore argues, is evocative of bodybuilding regimes and he describes Yahweh as a steroid-raging and protein-obsessed deity (see his sacrificial diet comprised 'primarily of red meat').<sup>89</sup> In writing about how these masculine images fit within the context of a god who elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible is figured with breasts and womb (as noted above), it is clear that Moore regards Yahweh's bodily anatomy as a key to his gender; for example, these female-coded body parts (i.e., those parts considered constitutive of the category of 'woman') are seen to make Yahweh's body 'hermaphroditic' and 'androgynous'.<sup>90</sup> Since Moore attributes an 'unmistakably female' chest to Yahweh,<sup>91</sup> he names Yahweh a 'she-male' (*sic*) and moves quickly to a change of pronoun for the deity ('s/he').<sup>92</sup> Hannah Løland employs similar language when she discusses the possibility that Yahweh has a womb; in her discussion of Isaiah 46.3, in which she finds a reference to such, she argues that the text depicts 'Yhwh [...] carrying the people in *her* own womb' (emphasis mine).<sup>93</sup> However, the biblical writers consistently use the pronouns הוּא ('he') and אַתָּה (masc. 'you') when they refer to Yahweh and even in passages where the deity's body is written as

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<sup>88</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *The Bible in Theory: Critical and Postcritical Essays* (SBL: Atlanta, 2010), 218.

<sup>89</sup> Moore, *The Bible in Theory*, 213-215.

<sup>90</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, 92.

<sup>91</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, 93.

<sup>92</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, 92-94.

<sup>93</sup> Hanne Løland, *Silent or Salient Gender?: The Interpretation of Gendered God-Language in the Hebrew Bible, Exemplified in Isaiah 42, 46 and 49* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 158.

wombed or breasted (such as Deut. 32), language such as 'father' is employed without any apparent unease or hesitation. To account for this, a better understanding of what gender is must be applied to the biblical texts.

### **God, Gender and Genitals**

One of the most popular and persistent models of gender employed today is grounded in the primacy of the genitals: to have penis and testicles is to be male, to have vagina and womb is to be female. This binary system of gender is initiated and upheld from birth, if not earlier in the case of prenatal scans, when an examination of the baby's genitals transforms an 'it' into a boy or girl. This process is so integral a structure in daily life that Judith Butler argues it is in the means by which humanization occurs—'the moment in which an infant becomes humanized is when the question, "is it a boy or girl?" is answered'.<sup>94</sup> This humanization is evident in how new-born infants are treated based on others' understanding of the child's gender. Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet outline various studies which demonstrate that how we act with, speak to and talk of newborns is heavily affected by our gendered perception of them.<sup>95</sup> 'We do not know how to interact', they write, 'with another human being [...] or how to judge [...] them, unless we can attribute a gender to them'.<sup>96</sup> If the infant is born with ambiguous genitals, that is, if the child is intersex, early 'corrective' surgery is often offered to 'normalize' the genitalia. Such a procedure permits the neat gendering of the child into one of two categories and at the same time reveals the artificial nature of gender itself.

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<sup>94</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 151.

<sup>95</sup> Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender* (New York: Cambridge University, 2013), 8-11.

<sup>96</sup> Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender*, 8.

Judith Butler and Nancy Chodorow both discuss gender as a kind of emergent property of the self; for Chodorow, gender is 'processual' and 'produced developmentally and in our daily social and cultural lives'.<sup>97</sup> In other words, there are no immutable and natural differences between men and women; rather, what are perceived as differences are in fact qualities that emerge over time due to social and cultural pressures and understandings.<sup>98</sup> In Butler's view, the differences accrued to the categories of 'man' and 'woman' may be said to produce the very categories themselves,<sup>99</sup> categories into which children are inculcated and to which they are expected to subscribe. In other words, the idea that gender is innate or fixed is rejected for one in which stable gender identity is exposed as an illusion.<sup>100</sup> The illusion of this stable gendered self is accomplished through the 'stylization of the body' which includes 'bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds'.<sup>101</sup> Butler derives this conceptualization of gender partly from Michel Foucault's idea of docile and manipulable bodies which are produced by a 'policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour'.<sup>102</sup> The body, therefore, is not simply a *tabula rasa*, not merely bulk matter, but a continual 'materializing':

One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body, and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Nancy J. Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989), 112.

<sup>98</sup> Chodorow, *Feminism*, 108-9.

<sup>99</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 190.

<sup>100</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191.

<sup>101</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191.

<sup>102</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 138.

<sup>103</sup> Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1998), 519-531: 521.

Butler is careful to remind her readers, however, that the way one does one's body in relation to gender cannot be wholly conceived of as a radically individual choice. The materialization of the body takes place within a set of scripts that precede the individual who is born into them. It is important for Butler to maintain that these social scripts are not coerced upon a passive body, but rather bodies are 'always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance'.<sup>104</sup> This opens up the possibility of variations in how the body is done, but this doing nevertheless takes place in 'culturally restricted corporeal space'.<sup>105</sup> Vary this body's doing too much, insofar as one does one's body 'wrongly', and abjection and violence may follow in order to prove the goodness of the system which acts to constrain bodies.

Some earlier theorists argued for a divide between sex and gender, the former a biological property of the body, the latter social. Under this conception, which Butler understands as a response to and criticism of a 'biology-is-destiny' formula,<sup>106</sup> sex is an immutable characteristic of the body, while gender is 'the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes'.<sup>107</sup> In this way, being male or female (sex) is understood as something different from being man or woman (gender). It is the categories of man or woman which are produced socially while male- or femaleness is seen as an unchanging biological truth about the body. This approach allowed early feminists to counteract patriarchal insistence that women and their place in society be dictated by their (*presumed*) biological makeup.<sup>108</sup>

Butler, however, draws attention to the way in which sex itself is a gendered category or rather how sex is produced by gender. She writes that "anatomy" and

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<sup>104</sup> Butler, 'Performative Acts', 526.

<sup>105</sup> Butler, 'Performative Acts', 526.

<sup>106</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 8.

<sup>107</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory, Methodology and Writing* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge), 24-25.

“sex” are not without cultural framing’,<sup>109</sup> and that gender, as a system of reading and understanding bodies, is the ‘cultural means by which [...] “a natural sex” is produced [...] as a politically neutral surface’,<sup>110</sup> a ‘just is’. Sharon Cowan sums it as such: ‘the practice of only seeing two ways of doing gender produces two biological sexes’.<sup>111</sup> The interpretation of so-called sex-determining chromosomes demonstrates Cowan’s argument insofar as the presence of the SRY gene on the human Y chromosome (which results in the emergence of testes and the production of testosterone)<sup>112</sup> is gendered as male due to the preexisting gendered worldview in which penises and testes are constitutive of men. In effect, therefore, the detachment of sex from gender is a misguided attempt to conceal the circularity of the relationship between the two.<sup>113</sup>

In his work on God’s phallus, however, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz maintains that the distinction between sex and gender is necessary in order to ‘come to terms with the potential discrepancy between a person’s anatomy (sex) and their qualities or characteristics (gender)’.<sup>114</sup> The examples Eilberg-Schwartz gives are ‘transvestism’ and ‘transsexualism’ (*sic*), the latter which he defines (incorrectly) as ‘living one’s life as if one is the other sex’<sup>115</sup> rather than identifying one’s gender as different from that assigned at birth. In defining being transgender as an ‘as if’, Eilberg-Schwartz gives primacy to anatomy as the truth of one’s life; in other words, according to this definition,

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<sup>109</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004), 10.

<sup>110</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 9-10.

<sup>111</sup> Sharon Cowan, “What a Long Strange Trip It’s Been”: Feminist and Queer Travels with Sex, Gender and Sexuality’, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Feminist Legal Theory*, ed. Margaret Davies and Vanessa E. Munro (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 105-123: 115.

<sup>112</sup> Christiane Nüsslein-Volhard, *Coming to Life: How Genes Drive Development*, trans. Helga Schier (Carlsbad, CA: Kales, 2006), 108.

<sup>113</sup> See further, Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 144-150 for a feminist critique of the issues surrounding the discovery and meaning of the SRY gene for so-called biological sex.

<sup>114</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 23.

<sup>115</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus*, 23-24.

a transgender woman is not actually a woman, but only living her life ‘as if’ she were one. Other than her own declaration that she is a woman, what particular experiences must she live in order to fulfil this ‘as if’? Being a woman is not a monolithic or universal experience, which Eilberg-Schwartz acknowledges, so why therefore does he need to characterize a transgender woman’s life *in particular* as an ‘as if’?

In any case, the system which separates sex and gender is never applied to cisgender women in the same way in which it is applied to transgender women. It is not uncommon, in this view, for transgender women to have their sex understood as male while being counted among women as to their gender (the not infrequently found term ‘male-bodied woman’ represents this interpretation). However, if a cisgender woman were to wear male-coded clothes, act in male-coded ways and participate in male-coded activities, it is more than likely that she will still be referred to as a woman, a masculine woman perhaps, but, due to a cultural bias towards the primacy of anatomy, a woman nonetheless. On the other hand, transgender women who do not conform to the social expectations placed on women (by wearing male-coded clothing or acting in male-coded ways, for example) will probably not be able to enjoy the privilege of others respecting their identity since any social masculinity they display will be connected to their presumed anatomy (or anatomical history). In other words, the cisgender woman has a freedom the transgender woman often does not: she can display masculinity and remain a woman.

The discrepancy is thus not between sex and gender but rather between how the system is applied differently to cisgender people on the one hand and transgender people on the other, highlighting just how much influence is credited to (presumed) anatomy. The only way that there could be a ‘discrepancy’ between anatomy and one’s ‘qualities’ is if one has already assumed—problematically—that the two are

causally associated in some manner. Even if this is a cultural assumption, Eilberg-Schwartz sustains it in his own personal (mis)definition of what transgender life is.

Due to the imbalance that inheres in the sex versus gender model, one must dispose of talking about 'discrepancies' linked to 'as ifs' which assume the stability of meaning attached to the biological body, *especially* if one is to invoke transgender experiences. A more fruitful approach to these issues is expressed by Butler for whom, as noted above, sex is a gendered category and gender the 'cultural means' through which 'natural gender' arises.

Our ideas of gender are therefore, for the most part, accorded to bodies by means of perception. In his lecture on femininity, Freud similarly notes, 'When you meet a human being, the first distinction you make is 'male or female?' and you are accustomed to make the decision with unhesitating certainty.'<sup>116</sup> One's certainty derives from the presence of so-called secondary sex characteristics ('bodily shape and tissues')<sup>117</sup> but also from other gendered signifiers such as clothing, voice, makeup, hair length and so on.<sup>118</sup> A person with a beard and a short hair, for example, will typically be read as a man while long hair, developed breasts and lipstick on another are likely to be understood as female markers. Even those for whom genitals or chromosomes are the ultimate markers of 'true' gender are not exempt from utilizing socially gendered signifiers in their own assessments since it is impossible for them to ascertain a person's genitals or configuration of chromosomes through perception without presumption.

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<sup>116</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), 412-432: 413.

<sup>117</sup> Freud, 'Femininity', 413.

<sup>118</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 23.

In terms of Chodorow's idea that social pressures effect gender, Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig have both written about how society's privileging of the male term works to construct female identity. Wittig in fact argues that within the very concepts of 'male' and 'female' inheres an ideology which functions to authorize male heterosexuality. She writes that the use of these gendered terms hides this ideology behind the idea that 'male' and 'female' are simply universal and natural givens.<sup>119</sup> 'Man' and 'woman' are for Wittig 'political concepts of opposition'.<sup>120</sup>

Irigaray focuses on how the importance of the penis, considered by dominant gender ideologies the ma(r)ker of maleness, itself marks women as less. Since the penis is the 'only sexual organ of recognized value', women become defined by lack; 'Her lot is that of [...] "atrophy"'.<sup>121</sup> Within the 'dominant phallic economy', women are said to compensate for this 'loss' through 'servile love of the father-husband' who can give her a male child (i.e., according to this phallic logic, a child with a penis). This is the means whereby she can 'appropriate', within an acceptable context, the phallic symbol for herself.<sup>122</sup> If she wishes therefore to access the power afforded to the idealized penis, she must do so vicariously through her father, husband or sons. Ultimately, what constitutes femininity is therefore 'prescribed by [...] masculine specula(riza)tion'.<sup>123</sup> In what Irigaray terms the phallic economy, women are looked-at objects, defined by male fantasy.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Monique Wittig, 'The Straight Mind', *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Min-ha and Cornel West (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990), 51-57: 54-55.

<sup>120</sup> Wittig, 'The Straight Mind', 55.

<sup>121</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1985), 23.

<sup>122</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 23-24.

<sup>123</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 30.

<sup>124</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 25.

In the Hebrew Bible, women are similarly defined by their relationship with sight and moreover by what the biblical authors permit them, as *subjects*, to look at; the biblical writers frequently employ the female look in contexts related to conception, pregnancy, children and men. This sight foregrounds various tensions within the text, often between two female characters or two dichotomous ideologies of sexuality.

In Genesis, there are two sets of women whose relationships with each other are strained on account of their reproductive (non)abilities and what they can offer their respective husband-patriarchs: Sarah and Hagar, Rachel and Leah. In Genesis 16, Sarah cannot give Abraham any children and so to remedy the situation, Sarah offers her slave Hagar to him that she might have a family through her. However, when Hagar realizes (Heb. 'sees') she is pregnant, she begins to despise her mistress (vv. 1-4). Complaining to Abraham, he tells Sarah that Hagar is 'in her hands' to deal with as is 'good in her [Sarah's] eyes' (v. 6), thus returning to Sarah the power of sight that Hagar has in the realization of her pregnancy. Sarah deploys this sight in an act of violence (ענה) against Hagar that may even be sexual in nature (v. 16b).<sup>125</sup> If ענה is indeed sexualized here, or has sexual undertones, Sarah's actions are a forceful reclamation of Hagar and her body for herself. This reclaimed power, however, is challenged once again when Sarah sees (ראה) Hagar's son 'mocking' Isaac, the son Yahweh has given her, during his weaning celebration. The only other times Hagar is said to see are after Sarah has banished her and she worries for the life of her son—she 'refuse[s] to see [her] son die' (v. 16). In response, Yahweh lets Hagar see a well of water which will save her son (v. 19), thus legitimizing Ishmael to become a 'great nation' like Isaac (v. 18).

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<sup>125</sup> Compare the use of ענה in Gen. 34.2, Deut. 21.14, 22.24, 29, Judg. 19.24, 20.5, 2 Sam. 13.12, 14, 22 to describe rape and sexual violation.

A similar series of incidents occurs with Rachel and her sister Leah in Genesis 30. Rachel sees (ראה) that she, like Sarah, is unable to give her husband children and becomes jealous of her sister (v. 1). With her sight, her knowledge, Rachel inaugurates the competition between her and her sister; she attempts to overcome her sister by giving Jacob her servant Bilhah that she, again like Sarah, might have a family through her handmaid (v. 3). When Bilhah does conceive and give birth, Rachel rejoices at 'winning the struggle' against Leah (vv. 7-8). Not to be outdone, perhaps, Leah too, when she 'sees' her inability to conceive, offers Jacob her handmaid and, finally, in total, between Rachel, Leah and their servants, Jacob becomes father to twelve sons.

The stories of Moses (Exod. 1.16; 2.2, 5-6), Athaliah (2 Kgs 11.1, 14), Dinah (Gen. 33.18-34.4) and Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39) connect female sight to questions of lineal identity. In the first of these, Pharaoh commands the Hebrew midwives to observe (ראה) the children born to Hebrew women and kill them if they are male so as to suppress Israelite lineage (Exod. 1.16); the midwives however defy Pharaoh and let the boys live (v. 18). As in the previously discussed texts, the female gaze, which Pharaoh here attempts to control and direct, sets up a tension, in this case between Egyptian and Israelite identities. In Exodus 2.1-10, which narrates a small part of Moses' infancy, Moses' mother gives birth and sees (ראה) that her child is male and hides him for three months before placing him in a basket and sending him down river. From the riverbank, Pharaoh's daughter sees (ראה) the basket and later the child inside it (vv. 5-6); she chooses to spare the child and adopts him into the royal family (v. 10) and thus, owing to the gaze of women, Moses overcomes Pharaoh's dictate. Female ראה, in so far as it involves itself with the themes of conception, pregnancy and birth, relates to the dichotomy between life and death (as demonstrated by Rachel,

who in Gen. 30.1 demands Jacob impregnate her lest she die); in Exodus 2.1-10, the dichotomy is realized in the life-saving sight of Moses' mother over and against the death-desiring gaze of Pharaoh.

Athaliah, who is a maligned female figure in the Hebrew Bible due to her association with illicit, foreign worship (2 Chr. 21.6; 24.7), also highlights the deathly aspects that the female gaze can assume. The first time she fixes her sight, it is upon her dead son (2 Kgs. 11.1), a sign of her lineage denied; the second time, she is found looking at the boy king Joash, whom she had earlier failed to kill as revenge for her son's death. It is because of Joash's return from hiding and subsequent coronation that Athaliah is put to death (2 Kgs 11.12-16). From the point of view of the biblical writers, the royal lineage she attempted to eradicate as revenge for the cessation of her own has instead remained and prospered.

Genesis 33.18-34.4 and 39 contain accounts in which the female gaze occurs alongside forceful and violent expressions of sexuality. In the former, Jacob travels from Paddan Aram to Shechem and pitches his tent on a plot of land purchased from the Hivite sons of Hamor, descendants of Canaan. Dinah, Jacob's daughter, who appears here as an acting character for the first time rather than just a name (Gen. 30.21), goes out to see (ראה) the women of the land, but is herself seen by Hamor's son Shechem who 'takes' Dinah and rapes her (Gen. 34.2). In the latter narrative, Potiphar's wife, an Egyptian, 'lifts her eyes' to take notice of a well-built and handsome Joseph. She demands sex from him, but he refuses (vv. 6-7). Later, when no servants are around, Potiphar's wife grabs Joseph and again demands that he lie with her (vv. 11-12). In response, Joseph flees, leaving behind Potiphar's wife clutching his

discarded (outer) garment. When she notices (ראה) the garment in her hand, she uses it as evidence against Joseph and accuses him of rape (vv. 13-15).

In both texts, female sight acts as a trigger in disclosing the violent nature of foreign sexuality; in the first, Hivite (i.e., Canaanite) and Israelite sexuality are contrasted, and in the second, Israelite and Egyptian. Shechem, whose foreignness is marked by his uncircumcision (34.14), treats Dinah like a 'harlot' (זונה) and 'cleaves' to her (דבק); in Genesis 2.24, דבק refers to becoming 'one flesh', and in relation to Shechem and Dinah expresses Shechem's desire to incorporate Dinah into his household, thereby removing the primacy of her Israelite identity as a daughter of Jacob. In Genesis 39.11-12, Potiphar's wife grabs (שפס) Joseph's garment, a verb used in Deuteronomy 22.28 to describe a man who 'grabs' and rapes a woman, and tries to coerce Joseph into sex. Ultimately, the attempt of Potiphar's wife to control and overpower Israelite identity fails, for even though she and her husband imprison Joseph, Pharaoh eventually 'sets [him] over all the land of Egypt' (Gen. 41.41) and presents him the Egyptian Asenath as a wife.

The use of בנה ('build'), as the first canonical instance of the verb, to describe the creation of woman from man's rib in Genesis 2.21-23 also reveals woman's identification to be based on her association with childbirth and men. Almost all of its uses in the Torah, the themes of which are carried throughout the Hebrew Bible, are connected with city building (Gen. 4.17; 10.11; 11.4-5, 18; Exod. 1.11; Num. 13.22; 21.27; 32.24, 34, 37-38; Deut. 6.10), house construction (Gen. 33.17; Deut. 8.12; 20.5; 22.8; 28.30), setting up altars (Gen. 8.20; 12.7-8; 13.18; 22.9; 26.25; 35.7; Exod. 17.15; 20.25, *et al*) or establishing a family line (Gen. 16.12; Deut. 25.9). That Eve is similarly 'constructed' frames her, and by extension women more generally, as (an)

object(s) through which familial lineages are brought into being and maintained. The first city in the Bible is named after Cain's son (Gen. 4.17) and provides the location for the proliferation of his descendants; likewise, one's house is metonymic for one's dynasty and the creation of altars marks territory for the god who bequeaths land and promises progeny to his worshippers.

For the writers of the Hebrew Bible, then, women appear defined by their relationship to birth, (male) progeny and men. That the biblical writers constrain female vision to these issues suggests women are characterized by their assumed reproductive body and what they can provide for men. Athalya Brenner recognizes this very characterization in the gender descriptors זכר ('male') and נקבה ('female'). She argues that since the former resembles the verb 'to remember' (זכר) while the latter is the feminine form of נקב ('cavity'), men are 'carrier[s] of memory', 'social agent[s]', while women exist to be 'penetrated' and 'receptive'.<sup>126</sup> In Brenner's view, a man, for the biblical writers, is 'gendered', while a woman is 'sexed' in so far as her social role is equated with her biological functions.<sup>127</sup> Brenner's use of 'sexed' here is to highlight the socially enforced nature of what 'woman' is and does; she does not employ the term to distinguish between so-called 'biological' sex and social gender. She stresses how women's identities are connected, for the male biblical writers, with their presumed anatomy; she demonstrates that men's bodies and presumed anatomy carry a social relevancy that women's do not. Marc Brettler, on the other hand, makes much of the distinction between sex and gender (where זכר/נקבה is biological and איש/אשה social),<sup>128</sup> though he must concede that איש/אשה are also used in relation

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<sup>126</sup> Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 12.

<sup>127</sup> Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 12.

<sup>128</sup> Marc Brettler, 'Happy is the Man Who Fills his Quiver with Them (Ps. 127:5): Constructions of Masculinities in the Psalms', *Being a Man: Negotiating Ancient Constructs of Masculinity*, ed. Ilona Zsolnay (London; New York: Routledge, 2017), 198-220: 198-203.

to sex and that there may indeed be ‘some overlap between gender and sex terms’.<sup>129</sup> He argues that there are no cases, as far as he can see, where זכר and נקבה operate as gender terms rather than sex ones.<sup>130</sup> A substantive challenge to this viewpoint is found in the Flood narrative in Genesis 7; in Genesis 7.2 Yahweh commands Noah to take pairs of animals (בהמה) into the ark, described as איש ואשתו (‘the male and its mate’, NRSV), while in vv. 8-9, זכר and נקבה are used in the same commandment for the animals to pair off. It becomes difficult to maintain that זכר ונקבה are sexed while איש ואשה are gendered when the redactor has put together the terms with the implication that they were broadly regarded as synonymous. These pairings, whether described as זכר ונקבה or איש ואשה, are described in Genesis 8.19 as ‘families’ (משפחה), again blurring the distinction between biological and social categories.

Regarding male identity, David Clines has written about what it means to be a man in the David narratives of the Hebrew Bible,<sup>131</sup> although the themes he identifies (valour, persuasiveness, beauty, intermale relationships and womanlessness) can be observed elsewhere in the biblical texts. For instance, Yahweh is called a ‘man of war’ (Ex. 15.3), ‘strong and mighty in battle’ (Ps. 24.8). In reference to the divine beauty, the Psalmist asks to ‘gaze upon Yahweh’s pleasantness (נעם)’ (Ps. 27.4) and the prophet Isaiah tells the righteous of Zion that they will see ‘the king in his beauty (יפה)’ (33.17). When Moses asks to see the glory of Yahweh, the deity promises that he will pass ‘all [his] beauty (טוב)’ before him (Ex. 33.19). In terms of intermale relationships, Theodore Jennings’s work, in which he examines the homoeroticism present in the

<sup>129</sup> Brettler, ‘Happy is the Man’, 201.

<sup>130</sup> Brettler, ‘Happy is the Man’, 199.

<sup>131</sup> David Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT Supplement Series 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 212-241.

sagas of the Hebrew Bible,<sup>132</sup> is exemplary in this area. Regardless of the homoerotic content of the relationship between the deity and human men, Jennings's work shows just how pervasively men are positioned at the centre of Yahweh's gaze. Although Clines does not understand homoeroticism as a necessary part of the 'bonding male', that homoeroticism may indeed be a component of the relationship between Yahweh and human men would only serve to underscore the importance men play in the deity's desire for Israel's flourishing.

The persuasiveness of Yahweh's speech is exemplified in the notion of divine wisdom. In texts where נבון is used (as it is used of David in 1 Sam. 16.18 to describe his eloquent tongue), one often finds the concept of wisdom in attendance. For example, Joseph is called both נבון and חכם ('wise, skilful') in Genesis 41 (vv. 31, 39) while the Proverb writers variously link the heart and lips of ones possessing נבון with wisdom (הכמה) and knowledge (דעת) (10.13; 14.33; 15.14; 16.21; 17.28; 18.15). The culmination of what divine wisdom signifies for the writers of Proverbs is found in Proverbs 8-9; Lady Wisdom speaks 'noble' and 'upright' things (8.6), her mouth is full of truth (8.7), her words plain to those with understanding (8.9) and all are encouraged to listen to her teaching (8.10-11). Interestingly, her words are aimed at men (אישים), the sons of Adam (בני אדם), rather than at humankind more generally (8.4), and it is through her that kings (מלכים), rulers (רוזנים), princes (שרים) and judges (שפטים) rule and uphold order (8.15-16). Wisdom's part in the sustenance of masculine rule is directly contrasted with the 'harlot' (זונה) of Proverbs 7 whose own 'smooth talking' entices men away from righteousness; she is like the woman of Proverbs 5 with whom men bereft of wise instruction go astray (v. 23). Clines associates Proverbs 7 and the image of the immoral woman with the masculine trait of womanlessness for, in his

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<sup>132</sup> Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*, iv.

estimation, every woman is dangerous to men insofar as they all have the potential to be the foolish woman of Proverbs 5 and 7.<sup>133</sup> Thus, to put it simply, woman in herself is a threat to male hegemony. This can be read as one of the meanings behind Proverbs 8-9; Yahweh, whose words encourage men to wisdom, seeks to bring men to the love of heaven-born, female-personified sagacity instead of ‘twilight-dwelling’ and ‘corner-lurking’ women (Prov. 7.9, 12). Wisdom lets men be men to and for other men in the upkeep of male order.

Harry A. Hoffner identifies two other traits of masculinity in the biblical texts more generally: those of military prowess and the ability to sire offspring.<sup>134</sup> I have previously argued that these two components are indexed by Yahweh’s glory (כבוד);<sup>135</sup> the former in that its manifestation expresses the divine purpose to conquer peoples and seize land, and the latter because it renegotiates the biblical understanding of sonship. Yahweh’s glory encourages Israelite growth, makes the land fertile and its presence in others permits Yahweh to remember (זכר), ‘to male, virilize’, them.<sup>136</sup>

What Clines provides here can be compared to the Butlerian stage on which gender works to give stability to identity in that adherence to these qualities stabilizes one’s position as זכר or איש. As an example, failing to demonstrate one’s status as a good warrior results in demasculization,<sup>137</sup> a disruption to stable male identity. While women exist for men as houses for their future progeny, men do not likewise exist in a similar

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<sup>133</sup> Clines, *Interested Parties*, 226.

<sup>134</sup> Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., ‘Symbols for Masculinity and Femininity: Their Use in Ancient Near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Ritual’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 (1966), 326-334.

<sup>135</sup> Alan Hooker, “Show Me Your Glory”: The Kabod of Yahweh as Phallic Manifestation?, *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 62, ed. Ovidiu Creanga and Peter-Ben Smit (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 17-34.

<sup>136</sup> Hooker, “Show Me Your Glory”, 24, 29-30.

<sup>137</sup> Claudia D. Bergmann, “We Have Seen the Enemy, and He is Only a ‘She’”: The Portrayal of Warriors as Women’, *Writing and Reading War: Rhetoric, Gender, and Ethics in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, Symposium 42, ed. Brad E. Kelle and Frank Ritche Ames (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 129-142: 134-140.

capacity for women; as such, women, unlike men, can be seen to be constrained by their anatomy in a way that men are not. Despite this, the discourses surrounding the penis in the Hebrew Bible imply that the traits and behaviours men should embody are phallic in nature. In particular, the attributes of valour, persuasiveness and beauty that Clines identifies are connected in the Hebrew Bible or a broader West Asian milieu to the penis. In an ancient West Asian rhetoric that connects war and rape,<sup>138</sup> valour demonstrates itself to be phallic; speech and persuasiveness are, as discussed later, phallicized in Ezekiel 16 where Yahweh's sexuality and his word are so interrelated with one another that the word becomes the means of Yahweh's sexual vengeance against a female-coded Israel. Phallic beauty, again examined in a subsequent chapter, is found in circumcision imagery and brings with it the implication that one's phallic form directly contributes to how one is perceived.

Patriarchal ideology, which values men more than women, imparts tremendous value to the penis as the ma(r)ker of the male gender. Not all penises are created equal, however, as there exist culturally preferred and promoted representations of it; in the Hebrew Bible, for example, that representation includes circumcision. This idealized penis does serve as a sign of gendered difference insofar as it communicates what masculinity ought to entail, though possession of a penis in no way guarantees the stability of male identity. The idealized penis separates those who have penises from each other, bringing them closer to or casting them away from the masculinity it represents and the power that attends that masculinity. Since gender is often perceptual, the relationship between masculinity and the idealized penis means that those displaying the traits of hegemonic masculinity, that is, the masculinity that is

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<sup>138</sup> Harold C. Washington, "'Lest He Die in the Battle and Another Man Take Her': Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Laws of Deuteronomy 20-22", *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 185-213: 194-198.

culturally promoted and approved, may be understood as phallic regardless of whether they possess a penis or not. This is not to say however that this phallicism would remain uncontested, just that phallicized persons or objects are understood to encroach upon the masculine domain. The very presence of contestation demonstrates that there has been an impingement upon the phallic sphere since there is recognition that it poses a threat to the order structured by the phallus.

In this thesis, the term phallic therefore refers to that which is invested with the power foregrounded in masculinity and carries with it the associations particular to the penis.<sup>139</sup> The phallus itself is a symbol in which these meanings and connotations culminate and to enquire about the phallic nature of Yahweh is to ask whether he does his body in accordance with phallic ideals. While phallicized subjects need not have a penis, and while nonphallic subjects may possess one, my argument is that for divine male subjects, to be phallic is to possess a gendered plenitude; in other words, they are permitted (or perhaps required) to possess features and attributes considered proper to the masculine and feminine domains *without* it negatively affecting their masculinity; in fact, I intend to explore whether their participation in feminine-coded domains may even bolster their masculinity. I would further suggest that this gendered plenitude correlates with the extensible materiality characterizing divinity in that such materiality has space for divinity to possess this plenitude in a single body.

### **Text Selection and Interpretation**

Nonbiblical mythological literature from ancient West Asia employs sexual imagery for their deities with relatively little unease: Ugaritic El has a penis 'as long as the sea',<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> David Buchbinder, *Studying Men and Masculinities* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 74-76.

<sup>140</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit* (London; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2006), 330.

the Egyptian creator god Atum masturbates air and moisture into being,<sup>141</sup> while Sumerian Enki ‘lifts his penis, ejaculates’ and fills the Tigris river.<sup>142</sup> According to Smith, comparable views of the divine are not found in the Hebrew Bible: ‘the Bible, rarely, if ever, describes divine sexual relations or genitalia’, perhaps through the deliberate omission of ‘older, more sexually explicit descriptions’ of the deity.<sup>143</sup> In his estimation, the priestly tradition(s) played a part in some of this censorship due to an understanding that divine holiness involved a ‘separation from death and sex’, such views coming to the fore in priestly prohibitions concerning sexual contact and contact with the dead.<sup>144</sup>

In Smith’s view, those who would see such sexuality imputed to Yahweh rely on eisegesis and wooden understandings of gender in the ancient world.<sup>145</sup> As noted above, he takes issue with Moore and Eilberg-Schwartz and questions whether the homoeroticism Eilberg-Schwartz identifies in the Hebrew Bible ‘belong to the text or to this author’.<sup>146</sup> This invocation of eisegesis by Smith leads to the issue of interpretation itself. Smith’s own methodology recognizes that ‘any analysis stands at a great remove from the actual religious situations’,<sup>147</sup> acknowledging that the interpreter is a product of their own traditions and continually at risk of creating meaning in their own image.<sup>148</sup> He cautions against generalization and notes that due to the paucity of historical data available, a ‘sense of historical fragility’ haunts our endeavours at interpretation.<sup>149</sup> Perhaps Smith’s problem with Eilberg-Schwartz’s work, therefore, is that Eilberg-

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<sup>141</sup> James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, Writings from the Ancient World 38 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 168.

<sup>142</sup> Samuel Noah Kramer, *From the Poetry of Sumer: Creation, Glorification, Adoration* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California, 1979), 47 n. 34.

<sup>143</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 92-93.

<sup>144</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 96-97.

<sup>145</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 91.

<sup>146</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 248 n. 50.

<sup>147</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 18.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 19.

<sup>149</sup> Smith, *Biblical Monotheism*, 18-19.

Schwartz's so-called heavy-handedness does not, in his opinion, respect the fragility of the historical situation in which the texts find themselves and that he has made the texts bear more than they can handle, hence the accusation of eisegesis.

J. G. Williams, however, questions the validity of this dichotomy between exegesis and eisegesis. He writes that 'the question is not exegesis or eisegesis, but rather what is revealed to and about the interpreter in the interpretation'<sup>150</sup> since each person brings 'a whole pile of intellectual and emotional baggage' with them to the text.<sup>151</sup> Under this supposition, Smith's strict division between interpreter and text cannot be upheld—the two cannot be separated so easily. The homoeroticism and complex issues surrounding masculinity that Eilberg-Schwartz sees within the biblical texts is related to who Eilberg-Schwartz is as a person and this, Williams would contend, cannot be detached from how he operates as an interpreter. In fact, Eilberg-Schwartz preempts arguments like Smith's in the introduction to *God's Phallus*, writing that his interpretation relates to the 'ongoing concerns of [his] life' and therefore there will 'undoubtedly be those who will dismiss this book as a projection of [his] own struggles'.<sup>152</sup> Similarly, Stephen Moore opens *God's Gym* acknowledging that it is an 'intensely personal book', relating to issues that have 'shadowed' him since childhood.<sup>153</sup>

In this sense, my own methodology parallels that of both Eilberg-Schwartz and Moore; the issues I address in this thesis, those of Yahweh's sexual and gendered body, and the interpretations I offer concerning them reflect the history of, and questions I have about, my own queer body. For example, am I consigned to maleness because of my

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<sup>150</sup> J. G. Williams, 'Exegesis—Eisegesis: Is There a Difference?', *Theology Today* 30.3 (1973), 218-227: 227.

<sup>151</sup> Williams, 'Exegesis—Eisegesis', 222.

<sup>152</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 10.

<sup>153</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, xi.

genitals? Is there a possibility of gendered life for those of us who understand ourselves as neither male nor female? Are the otherwise gendered created *ad imaginem Dei*? What does it mean to be gendered at all? Like Eilberg-Schwartz, however, one does not have to view this self-investment as a hindrance to analysis; in refusing the exegesis-versus-eisegesis model of interpretation, the interpreter may utilize their own experiences in uncovering in the text what others have perhaps left unturned.

I do not understand my task in this thesis as strictly argumentative; that is to say, in the words of Paul Ricoeur, I am not championing ‘one opinion over another’ or forcing the text to ‘signify one thing rather than another’.<sup>154</sup> The task instead is to allow the text to ‘signify as much as it *can*’.<sup>155</sup> In other words, to examine what is possible and how this possibility functions within the world of the text. The validity of these possible readings, or the field of what is possible, is not limited by the intentions of the biblical writer, for to impose such a limit denies the genealogy of language; namely, that language has a past and a future. Just as readers bring themselves to bear on the text, language also has a history (and a potential future) that accompanies and affects it.

In English, for example, one may use the word ‘mankind’ and though intending no exclusion of women, the very use of the word invites the question of who is included in and who can identify with the word itself. With reference to Ezekiel 16 above, Shield’s argument examines the text’s portrayal of Yahweh and in doing so asks who is identified with whom. She writes that the typical ‘masculinist’ interpretation reads in this passage a message of God’s unconditional grace in that the *male* deity, despite

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<sup>154</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Rhetorics-Poetics-Hermeneutics’, *From Metaphysics to Rhetoric*, ed. Michel Meyer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1989), 137-149: 146.

<sup>155</sup> Ricoeur, ‘Rhetorics-Poetics-Hermeneutics’, 146.

*female* Israel's waywardness, chooses to take her back into his embrace one more.<sup>156</sup> Feminist analysis, however, notes the gendered disparity between the images of Yahweh and Israel and brings the violent misogynistic rhetoric of Ezekiel 16 to the fore. Regarding the text's meaning, therefore, is it relevant whether Ezekiel *intends* to present Yahweh as a vehement woman-hater?

While many arguments about what constitutes meaning vacillate between whether the author's intention (*intention auctoris*) or the reader's intention (*intention lectoris*) is decisive, Umberto Eco introduces the *intention operis*, the intention of the work or text itself. 'To recognize *the intentio operis*,' he writes, 'is to recognize a semiotic strategy',<sup>157</sup> which often begins with the identification of stylistic conventions within the text. Eco gives the example of 'once upon a time', a phrase which traditionally signals the beginning of a fairy tale.<sup>158</sup> A biblical example might be, 'and Yahweh's word came to me', a refrain frequently found in prophetic literature and at the beginning of prophetic utterances. In both cases, these textual clues furnish the interpreter with an economical method and set of boundaries in which to read the text.

Eco states that the *intention operis* is hypothesized by the reader and that the reader's initiative lies in this very hypothesizing about the *intentio operis*; what occurs in these hypotheses is also the creation, shifting, questioning or reinscription of textual boundaries. In other words, the *meaning* of a text cannot be conceived as a single point, but the text can be regarded as bounded area in which movement and *meanings* can occur. For this reason, Eco argues that while it may not be possible to identify criteria by which one can ascertain the best reading of a text, it is possible to

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<sup>156</sup> Shields, 'Body Rhetoric', 6.

<sup>157</sup> Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992), 64.

<sup>158</sup> Eco, *Interpretation*, 65.

detect bad ones,<sup>159</sup> those that lie far outside the boundaries. This is not to say that the boundaries of a text are fixed (for example, the discoveries at Ras Shamra widened the boundaries of how the biblical texts could be interpreted), but there are interpretations that can be recognized for the most part as anomalous.

Ultimately, establishing a plausible context (historical period, genre, topic, audience, and so on) allows the reader to explore the meaning of the text in a set of limits with the least resistance against the text itself. Returning to the above question about Ezekiel 16, one can see that the feminist interpretation offered by Shields is indeed an economic reading of the text. It is both interesting *and* deepens our understanding of how the text functions; her conclusions work within the text's genre (it is a prophetic text of judgement), its motifs (it draws on a common prophetic image of Yahweh and Israel as lovers) and reveals the relationship between the picture of Yahweh presented and the text's audience (elite Israelite men). Regardless of the message Ezekiel *intends* to convey about Yahweh, the text is there (to borrow Eco's phrase).

In the first part of this study, I examine divine penises appearing in other ancient West Asian literature (Sumerian, Ugaritic and Egyptian) to set a relevant context for the aims of this thesis, since, as stated earlier, one might presume Yahweh to have masculine-coded genitals (that is, penis and testicles) given the strong masculocentrism of the Hebrew Bible. The second half looks at biblical texts which display a phallic logic; that is, texts in which the language used relies on, assumes or needs the penis (or the idea of the penis) to function. I have chosen to focus on Genesis 1-3 (and the relationship between knowledge, sexuality and gender), the figure of the זונה ('harlot') in the prophetic texts as a site which questions and defines Yahweh and his relationship to

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<sup>159</sup> Eco, *Interpretation*, 52.

gender and sexuality, Yahweh's and Ezekiel's relationship in Ezekiel 36-37 where Ezekiel's body is, I argue, rendered wombed, and Yahweh's supermaterial Temple manifestation in Isaiah 6.1-7, the text in which Eslinger claimed the prophet catches a glimpse of the deity's genitals. The final chapter will look at 'other phallic spaces', texts concerning urination, circumcision, loins and the divine womb since they are issues which concern penises or phallic logic, but which are not necessarily, like the other texts, founded in the prophetic imagery of a male Yahweh in relationship with a female Israel.

## DIVINE SEXUALITY AT SUMER

Among the gods of the Sumerian pantheon, Enlil and Enki deserve special attention since both are presented as genitaled and both, like Yahweh, receive the epithet 'Father'. Moreover, they are the creators of heaven and earth (including humankind) and live near the heavenly/chaotic waters as Yahweh himself does.<sup>160</sup> The myths I focus on in this chapter (*Enki and Ninhursag*, *Enki and Ninmah*, *Enki and the World Order*, *Enlil and Ninlil*)<sup>161</sup> have been chosen because they are creation myths and as such will include sexuality-based terminology associated with parenthood and begettal and therefore will provide grounds for comparison between Yahweh and other creator deities.

### Enki and Ninhursag

According to Terje Stordalen, the tale of *Enki and Ninhursag* (*ENh*) concerns 'Enki's sexual and fertilizing activity'.<sup>162</sup> It begins in the land of Dilmun, the Sumerian 'paradise',<sup>163</sup> a 'pure and bright land' (*kur dilmun<sup>ki</sup> kug-ga-am<sub>3</sub>*), 'virginal' (*kur dilmun<sup>ki</sup> sikil-am<sub>3</sub>*), a land where lions do not hunt and where lambs are not captured. While it is devoid of disease, old age, unclean women, darkness and lamentation (*ENh* 20-26), a place where Enki can 'lie with' (*nu<sub>4</sub>*) his daughter and yet remain pure (*ENh* 5-10), it nonetheless lacks water, fields and irrigable trenches. Ninsikil, the goddess to whom Dilmun is given, complains to Enki and he assures her that fresh water will flow in abundance when Utu, the Sun god, enters heaven (*ENh* 40-49).

As fresh water flows into Dilmun,

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<sup>160</sup> DDD, 126; David Toshimo Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 145-53; Mary K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 101-102.

<sup>161</sup> All quotations from these Sumerian texts are taken from *ETCSL* (<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>).

<sup>162</sup> Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 144.

<sup>163</sup> J. Edward Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (New York: Oxford University, 2000), 29-30.

All alone the wise one, toward Nintur [another name for Ninhursag], the country's mother, Enki, the wise one (*ĝeštug<sub>2</sub>-ge tuku-a*), toward Nintur, the country's mother, was digging his phallus into the dykes, plunging his phallus into the reed beds. (lines 63-66).

As in Genesis, action follows promise (*Wortbericht/Tatberich*), and lines 63-66 detail the sexual enactment of Enki's promise to Ninsikil. The text continues:

The august one [Ninhursag] pulled his [Enki's] phallus aside and cried out: 'No man take me in the marsh.'

Enki cried out: 'By the life's breath of heaven I adjure you. Lie down for me in the marsh, lie down for me in the marsh, that would be joyous.' Enki distributed his semen destined for Damgalnuna. He poured semen into Ninhursag's womb and she conceived the semen in the womb, the semen of Enki. (lines 67-74).

The result of the sexual union<sup>164</sup> between Enki and Ninhursag is the goddess Ninnisig, 'Lady Verdure'. The production of grain from the influx of water into Dilmun's great basins (*ENh* 50-62) is therefore mirrored by Enki's sexual activity: Utu enters (*gub*) heaven and water flows into the city, while Enki 'enters' Ninhursag and has a daughter whose name signifies the emergence of vegetation. The verb used of the Sun god's

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<sup>164</sup> Depending on how one chooses to translate Ninhursag's statement ('No man take me in the marsh'), this could be a case of rape and a demonstration of Enki's violently imposed masculinity.

entry (*gub*) into heaven is used later in the narrative (*ENh* 97) in a euphemistic sense to describe Enki letting his 'feet' stand (*gub*) in Ninnisig's 'boat'.<sup>165</sup>

Agriculture and sexuality are closely related in this myth and the verb *a dug<sub>4</sub>*, used to describe Enki directing his semen into the goddess's womb, is a phrase that also denotes irrigation (where *a* signifies both semen and water). If the birth of Ninnisig in the world of the text is correlated with the appearance of greenery in Dilmun,<sup>166</sup> then the birth of other goddesses punctuating the narrative indicates the agricultural development of the city.

Each of these goddesses are daughters of Enki and are the product of an incestuous sexual union between Enki and his previous daughter. Ninnisig, Ninkur ('Lady Loom/Mountain') and in some traditions Ninimma ('Lady Vulva') are all objects of their father's sexual gaze in the *ambar* ('reed bed'). After conception, after Enki 'pours his semen' (*a ri*, lit. 'imposes water') into the goddesses' wombs, each daughter gives birth 'like the oil of abundance' to another, signifying the 'civilizing' of Dilmun and its emergence as an 'emporium' (*ENh* 48-49, 61-62), a land abundant in precious goods (*ENh* 49A-P).

Uttu ('weaver') interrupts this cycle, for although she, like her ancestresses, becomes the object of Enki's desiring gaze, unlike her foremothers, Ninhursag warns Uttu that Enki 'will set his eyes on [her]' (*ENh* 132). Although the text is fragmentary (*ENh* 133-146), it appears that Enki realizes his sexual desires (perhaps through

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<sup>165</sup> On this euphemism, see Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 33-34.

<sup>166</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 146.

rape)<sup>167</sup>; this success however has come at a (bridal?)<sup>168</sup> price, for Uttu first demands cucumbers, apples and grapes from him (*ENh* 147-151). To procure these items, Enki fills dykes, canals and furrows with his 'water' (*ENh* 152-158) that he might grow them.

Uttu, unlike the ones who have come before her, challenges Enki's position of authority by imposing *her* demands upon him. Her request for gifts of vegetation, the result of Enki's insemination of the earth, and so a sign of his fertility, places Enki's semen under the direct control of Lady Uttu. When Enki gathers the required offerings, he appears at Uttu's door in the guise of a gardener with sceptre (*gidru*) in hand. The *gidru*-sceptre is a sign of military strength and headship, as in *Enki and the World Order* where Enki's barge captain Nigir-sig wields it and in *Inana and Enki* where the 'noble *gidru*' occurs in a list alongside 'the staff and cross, the noble dress, shepherdship [and] kingship' (lines F19-20). Enki's appearance as a gardener recalls how the title is used between lovers in ancient West Asian myth, and if indeed women are meant to be 'gardens of delight, full of joy',<sup>169</sup> then the text positions Uttu as the garden Enki wishes to cultivate and seed. Here then Enki attempts to reassert his masculinity over Uttu; in this regard, one must not overlook the sexual implications of the 'sceptre' near Uttu's 'door'. Enki's masculinity is intimately connected with his sexual prowess and power over women.

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<sup>167</sup> According to the translation of C. Woods, *The Grammar of Perspective: The Sumerian Conjugation Prefixes as a System of Voice* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 173, Enki has made Uttu drunk with beer he brought along with his other gifts (though this line, line 177, is not in all manuscripts); moreover, is Uttu's cry after Enki rapes/has sex with her, 'Woe, my thighs [...] Woe, my body. Woe, my heart/womb' (line 186), the cries of one who has suffered sexual assault or as Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 22, 72, argues, the pangs of childbirth?

<sup>168</sup> Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once...: Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven: Yale University, 1987), 197-99.

<sup>169</sup> Leick, *Sex and Eroticism*, 153-154.

After Enki 'pours his semen' into Uttu, the matriarch Ninhursag removes it from her and plants it into the ground (*ENh* 187). From the semen the goddess plants, eight different types of tree grow and the text presents Enki as looking upon them from the *ambar* (*ENh* 198-201) as he does with his daughters. Enki's gaze works to effect order for when he sees the plants, he says, 'I have not determined their destiny', an act through which he may know their hearts/wombs (*šag*<sub>4</sub>). Enki's sexual relationship with his daughters into whose wombs he 'pours' his semen correlates here with how the text speaks of providing the plants (also, like his daughters, his 'seed') with a destiny. Since the concept of destiny in ancient Mesopotamia (Sum. *nam*, Akk. *šimtu*) refers to the ordering of chaos, bringing sense to disarray and the establishment of hierarchy,<sup>170</sup> Enki's insemination of his daughters is an act of destiny, as it signals the flourishing and civilizing of Dilmun; Enki has sought to put everything in its 'proper' place; not only does his incestuous relationships with his daughters mean that all creation ultimately derives from his semen but it also reveals there to be no other male who may challenge Enki's masculine order.

Since another goddess, in this case Ninhursag, has taken control of Enki's semen, in order to reassert himself, Enki purposes to eat the plants that Ninhursag has grown from his seed. Keith Dickson writes that the narrator here 'switches from a sexual to culinary code'<sup>171</sup> as Enki consumes his eight daughter-plants (*ENh* 202-218), though this culinary code is not completely other to the sexual one, but rather acts to support it; Enki's eating is to the plants, as his sexuality is to his daughters. This act seemingly enrages Ninhursag who in response curses Enki and defies never to look upon him with her 'life-giving eye' again (*ENh* 220-221). The consumption of the plants

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<sup>170</sup> Jack N. Lawson, *The Concept of Fate in Ancient Mesopotamia of the First Millennium: Toward an Understanding of Šimtu* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1994), 19-22.

<sup>171</sup> K. Dickson, 'Enki and the Embodied World', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 125.4 (2005), 499-515: 500.

renders Enki ill, however, but the pain is ultimately cured by Ninhursag who makes Enki sit by/in her vagina while she gives birth to various other goddess to whom *she* allots destinies (*ENh* 254-271) and whose names reflect the parts of Enki's body to be healed. Despite the tension between Enki and the goddess (a theme repeated in *Enlil and Ninmah*), Enki's position as male authority is ultimately reaffirmed at the end of the text with praise to 'Father Enki' (*ENh* 281).

Enki's penis (*ĝiš*) appears by name only a handful of times in *Enki and Ninhursag*, but plays a decisive role. In lines 63-126, it operates as an instrument of agricultural fertility (with semen equated to life-giving water) and links back to the influx of water into Dilmun's great basins, a sign of the city's development and the creatively cosmic dimensions of Enki's penis. In lines 152-158, when he uses it to grow vegetables for the goddess Uttu, it serves as another reminder of its agricultural function and recalls its earlier use in the civilization of Dilmun. Moreover, Enki's consumption of the daughter-plants in lines 198-219 is a phallicized action in so far as his eating is sexually encoded.<sup>172</sup> Ultimately, Enki's penis is a focal point of the myth, both when it is affirmed and when it is challenged, for whenever it is challenged, Enki redisplay and reuses his penis to rectify the situation, thus bringing again to the forefront of the text.

The first time the divine penis appears is when Enki, 'Possessor of Wisdom' (*ĝeštug<sub>2</sub>-ge tuku-a*), slips and plunges it into the embankment and the reeds toward Ninhursag, Mother of the Land (*ama kalam-ma-še<sub>3</sub>*). This is the only time the epithet 'Possessor of Wisdom' is used of Enki in the text and its occurrence alongside Enki's phallic display reveals the phallicization of wisdom such that to be wise is to be penis

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<sup>172</sup> Hastings Donnan and Fiona Magowan, *The Anthropology of Sex* (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2010), 51-52; K. Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex and Bible in Queer Perspective*, *Queering Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 100; J. Cherul Exum, *Song Of Songs: A Commentary*, *The Old Testament Library* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 238.

(or *vice versa*).<sup>173</sup> While Enki is wise, phallic, and creative, Ninhursag is in the very same lines construed as ‘Mother of the Land’ and identified thus with the earth, such that Enki’s active, divinely phallic nature has circumscribed her role as passive and earthly.

Enki has, at least at the beginning of the myth, phallically ordered the cosmos and consigned everything to its proper place. Enki’s incestuous behaviour during Dilmun’s development ensures that he remains progenitor *par excellence*, the perpetual ancestor (see the refrain of praise given to ‘Father Enki’ in this myth as well as *Enki’s Journey to Nibru*, *Enki and the World Order* and *Enki and Ninmah*). Enki’s penis is therefore a tool of masculine control insofar as it works to construct a gendered hierarchy with Enki at the top and the various goddess underneath him as representations of the city and land, objects which mean are responsible for building and cultivating. Part of the order which Enki imposes may be gender itself or its exposition; when Enki has sex with (or rapes, in some cases) the goddesses, he exposes their phallic lack and emphasises his uniqueness such that maleness is primal, singular and unchallenged, and femaleness, derivative, plural and subjugated.

### **Enki and Ninmah**

*Enki and Ninmah* (ENm) concerns divine creation and a dispute between Enki and the goddess Ninmah about who has the greatest control of human destiny. In this respect, it resembles *Enki and Ninhursag* in which Enki’s creative abilities are frustrated by the goddess who attempts to claim ownership of this creativity.

*Enki and Ninmah* opens with the setting familiar from *Enki and Ninhursag*:

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<sup>173</sup> There is perhaps a pun in the text between ‘wisdom’ (*ĝeš.tug*) and penis (*ĝiš<sub>3</sub>/ĝeš<sub>3</sub>*).

In those days, in the days when heaven and earth were created;  
 in those nights, in the nights when heaven and earth were  
 created; in those years, in the years when the fates were  
 determined; when the Anuna gods were born; when the  
 goddesses were taken in marriage; when the goddesses were  
 distributed in heaven and earth; when the goddesses .....  
 became pregnant and gave birth (lines 1-7)

The association between the determination of destiny and the distribution of goddesses has been noted in *Enki and Ninhursag* and here at the very beginning of the text, one can already see the gendered expectations placed upon female deities: marriage, pregnancy, birth.

In *ENm 52*, Enki and Ninmah become drunk and the goddess poses a challenge to Enki that he must find a place in society for the various types of people she will create. The goddess creates six types of human who might not conventionally fit into the world order: a man with weak hands, one with constantly opened eyes, another with broken feet, an incontinent man, a barren woman and a person with neither penis or vagina. In his wisdom, Enki is able to find a place for all these creatures (*ENm 56-82*) and in turn fashions a creature of his own to challenge Ninmah: 'I have decreed the fates of your creatures and given them their daily bread. Come, now I will fashion somebody for you and you must decree the fate of the newborn one' (*ENm 81-82*).

Enki's creation is Umul (perhaps a miscarried foetus or one yet to be born),<sup>174</sup> a creature who cannot breathe properly, who has bad eyes, damaged limbs, is afflicted

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<sup>174</sup> Marten Stol, *Birth in Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting* (Groningen: STYX, 2000), 110.

in the neck, heart and bowels and is altogether unable to stand (*ENm* 83-91). Ninmah looks at the creature and declares, 'The man you have fashioned is neither alive nor dead. He cannot support himself.' Martin Stol argues that Umul's 'defectiveness' is due to the lack of Ninmah's participation in its creation: 'he lacked what only she could contribute'.<sup>175</sup> In this reading, the heterosexual union of Enki and Ninmah is presented as the ideal method of creation. Line 131 implies that Ninmah, most likely at Enki's behest, puts Umul in her 'lap' or 'loins' (*ur<sub>2</sub>*) to assign a place to Umul; Ninmah's nurturing womb is therefore a prerequisite for good creation. Enki, writes Stol, 'cannot do it alone, the expertise of the birth goddess Ninmah is indispensable'.<sup>176</sup> Despite the supposed necessity of the goddess, Enki remains in control, for not only do his creative abilities to assign places to Ninmah's creations render the goddess silent (*ENm* 79), but he commands Ninmah in how to handle (his) semen when he asks her to 'pour ejaculated semen' into the womb of the to-be-born Umul's mother (*ENm* 85). Ninmah could not assign a place to Umul, but Enki, utilizing semen and Ninmah's 'lap', is able to make him useful in the social order; he is to build Enki's house (*ENm* 139).

In the myth's closing section, Enki declares: 'Today let my penis be praised and serve as a reminder to you (or and your [Ninmah's] wisdom be confirmed)' (*ENm* 134). Through competition between god and goddess, the text underscores the importance of the divine penis. Eva Wasilewska argues that the myth's importance lies in the fact that all creatures, even the afflicted Umul, 'are divine creation with a specific purpose in life'.<sup>177</sup> It is precisely Enki's ability to decree fates, tied in both this myth and *Enki*

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<sup>175</sup> Stol, *Birth in Babylonia*, 110.

<sup>176</sup> Stol, *Birth in Babylonia*, 109.

<sup>177</sup> Eva Wasilewska, *Creation Stories of the Middle East* (London; Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2000), 146.

and *Ninhursag*, to his penis, that allows these creatures to take on a valuable role in the cosmos.

One might argue that the text presents a positive theology of disability in that all types of creatures are able to occupy a 'useful' position in society,<sup>178</sup> yet it is more likely that their presence in the myth is a means to an end: to stress the power of Enki (compare Exod. 4.11 and Yahweh's declaration that it is he who makes people blind or deaf). If Umul is indeed Enki's offspring,<sup>179</sup> then this power is the masculine ability to direct and organize, realized in *Enki and Ninhursag* as his control over his goddess daughters. That Enki can find a place in society for a creature who is, in Ninmah's view, too afflicted to be useful, shows the strength of Enki's masculinity. The text's closing line, 'Ninmah could not rival the great Lord Enki' (*ENm* 141) confirms the superiority of Enki's creative abilities and its instruments: his penis and semen.

### **Enki and the World Order**

*Enki and the World Order* (*EWO*) is a myth in which Enki imbues fertility to the created order and intends 'to make rulers and common people alike happy, prosperous, and secure in Sumer'.<sup>180</sup> There is a strong emphasis on fecundity in *EWO* as Enki's presence encourages rainfall and increases crop growth and carp supply (*EWO* 90-93); his fecund power therefore encompasses all here cosmic levels: heaven (rainfall), earth (crop growth) and sea (carp supply). The imagery used to talk about Enki's

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<sup>178</sup> Neal H. Walls, 'The Origins of the Disabled Body', *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disability in Biblical Studies*, ed. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 13-30: 19.

<sup>179</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 28.

<sup>180</sup> Richard E. Averbeck, 'Ancient Near Eastern Mythography as It Relates to Historiography in the Hebrew Bible: Genesis 3 and the Cosmic Battle', *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions*, ed. James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2004), 328-56: 335.

fertility and goodness provide useful lenses through which to read *EWO* and Enki's presentation as a penised god.

The beginning of the text narrated Enki's own birth; he is 'engendered by a bull, begotten by a wild bull' (*gud-dam a ri-a am gal-e tud-da*), an animal with profound associations to virility and potent masculinity in ancient West Asia.<sup>181</sup> At Ugarit, El, father of the gods, is the divine *tr* ('bull') and Baal shares in this imagery as well.<sup>182</sup> Both El and Baal are sexual deities (as discussed in the section on Ugaritic mythology) and Enki's own connection to bull-imagery suggests he is too. Enki, like Ugaritic El, possess the title 'Father' (*EWO* 2) and the entire narrative is framed around this identity. It begins with Enki's paternity, and ends with his fatherhood: *a-a d'en-ki za3-mi2*, 'praise be to Father Enki' (*EWO* 472). This paternal and masculine aspect of Enki is emphasised by how he uses his words: 'You [Enki] only have to open your mouth for everything to multiply and for plenty to be established' (*EWO* 21), 'Your word [Enki] fills the young man's heart with vigour, so that like a thick-horned bull he butts about in the courtyard' (*EWO* 32-33). His word also 'bestows loveliness on the young woman's head' so that people in the cities will gaze at her (*EWO* 34-35). Enki's word is therefore organized around male sexuality: it 'invigorates' men and confers beauty on women for the express pleasure of men.

Not only is Enki's word fertile, but his mere presence is too, having the power to produce 'good seed': when he approaches the ewe, cow or goat, they produce strong offspring; when he goes near parched land, it brings forth fruit (*EWO* 52-60). Enki is the lord of abundance, growth and fertility in the world order he establishes—

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<sup>181</sup> Tallay Ornan, 'The Bull and its Two Masters: Moon and Storm Deities in Relation to the Bull in the Ancient Near Eastern Art,' *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001), 1-26: 3.

<sup>182</sup> Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 206-7.

indeed, his position as a fertile deity is what makes it possible for him to be this deity who establishes order.

Enki's presence engenders 'good seed' and he himself is described as 'the good semen, begotten by a wild bull [...] the firstborn of An' (*EWO* 68). By dint of his status as 'the good semen', he is 'the father of all the foreign lands' (*EWO* 70), affirming his sovereignty over the entirety of the created order.

Enki's penis appears explicitly for the first time in lines 250-266 in the account of how the Tigris river came to be. The section opens, '[F]ather Enki [...] lifted his eyes across the Euphrates, he stood up full of lust like a rampant bull', recalling how Enki's gaze in *Enki and Ninhursag* is aimed towards the objects of his sexual desire. Earlier in *Enki and the World Order*, Enki's gaze occurs to describe the god setting his sight on the land he is about to set in order (*EWO* 16): 'you have fixed your gaze on the heart of the land (*šag<sub>4</sub> kalam*)'. Enki's gaze, coupled with the bull imagery, confirms that he is about to engage in sexually creative acts and, sure enough, the deity 'lifts his penis, ejaculates and fills the Tigris with flowing water/semen (*a*)' (*EWO* 253-254). In lifting his penis, Enki has 'brought a bridal gift' (*EWO* 257), indicating the Tigris is 'presented as a female partner who is inseminated'.<sup>183</sup>

The coupling of Enki and the Tigris brings forth food and wine, abundantly filling the Ekur, the house of the chief deity Enlil (*EWO* 259-260). In recognition of his actions, Enki puts on 'the diadem as a sign of lordship, he put on the good crown as a sign of kinship [and] plenty came forth out of the earth for him' (*EWO* 263-266). The filling of the Ekur, the mountain dwelling of the gods, with the produce of the Tigris links the heavenly temple to Enki's ejaculation. The fertility of the deity is beneficial for both the earth, which produces crops, and the heavenly realm, which is filled with abundance.

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<sup>183</sup> Leick, *Sex and Eroticism*, 25.

William Irwin Thompson describes the earthly landscape as ‘literally awash with semen’, ‘a male landscape of irrigation technology [...] and male fertility power’.<sup>184</sup>

Order and masculinity are synonymous in this myth and Enki’s ejaculate is a visible sign of these characteristics. As Murat Aydemir writes in reference to pornographic depictions of ejaculation: ‘[i]n order to convince, masculinity must be foregrounded, produced into visibility, exposed. Thus, the cum shot may partake of the endeavour to make masculinity real: to realise or authenticate it in the eyes of the viewer’.<sup>185</sup> Enki’s ejaculation achieves just this.

In the latter half of the hymn, the goddess Inana complains that no role has yet been assigned to her in Enki’s cosmic scheme. As with the other two myths examined beforehand, there is female confrontations against Enki and a challenge to his creative abilities. Enki has ordered Inana’s goddess sisters but has not, argues Inana, assigned her any functions: ‘Enlil left it in your hands to confirm the function of the Anuna, the great gods [...] I am holy Inana – where are my functions?’ (*EWO* 391-394). Enki reminds her that he has bestowed various functions upon her: she is the woman who speaks with a pleasant voice (*EWO* 428), she is the one covered in garments of women’s power (*EWO* 432), women’s speech is in her mouth (*EWO* 433), she has the spindle and hairpin in her hands (*EWO* 434) and she possesses the staff and the crook (*EWO* 436). To remind Inana of what he has already done is not only for him to assert *his* word over the power of women’s speech that he has put into her mouth, but also in invoking his word as a reminder, it serves a similar function to the exhibition of his

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<sup>184</sup> William Irwin Thompson, *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: Mythology, Sexuality and the Origins of Culture* (New York: St Martin’s, 1996), 162.

<sup>185</sup> Murat Aydemir, “Significant Discharge”: The Cum Shot and Narrativity’, *Narrative Theory: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Mieke Bal (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 297-318: 298.

penis earlier as a reminder in *Enki and Ninmah*: to assert his masculine dominance and to affirm that the goddess is unable to rival 'Father Enki'.

Enki's sovereignty again exists in a gendered dimension: it requires the sublimation of the female into creation/ordered, so that the male can stand equated with creating/order. Indeed, when Enki finally allots Inana (or rather reminds her of) her place in the cosmic and social order, Enki rejoices: '[t]he heart has overflowed, the land (of Sumer) restored' (*EWO* 451). Averbeck interprets these lines as a reference to the reappearance of the seasonal flood, meaning 'Sumer has become prosperous through Enki's decree'.<sup>186</sup> The hymn began with Enki 'fixing his (erotic and fertile) gaze' on the heart/womb of the land and, after ordering the holy feminine, ended with the heart overflowing and the restoration of Sumer.

### **Enlil and Ninlil**

In many ways, this myth is like *Enki and Ninhursag*; lines 1-12 of *Enlil and Ninlil* (*ENn*) describe the city of Nibru, 'the religious centre of the Land',<sup>187</sup> and its rivers, quays, canals and cultivated fields, mirroring the opening sections of *Enki and Ninhursag* where the city and its agricultural needs are central to the text. Moreover, *Enlil and Ninlil* follows the same god-seeks-goddess motif found in *Enki and Ninhursag*:

- (1) The god sees the goddess by the river (*ENn* 22-34)
- (2) The god's minister takes the deity to the goddess by boat (*ENn* 35-47)
- (3) The goddess resists (*ENn* 30-34)
- (4) The god seizes the goddess and has sex with/rapes her (*ENn* 48-53)

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<sup>186</sup> Averbeck, 'Ancient Near Eastern Mythography', 769.

<sup>187</sup> Jeremy Black, Graham Cunningham, Eleanor Robson and Gábor Zólyomi, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 100.

- (5) The god pours semen into her womb (*ENn* 53)
- (6) The god impersonates various officials in order to have sex with Ninlil and 'pour [more] seed' into her womb, just as Enki impersonates the gardener to get close to Uttu in *Enki and Ninhursag* (*ENn* 65-142)
- (7) A doxology to 'Father Enlil' (*ENn* 143-154)

Ninlil's mother advises her daughter not to go to the river for 'the Great Mountain, Father Enlil' will look upon her and desire to 'pour his lusty semen' in her womb (*ENn* 21). Once again, the river is a locus of the sexual gaze and in his gazing Enlil is described as the 'shepherd who decides all destinies' (*ENn* 19), cementing the connection mentioned earlier between the sexuality of the father deity and the ordering/creation of the cosmos.

In *Enlil and Ninlil*, it is the bathing of Ninlil in the river, an activity her mother Nunbaršegunu warns her against, that, according to the text, leads the male deity to desire her. This trope, a male figure who sexually objectifies a female one by water, is prominent in these Sumerian myths: in *Enki and Ninhursag*, Enki spies Ninhursag from the *ambar*, the marshes, and later rapes her there, depositing his 'water' into her womb, while in *Enki and the Word Order*, the Tigris river is personified as Enki's wife whose heart/womb is filled with joy when he fills it/her with his water/semen. In the Hebrew Bible, the trope is found in the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11.1-27). In this narrative, David spies a beautiful woman ritually bathing and sends a messenger to find out who she is; in *Enlil and Ninlil*, Enlil's minister brings him across the river to Ninlil, while David has Bathsheba brought to him (compare Sobek's description in the Coffin Texts as 'lord of semen who takes women from their husbands

to the place [he] like[s]'.<sup>188</sup> In both cases, there is an immediate mention of the women's conceptions after they come into the presence of men (*ENn* 46-53; 2 Sam. 11.4) and the only words Bathsheba ever speaks are to confirm the efficacy of David's semen:

She came to him, and he slept with her [...] Then she went back home. The woman (Bathsheba) conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

In this biblical story, David overcomes the authority of another man, in this case Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, whom David successfully plotted to murder. Similarly, Enlil can be said to have overcome the authority of Ninlil's father, whom she invokes as a reason for not acquiescing to Enlil's sexual advances (*ENn* 33). Furthermore, Enlil's title 'Father Enlil' (*ENn* 18, 26, 154) discloses his position as chief deity and patriarchy and thus his authority as Father Enlil, the Great Mountain, usurps that of Ninlil's father who is never mentioned in the text by name. This usurpation is emphasized further by Ninlil's constant return to Enlil. Each time Enlil has sex with (or rapes) the goddess, he leaves and Ninlil 'chases' after him (*ENn* 64, 92, 118). As in *Enki and Ninhursag*, the goddess first refuses sex with the god, but in *Enlil and Ninlil*, the goddess's words change from refusal and rejection to longing as all subsequent speech on her parts concerns the whereabouts of Enlil, a sign that Enlil has overcome.

Each time Enlil 'pours his semen' into Ninlil's womb, it is seed that will result in deities responsible for the created order more generally and Mesopotamian city life more particularly<sup>189</sup>: the moon deity Suen, Nergal (god of the underworld and vegetation), Ninazu, 'the king who stretches measuring lines over fields' (*ENn* 116), and Enbilulu, 'the inspector of canals' (*ENn* 142). In the story of David and Bathsheba,

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<sup>188</sup> Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 64.

<sup>189</sup> Dale Launderville, *Celibacy in the Ancient World: Its Ideal and Practice in Pre-Hellenistic Israel, Mesopotamia, and Greece* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 29.

the child born to the couple, Solomon, later builds the temple, a material representation of heaven on earth (1 Kgs 6.1-38). Roland Boer, due to the temple measurements given in Chronicles, calls it 'a phallic tower [...] like some angular cock raised to the heavens',<sup>190</sup> while Julie Galambush understands the temple as akin to the womb,<sup>191</sup> established upon flowing, life-giving waters (Ezek. 47.1-12) like the cities of Nibru and Dilmun in the above-mentioned myths and, therefore, like them as well, a divine centre of fertility. As with Solomon, who builds the order-generating, chaos-defeating temple, Ninlil's children are responsible for the maintenance of the created agricultural order. Enlil, who is banished from the Kiur, part of the god's heavenly dwelling place, by the fifty great gods earlier in the text (*ENn* 54-64) for improper relations with Ninlil, is now at the end of the myth lauded as king and the 'lord who makes flax grow [...] who makes barley grow [...] lord of earth, lord plenty, lord of heaven' (*ENn* 143-154).

## Conclusion

In the texts examined above, the divine penis is comparable in important ways to the temple: both order creation, both are life-giving, both representation agricultural fertility (the temple is the heavenly garden, for example) and both link heaven to earth. In its ordering of creation, the divine penis divinizes masculinity and establishes patriarchal, phallic rule and the bodies of the goddesses become identifies with the earth and its produce in need of the fertilizing capability of the male deities. Integral to the triumph of masculinity, or indeed what masculinity consists in, is the subjugation of the feminine. In the texts which concern creation, this subjugation cannot be taken from granted by must be demonstrated by the male deities to show their active power. The

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<sup>190</sup> Roland Boer, 'Of Fine Wine, Incense and Spices: The Unstable Masculine Hegemony of the Books of Chronicles', *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* 4.1 (2010), 19-31: 23.

<sup>191</sup> Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, SBLDS 130 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 87.

divine penis, the phallus, is the apogee of male divinity within these Sumerian myths and femininity is constructed in relation to it.

The divine penis's connection to speech is also evident: in *Enki and Ninhursag*, Ninhursag vocalizes her opposition to Enki, yet he 'seizes' her anyway. For the writer of *Enki and the World Order*, the god's word invigorates young men, making them like fertile bulls; this word also brings fertility ('When I approach the green meadows, at my word stockpiles and stacks are accumulated', *EWO* 92-93) and puts 'vivifying' words in the goddesses' mouths (*EWO* 438).

Alongside 2 Samuel 11.1-27 in the biblical texts, Isaiah 47.1-15 is another example of similar motifs in the Hebrew Bible. Isaiah 47 is a condemnation of the Virgin Daughter Babylon (בתולת בת-בבל) by the prophet; as in the Sumerian texts, Isaiah utilizes water imagery as the Virgin Daughter is commanded to 'take off [her] veil, strip off [her] skirt, uncover [her] legs and wade through the rivers' to 'expose' her nakedness and shame (vv. 2-3). Both Isaiah and the Sumerian texts associate this trope with passive female sexuality and this is especially evident in *Enki and Ninhursag*, for even though Ninhursag actively dissuades Enki by 'pushing his phallus aside' and shouting out, the god ignores her and vocalizes his own cry: 'By the life's breath of heaven I adjure you. Lie down for me in the marsh [...] that would be joyous' (*ENh* 69-71). He usurps her power of speech and ultimately affirms his precedent in phallogocentric discourse when he rapes her, conflating the male word and the erect penis.

Isaiah 47 employs a similar silencing tactic: the prophet commands Babylon to 'sit silently and go into darkness' (v. 5), while in vv. 7-8 there is juxtaposition between Daughter Babylon's words ('you said...') and what Yahweh says ('now, therefore, listen to this...'). In the final analysis, for both the Sumerian and biblical texts, the word

of the masculine deity overcomes and renders silent the female body, such that the male speaks for the female and not she for herself. Moreover, the repeated exhibition of the divine penis recalls Freud who argues that the urge to exhibit is a 'means of constantly insisting upon the integrity of the subject's own (male) genitalia and it reiterates his infantile satisfaction at the absence of a penis in those of women'.<sup>192</sup> In other words, exhibition reveals the performativity of the penis insofar as it is produced as a coherent object (alongside the maleness it signifies) through the affirmation that comes from its revelation to the wider community. The effect for those without penises, understood in these texts as women, is that it forces them to be identified with their lack in relation to the visibility of men thereby rendering them, essentially, invisible. The divine penis, the phallus, inaugurates the site of gender and privileges men who conform to the phallic expectations brought to bear upon them. For this reason, men without penises or those whose penises are challenged (such as Enki) are degendered and their masculinity questioned. As such, it is incumbent upon male figures such as Enki to reassert themselves and their penis-bearing bodies to prove themselves worthy of the phallus and what it represents.

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<sup>192</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2005), 300 n. 3.

## DIVINE SEXUALITY AT UGARIT

### Introduction

Divine sex is explicitly part of various Ugaritic mythologies.<sup>193</sup> The god Baal, for example, engages in sexual intercourse with a heifer (KTU 1.5 v 18-22) and the high deity El has sex with two women/goddesses in KTU 1.23.<sup>194</sup> The use of familial language among the inhabitants of the divine realm also implies the sexual nature of the heavenly realm: El is *'ab bn 'il* ('father of the divine sons') and his wife, Athirat, is *qnyt 'ilm* ('creatrix of the gods').<sup>195</sup> El himself also has the title *qny* ('progenitor'): he is *qny w'adn 'ilm* ('progenitor and lord of the gods'),<sup>196</sup> *qnyn* ('our creator')<sup>197</sup> and his children are the 'divine sons' (*bn 'ilm*).

One could argue that the use of familial title is not in itself an indication of sexuality as El is named *'ab 'adm* ('father/ancestor of humanity'), yet there is no extant Ugaritic myth in which human beings *in toto* are the biological offspring of the high god. It is likely that there is not a homogenous understanding of creation/begetting in the Ugaritic texts. For one, Athirat is the creatrix of the gods, but she is nowhere connected to the creation of humankind.<sup>198</sup> Marvin H. Pope argues that El is the father of humanity as far as he, like Yahweh of the Hebrew Bible, grants or withholds fertility.<sup>199</sup> In other words, humankind's creation is effected solely by El in a manner

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<sup>193</sup> Mark S. Smith, *Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University, 2001), 175.

<sup>194</sup> Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2002), 203.

<sup>195</sup> Aichi Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Alphabetic Texts*, trans. J. N. Ford (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 276. See also David Bokovoy, 'Did Eve Acquire, Create, or Procreate with Yahweh? A Grammatical and Contextual Reassessment of קנה in Genesis 4:1', *VT* 63 (2013): 19-35 for a discussion about the Semitic root *qnh* in terms of procreation.

<sup>196</sup> Bokovoy, 'Did Eve Acquire, Create, or Procreate with Yahweh?', 23.

<sup>197</sup> Bob Becking and Marjo C. A. Korpel, 'To Create, To Separate or To Construct: An Alternative for a Recent Proposal as to the Interpretation of ברא in Genesis 1:1-2:4a', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 10, article 3 (2010), 1-21: 15 n. 54.

<sup>198</sup> Steve A. Wiggins, *A Reassessment of Asherah: With Further Considerations of the Goddess*, *Gorgias Ugaritic Studies* 2 (New Jersey: Gorgias, 2007), 232.

<sup>199</sup> Marvin H. Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 47.

which does not require copulation with another deity, but which still relies on the idea of a fertile deity.

The text which will form the basis of this chapter's analysis is KTU 1.23, generally known as the 'Birth of the Goodly (or Beautiful) Gods'. This text contains explicit references to divine sex and genitalia and moreover the interwoven themes of life and death throughout, bound up with fertility, make it an ideal analytic focus.

There is debate as to the genre of KTU 1.23; given the unambiguous presence of sexuality activity in this myth, it is tempting to place it within the context of so-called sacred marriage (*hieros gamos*). Nicolas Wyatt, for example, argues that KTU 1.23 describes the marriage between El and the goddesses Athirat and Rahmay (two hypostases of the sun goddess Shapshu),<sup>200</sup> while Johannes C. de Moor contends that it narrates a New Year festival in which the king and queen play the roles of El and his consort Athirat respectively.<sup>201</sup> On the other hand, Mark Smith believes that this focus on sex obfuscates the 'larger theme' of the feast for the Goodly Gods at the end of the text (lines 70-76).<sup>202</sup> Smith's critique rests on the idea that sexual activity in the myth plays a 'relatively subordinate role' to that of the feast.<sup>203</sup>

However, rather than attempt to assess which theme has more weight in the text, I take the approach of Ken Stone who argues that food and sex are 'good to think' one another.<sup>204</sup> In other parts of the Ugaritic corpus, after all, food and sex are connected to one another: the goddess Anat, for instance, demands Aqhat's bow, an

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<sup>200</sup> RTU, 324; Nicolas Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge 2005), 197.

<sup>201</sup> ARTU, 117-8; see also Hennie J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 528.

<sup>202</sup> Mark S. Smith, *The Rituals and Myths of the Feast of the Goodly Gods of KTU/CAT 1.23: Royal Constructions of Opposition, Intersection, Integration, and Domination* (Atlanta: SBL, 2006), 127.

<sup>203</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 127.

<sup>204</sup> Ken Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex, and Bible in Queer Perspective*, *Queering Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 3.

object laden with sexual and masculine attributes, during a feast of the gods (KTU 1.17),<sup>205</sup> and in KTU 1.23.35-39 El prepares food to sexually entice the two female figures. The juxtaposition of hunger and satisfaction in the text (speaking to the relationship between food and sexuality) is part of the larger theme of the tensions between life and death in KTU 1.23.

Lines 8-9 mentions the staff(s) of sterility and widowhood, while in line 37 El uses his own 'staff' to have sex with the young women of the myth.

<sup>8</sup> <i>mt wšr yṭb</i>	Mt-w-Šr is enthroned,
<i>bdh ḥṭ tkl</i>	in his hand the staff of bereavement,
<sup>8-9</sup> <i>bdh/ht 'ulmn</i>	in his hand the staff of widowhood.
<sup>37</sup> <i>'il ḥṭh nḥt</i>	El became strong as to his staff,
<i>'il ymnn mṭ ydh</i>	El became firm as to the rod of his penis.

Wyatt contends that the staff of sterility and El's rod are one and the same,<sup>206</sup> demonstrating the change in state of El's penis from infecundity to fruitfulness. However, even if the staff cannot be identified with one another, the text nevertheless moves from barrenness to plenitude, signalled in the myth by the birth of the Goodly Gods who are described as 'gluttonous from birth' (KTU 1.23.58), once again cementing the link between sexuality, new life and consumption.

The dichotomies between life/death and hunger/satisfaction are also found as topographical tensions within the text. KTU 1.23.4 locates the invocation of the Goodly Gods to the feast 'in the wilderness at the end (of the world)' (*bmdbr špm*).<sup>207</sup> The

<sup>205</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, 'The Story of Aqhat', *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, ed. W. G. E. Watson and N. Wyatt (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 234-58: 236.

<sup>206</sup> RTU, 331 n. 36.

<sup>207</sup> RTU, 326; Mark Smith translates 'In the outback, on the heights...' (2006: 31).

*mdb*r is a land devoid of nourishment,<sup>208</sup> and connotes the same as the Hebrew מדבר: death, chaos and infertility.<sup>209</sup> This *mdb*r stands in contrast to the sown land at the end of KTU 1.23 (lines 68-76), a field full of wine which the gods enter after 'roam[ing] the edge of the *mdb*r' for a long time. Similarly, in line 30, the chief god El marches out to 'the shore of the sea' (*gp ym*), 'step[s] out to the shore of the abyss' (*gp thm*), perhaps to parallel the position of the invitation at the beginning of KTU 1.23. Indeed, like the *mdb*r, the *thm* (cf. Heb. תהום) is a chaotic place, though watery in nature rather than arid. The Goodly Gods narrative thus creates meaning through a series of juxtaposed dichotomies; by bringing these dichotomies together I intend to highlight how divine sexuality functions within the texts and how it plays against the feast which Mark Smith identifies as the main theme of KTU 1.23.

### **The Ritual Section**

The text of KTU 1.23 is typically viewed in two sections: a ritual one (lines 1-29) and a mythic one (lines 30-76). The ritual section is demarcated by lines on the tablet, perhaps into individual components or actions, a common feature of other ritual texts from Ugarit.<sup>210</sup> Lines 30-76, on the other hand, show no such divisions and as such are more consonant with Ugaritic narratives. Mark Smith, however, notes that ritual section is 'unlike any ritual text known at Ugarit',<sup>211</sup> thus complicating what otherwise presents itself as relatively simplistic. If the ritual section of this text is unlike any other, perhaps it is due to the way in which it is paired with the myth which follows it. This pairing offers us an insight into how the text was received by the community that used

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<sup>208</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 35.

<sup>209</sup> J. Goldingay and D. Payne, *Isaiah 40-55*, vol. 1 (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 182.

<sup>210</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 3.

<sup>211</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 4.

it and how the ritual section would have been understood and read in light of the mythic one and *vice versa*.

The start of the ritual section includes an invitation to the king, queen, priests and guards/victuallers (*tnnm*)<sup>212</sup> to enter the *mabr*. The king, representative of the urbanized city state and mediator between heaven and earth,<sup>213</sup> moves from urban order to wild chaos, disclosing the liminal nature of the ritual itself. Mimicking this move from order to chaos, lines 8-9 introduce a figure known as *mt wšr* who sits with the staff(s) of sterility and widowhood in his hand, representing the forces that deny the life-giving nature of order and the wilderness into which the ritual participants have entered. The identity of *mt wšr* is a point of contention among scholars, most of whom read *mt* as the death god Mot, where *šr* refers to his regal status.<sup>214</sup> This translation certainly makes sense in the context of *tkl* ('bereavement') and *'ulmn* ('widowhood'), yet Wyatt renders *mt wšr* as 'lord and master' and argues that the figure is not Mot, but El, who in KTU 1.23.39-42 is designated *mt* ('man', 'husband').<sup>215</sup> Moreover, the use of *šr* for El is not without precedent in the Ugaritic corpus, where one finds the title *'il šr*, 'El the Prince' (KTU 1.123).<sup>216</sup>

Another reason Wyatt gives for the identification of *mt wšr* with El is the matching terms for the staffs used of *mt wšr* and El in lines 8-9 and 37 (*ht*).<sup>217</sup> If these are the same staffs, then the text functions as a discourse about El and his penis, attempting to delineate and answer questions about how it becomes fecund, how El uses it, what issues forth from it and how it affects/effects the created, fertile order.

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<sup>212</sup> A. F. Rainey, 'The Military Personnel of Ugarit', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 24.1-2 (1965), 17-27: 22-23; Wyatt translates *tnnm* as 'temple-victuallers' (RTU, 329).

<sup>213</sup> André Calquot and Maurice Szyner, *Ugaritic Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 18.

<sup>214</sup> J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 28 n. 1.

<sup>215</sup> RTU, 326.

<sup>216</sup> Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets*, 43.

<sup>217</sup> RTU, 331 n. 37.

For Wyatt, the lines that follow this figure's description as *mt wšr* describe the ritual circumcision of El before the consummation of his marriage to the two female figures.<sup>218</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Those who pruned the vine pruned him,

<sup>10</sup> Those who bind the vine bound him,

<sup>10-11</sup> They let his tendril fall like a vine.

Similar pruning language is found in relation to circumcision in the Hebrew Bible (Lev. 19.23-25) in which the fruit of 'immature trees' is likened to foreskins. After three years, the trees are pruned/circumcised in order to increase their harvest/fertility. Wyatt's reading of lines 9-11 relies on this association in order for the pruning imagery in KTU 1.23 to imply the ritual circumcision of El which increases his fecundity in preparation for his marriage.

Though the translation of *mt* as 'death' is supported by the references to bereavement and widowhood, J. F. Healey's suggestion that this is a ritual destruction of Mot for the protection of the children to be born<sup>219</sup> does not consider that in the ritual section at least (lines 1-29), the Goodly Gods are already present from the very beginning. Furthermore, the deities who are born in the mythic section are described using imagery normally reserved for Mot himself: the description of the twin gods in line 62, 'A lip to the underworld, a lip to the heavens' recalls language used of Mot in the Baal Cycle:

[a lip to the] earth, and a lip to the heavens,  
[And the] tongue to the stars,  
So that [Baal] may go into his (Mot's) insides.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> RTU, 326-7.

<sup>219</sup> DDD, 600.

<sup>220</sup> Alberto W. R. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 198.

The presence of this Motlike imagery and El's title *mt* elsewhere in KTU 1.23 make it unlikely that lines 9-11 concern the ritual destruction of Mot. Rather, in consonance with broader ancient West Asian rhetoric surrounding circumcision and fertility, lines 9-11 are understood better as a key moment in the ritual section in which El's circumcision creates his fertile body. As Catherine Bell writes of ritual, 'it primarily acts to restructure bodies in the very doing of the act themselves'.<sup>221</sup> El's circumcision is therefore paramount in the progression of the text as the performative nature of circumcision makes El's body the locus of fertility, a force responsible for the birth of the Goodly Gods in the mythic section. Furthermore, the mention of El's field (*šd 'ilm*) in line 13, a field which stands in stark contrast to the unfertile wilderness, underscores the fertile power of El's body.

Another Ugaritic text which ties together circumcision and marriage is KTU 1.24; it describes the union of the goddess Nikkal and the moon god Yarih. The opening lines describes Nikkal as the daughter of Harhab, who himself possess the titles *mlk qz* 'king of circumcision'<sup>222</sup> and *mlk agzt*, 'king of weddings'. The rite of circumcision preceding marriage is attested to in Egypt around the third millennium BCE,<sup>223</sup> and Robert Allan argues that in KTU 1.24 Harhab's role is as the *htr*, the circumciser, who must make the groom 'suitably prepared [to take] full advantage of [Nikkal's] "fruitfulness"'.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York; Oxford University, 1992), 100.

<sup>222</sup> RTU, 336; though the term *qz* is often translated 'summer' (cf. Heb. *qay*), the translation 'circumcision' (Allan 1999: 21) has more consonance with the text given its parallel with *mlk agzt* ('king of weddings'), since one finds the link between circumcision and marriage in other ancient West Asian literature; in Biblical Hebrew for example the verbal root *qtn* ('circumcise') gives us the terms for groom, father-in-law, and wedding feast. In Arabic, we have *ḥataana* ('circumcise'), *ḥatanun* ('bridegroom'), and *ḥa'tinun* ('father-in-law', 'the one who circumcises').

<sup>223</sup> Robert Allan, 'Now That Summer's Gone: Understanding QZ in KTU 1.24', *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici Sul Vicino Oriente Antico* 16 (1999), 19-25: 22.

<sup>224</sup> Allan, 'Now That Summer's Gone', 23.

Circumcision is therefore a mark of transition into fertility; for the Xhosa of South Africa, circumcision (*ulwaluko*) functions similarly as the signifier for the passage of a boy into adulthood.<sup>225</sup> The ritual involves a period of seclusion for the *abakhwetha*, the youths who are to undergo circumcision, in which they are traditionally taught about courtship and marriage.<sup>226</sup> The end of the ritual marks the *abakhwetha*'s reintegration into society when they are permitted to participate in male communal assemblies and also to marry.<sup>227</sup> The *ulwaluko* ritual, like the circumcision in KTU 1.23 and 1.24, is performative and actively transforms the youths into men, ready for the responsibilities that attend it.

An uncircumcised *mt wšr* ('Warrior-Prince')<sup>228</sup> in KTU 1.23 would be a contradiction in terms as it would threaten Prince El's masculinity. Unlike the Xhosa ritual, the circumcision of El is not intended as part of a larger rite concerned with the dissemination of knowledge, but it *is* a means of re(in)corporation in that the body of the deity is re-corporated, re-bodied, and henceforth constituted differently in his materiality. For the ritual participants, the circumcision is an announcement of El's fertile status, that which Dijkstra says transforms El into the 'ideal husband prepared for manhood'.<sup>229</sup> Destitution and sterility are transformed concomitantly with the reinscription of El's body so that he might, through the sexualized staff he later uses, bring stability and fecundity.

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<sup>225</sup> Lilian N. Ndangam, "'Lifting the Cloak on Manhood": Coverage of Xhosa Male Circumcision in the South African Press', *Masculinities in Contemporary Africa*, ed. Egodi Uchendu (Dakar: Council for the Development of Social Science Research, 2008), 209-28: 211-12.

<sup>226</sup> Ndangam, 'Lifting the Cloak on Manhood', 212.

<sup>227</sup> Ndangam, 'Lifting the Cloak on Manhood', 212.

<sup>228</sup> Christopher B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 123.

<sup>229</sup> M. Dijkstra, 'Astral Myth of the Birth of Shagar and Shalim (KTU 1.23)', *Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf: Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient. Festschrift für Oswald Loretz zur Vollendung seines 70. Lebensjahres mit Beiträgen von Freunden, Schülern und Kollegen*, ed. M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 265-87: 287.

Outside the Ugaritic texts, the evidence for a cult of El at Ugarit is uncertain,<sup>230</sup> as is whether those involved in the cult would have practised circumcision. However, myths elsewhere attest to a connection between El and circumcision; the Phoenician deity Kronos, for example, whom Eusebius identifies as El, circumcises himself and sacrifices his only son Ie(d)oud (cf. Heb. יחיד) to protect his country from war and pestilence (*Praep. Ev.* I. 10). In these myths, circumcision is apotropaic, intending to ward off evil. Eusebius writes further that in times of distress, it was common for city rulers to sacrifice their children as ransom to the ‘avenging daemons’. Francesca Stavrakopoulou writes that ‘[o]ne of the most prominent afterlives of child sacrifice is probably its transformation into a circumcision rite’.<sup>231</sup> In other words, in place of sacrificing one’s son to the gods in order that your familial fertility might increase, he is circumcised instead.

In KTU 1.23 there is no city under attack, but the mythosymbolic landscape is certainly threatened by the sterility which resides in the wilderness and looms over the land’s produce. El’s circumcision ensures that creation flourishes, that fertility becomes a governing principle, and that the Goodly Gods be born; indeed, the field that these gods enter to find sustenance is presumably the field of El himself (lines 13 and 28).<sup>232</sup>

In the ritual section, El is not the only deity mentioned; one also finds Athirat and Rahmay, hunters (šd) girded with ‘goodly might’ (gʾzr nʾm).<sup>233</sup> Athirat and Rahmay are integral to the text as they hunt the meat for the feast to accompany the ‘coriander in

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<sup>230</sup> Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 139.

<sup>231</sup> Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 305.

<sup>232</sup> Judith M. Hadley suggests that šd here does not necessarily denote a cultivated field and is perhaps best translated as ‘steppe’, a land in which wild beasts roam (2000: 45). Mark Smith argues on the other hand that ‘the field represents another way to refer to the sown where the rituals take place’ (2006: 51).

<sup>233</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 20.

milk, mint in curd' (line 14).<sup>234</sup> The field of El, the divine field, mentioned earlier is also the field of Athirat and Rahmay (*wšd šd 'ilm || šd 'aṯrt wrḥmy*), who themselves are fertile goddesses. Athirat's breasts are a source of nourishment for the Goodly Gods (line 24), and in KTU 1.15 II 26-28 king Keret's son Yaššib suckles the breasts of the goddesses Athirat and Rahmay<sup>235</sup> (or Anat).<sup>236</sup> The motif of the king who suckles the breasts of goddesses is a common one in ancient West Asia; in the *Enuma Elish*, for example, Marduk suckles the breasts of the Ishtars, filling him with power (I.85-86).<sup>237</sup> In ancient Greece, the link between divine milk and power is exemplified in the story of Hera, whom Athena tricked into breastfeeding the infant Heracles, thereby bestowing immortality upon him.<sup>238</sup> In Egypt as well, the suckled king motif is common and in the Pyramid Texts there are multiple references to the potent nature of goddess milk, which Stephanie Budin associates with prosperity and rejuvenation.<sup>239</sup> In Pyramid Text 406, the milk of Isis is compared to 'health, happiness, bread, beer, clothing, and food',<sup>240</sup> materials that allow the recipient of the divine milk to enjoy life and experience stability—the state of always having enough and not being in want. The goddesses' breasts are also the site at which kingship is ensured and lines of divine descent forged; breastfeeding by the goddess is a means to legitimize the one who suckles and to secure royal lineage.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 58.

<sup>235</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, 'The Religion of Ugarit: An Overview', *Handbook of Ugaritic Studies*, ed. Wilfred G. E. Watson and Nicolas Wyatt (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 529-85: 560.

<sup>236</sup> Wiggins, *A Reassessment of Asherah*, 31.

<sup>237</sup> M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Elements in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 133.

<sup>238</sup> Deborah Lyons, *Gender and Immortality: Heroines in Ancient Greek Myth and Cult* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1997), 90.

<sup>239</sup> Stephanie Budin, *Images of Woman and Child from the Bronze Age: Reconsidering Fertility, Maternity, and Gender in the Ancient World* (New York: Cambridge University, 2011), 39-40; see also, Andrew H. Gordon and Calvin W. Schwabe, *The Quick and the Dead: Biomedical Theory in Ancient Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 136 for references to the vivifying nature of Isis' breast milk.

<sup>240</sup> Budin, *Images of Woman and Child*, 39.

<sup>241</sup> Walter A. Maier, *'Asherah: Extrabiblical Evidence* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 43.

The goddesses' connection to the field in KTU 1.23 is evocative of a Sumerian text in which Inana's breasts are compared to fields, 'wide fields which pour forth flax [...] wide fields which pour forth grain' (*ETCSL* 4.07.7). While the Goodly Gods suckle at Athirat's breast, Rahmay, whose name derives from *rh̄m* ('womb'), hunts meat for the feast, and so both goddesses are preeminent in the text as givers of fertility. It is not until the mythic section that El makes a proper named appearance, at which point the two goddesses become unnamed—El taking centre stage now that he has been ritually prepared for the duties of manhood.

### The Mythic Section

This portion of the text, like the ritual section, begins with a reference to the liminal and chaotic space as El marches to the *gp ym*, the shore of the sea, to the *gp thm*, the edge of the primordial abyss. The *thm*, the watery abyss, indexes the precariousness and instability that the wilderness (*mdb̄r*) of the ritual section does; it is a space that awaits cultivation. Considering the setting by the water, this is likely to be El's home, elsewhere described as located at 'the source of the two rivers', 'in the midst of the channels of the two deeps' (see KTU 1.4 IV 21-22).<sup>242</sup> It is from his home at the centre of the cosmos that El marches towards the volatile, tehomic periphery.

In the ritual section, the Goodly Gods are invited to eat of every food and drink of every wine (line 6), and in line 30, here at the edge of the *thm*, the text mentions an 'agn, a pot or basin (cf. Heb.  $\lambda$ ), suggestive of food preparation. However, who is preparing the food? Is it the two *mš̄t'ltm*,<sup>243</sup> that is, the goddesses, or El himself? In

<sup>242</sup> Lowell K. Handy, *Among the Host of Heaven: The Syro-Palestinian Pantheon as Bureaucracy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 90-91.

<sup>243</sup> The translation of *mš̄t'ltm* is contested (see Smith 2006: 74-76 for an overview); the simplest explanation is that it is a substantive of the Št-stem of 'lh ('to ascend'), hence 'those who raise (or offer?) themselves up'.

KTU 1.4 IV, El acts as host to Lady Athirat and invites her to eat of the food and drink of the wine that is before him (1.4 IV 33-39).

Are you quite hungry ...  
 Or are you quite thirsty, then sup.  
 Eat or drink!  
 Eat food from the tables,  
 drink wine from the carafes,  
 the blood of trees from cups of gold.  
 Is it the 'hand' (*yd*) of King El which arouses you?  
 (Or) the Bull's passion which excites you?<sup>244</sup>

The mention of El's penis (*yd*) and its power to excite alongside the reference to a feast allows us to 'think' the two together. If El uses food in such a way in KTU 1.23, one may assume that El prepares food to entice his future wives (*'att*),<sup>245</sup> as he also does in lines 37-39, 41, 45, and 48 which describe the deity shooting, plucking, and roasting a bird (see especially line 39, *'il attm kypt*, 'El indeed entices the two women').

Regardless of who prepares food for whom in KTU 1.23.31, both this text and KTU 1.4 IV demonstrate that sex and food can code one another. The preparation of the meal precedes El's action in lines 35-36 where he 'takes (*yqh*) the *mšt'ltm* from the top of the pot [...] and sets them in his house (*bbth*)'. The meal is evidently successful and El's *bt* not only refers to his house, his temple, but also to his lineage in the sense that one's house represents one's dynasty or family. The verb *yqh* also serves a dual purpose; it describes El taking the two women down from the top of the pot, but it is also used as a verb connected with marriage, the taking of a wife (cf. *נָקַח* in Gen. 2.23; 4.19; 6.2; 11.29, *et al*).

<sup>244</sup> Wilfred G. E. Watson, 'The Switch between Second and Third Person Address in Ugaritic', *Studi Epigrafici E Linguistici Sul Vicino Oriente Antico* 17 (2000), 77-82: 77-78.

<sup>245</sup> Smith however argues that it is the goddesses who prepare the food for El, perhaps as an offering, writing 'I doubt El ever prepared a meal in his life' (2006: 76-77). For this reason, he does not read lines 37-39, 41, 45, and 48, which refer to El shooting, preparing, and roasting a bird as a reference to a meal, instead preferring to understand it as 'metaphorical double-entendre' in line with Albright (2006: 86) for El's tumescence and sexual activity with the goddesses. It is odd that Smith, who at the outside describes feasting as the larger theme of the text, should here choose to interpret a reference to preparation and roasting in what seems an exclusively sexual manner.

<sup>31</sup> El [takes] the *mšt'ltm*,  
*mšt'ltm* from the top of the pot.

<sup>33b</sup> El's penis extends like the sea,  
<sup>34</sup> Indeed, El's penis like the tide.  
 El's penis extends like the sea,  
 Indeed, El's penis like the tide.

The explicit mention of El's penis after he 'takes' them shows a text that moves from a meal offered to a sexuality that takes, and the twice-repeated refrain above (along with the repetition of references to El's sexual activity in lines 49-51 and 55-56) demonstrates the importance of El's sexuality to the narrative. Lines 37-39 describe what happens while El take the two women from the top of the pot<sup>246</sup>:

<i>'il ḥṯh nḥt</i>	El grew strong as to his staff,
<i>'il ymnn mṯ ydh</i>	El became firm as to the rod of his penis.

Smith's translation of lines 37-39 is almost the exact opposite of how I have rendered them above. He reads the verbs *nḥt* and *ymnn* as 'descends' (cf. Heb. נָחַת) and 'droops' respectively (though he does note the ambiguous nature of these verbs).<sup>247</sup> Johannes C. de Moor also understands *nḥt* as 'to lower', but interprets *ymnn* as 'to take in one's right hand' (from *ymn*, 'right hand').<sup>248</sup> Ginsberg associates both verbs with Arabic roots and renders them 'put down' and 'lay down' for a translation of 'Il put down his rod, 'Il laid down the staff of his hand',<sup>249</sup> and Pope gives 'El, his rod sinks. El, his love-staff droops'.<sup>250</sup> My interpretation relies on the association between the lines which flank the text in question (lines 33-35 and 37-38) and describe El's penis extending (the latter by way of double entendre). Moreover, the language of marriage (*lqh*, *'att*) coupled with the fact that sexual intercourse has yet to take place provides

<sup>246</sup> Smith notes that line 37 does not use the prefix form one would usually find for a progressive narrative, and concludes that the actions described in line 37 occur simultaneously with those in lines 35-36 (2006: 80).

<sup>247</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 83-85.

<sup>248</sup> *ARTU*, 124.

<sup>249</sup> H. L. Ginsberg, 'Notes on "Birth of the Gracious and Beautiful Gods"', *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1935), 45-72: 55.

<sup>250</sup> Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 38.

a convincing case that one should understand the lines in between these two texts as a reference to the potency of El for his future wives.

The view espoused by Pope that *nḥt* and *ymn* denote El's inability to achieve erection<sup>251</sup> is at odds with his position as creator deity. Known at Ugarit as *tr 'il*, Bull El, this theriomorphic image conveys El's fertile nature,<sup>252</sup> and along with his position as *qn(y) 'arṣ* ('begetter of earth/underworld'),<sup>253</sup> a sign that he oversees the world and its 'productive faculties',<sup>254</sup> paints a rather different picture than the one in which El is *deus impotens*.

I propose, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>255</sup> that given the erotic tone of KTU 1.23 one can see the verbs *nḥt* and *ymn* as etymologically related to the Egyptian *nḥt* and *mn*, denoting strength/victory and firmness respectively. In Egyptian literature, *nḥt* appears in relation to penises: Amun, for example, is known as *nḥt mṯ3*, 'mighty of phallus',<sup>256</sup> and in one Middle Egyptian oneiromantic text, one reads 'If a man sees himself in a dream: seeing his penis erect (*nḥt*) ... this means victory (*nḥtw*) for his enemies'.<sup>257</sup> Moreover, according to R. M. Good, Egyptian *mn*, 'to be firm' (cf. *mnnw*, 'fortress') overlaps with Arabic *munnatun*, 'strength'.<sup>258</sup> In the Egyptian coffin texts, *mn* is applied to various body parts: Osiris' heart, Osiris' eye, the vertebrae, the flesh, the arm and

<sup>251</sup> Pope, *El in the Ugaritic Texts*, 40.

<sup>252</sup> David R. Tasker, *Ancient Near Eastern Literature and the Hebrew Scriptures about the Fatherhood of God* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 70.

<sup>253</sup> Though this precise title does not appear in the extant Ugarit corpus, Pope notes that it is attested at Karatepe, Palmyra and in a neo-Punic inscription at Leptis Magna; he also notes the presence of Hittite fragments which mention a deity known as *el kunirša*, probably a form of *'il qn 'rṣ* (Pope 1955: 52).

<sup>254</sup> W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1968), 81.

<sup>255</sup> Alan Hooker, 'The Ugaritic Terms *nḥt* and *ymn*', *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* 2014/1: 34-35.

<sup>256</sup> Mark Smith, *The Carlsburg Papyri 5: On the Primaeval Ocean*, CNI Publications 26 (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2002), 47 n. 137; Christian Leitz (ed.), *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen VIII* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 78.

<sup>257</sup> Lynn M. Meskell and Rosemary A. Joyce, *Embodied Lives: Figuring Ancient Maya and Egyptian Experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 102.

<sup>258</sup> R. M. Good, 'Hebrew and Ugaritic *nḥt*', *Ugarit Forschungen* 17 (1986): 153-56.

the legs.<sup>259</sup> If applied to the penis, one suspects that like *nḥt* it would denote an erection, or perhaps its longevity.

<sup>39</sup> If the two women cry:  
<sup>40</sup> 'O man, man!  
 Your staff tumescs,  
 The rod of your penis stiffens (or remains stiff).

<sup>41</sup> Lo[ok] a bird  
 You're roasting on the fire,  
 Browning on the coals.'

<sup>42</sup> (Then) the two fe[mal]es will be wives of El,  
 Wives of El, and his forever.

<sup>42-43</sup> But if the two females cry:  
<sup>43</sup> 'O Daddy, Daddy!  
 Your staff tumescs,  
<sup>44</sup> The rod of your penis stiffens!  
 Look a bird  
 You're roasting on the fire,

<sup>45</sup> Browning on the coals.'  
 (Then) the two females will be daughters of El,  
<sup>45-46</sup> Daughters of El, and his forever.<sup>260</sup>

KTU 1.23.39-46 above contains a scene in which El entices the two women and arguably decides whether they are to be his wives or his daughters based on how they choose to address him: as 'man, husband' (*mt*) or 'daddy' (*'ad*). In both cases, the two women mentioned the bird which El catches and roasts on the fire and thus, considering the sexually laden imagery of the birds, Wyatt's understanding that this not an either/or, that is, the women are both the wives *and* daughters of El, holds more appeal.<sup>261</sup> Such incestuous activity among the gods however is not unusual in ancient West Asian mythologies. As Athalya Brenner writes, 'myths and legends from

<sup>259</sup> Rune Nyord, *Breathing Flesh: Conceptions of the Body in the Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (Copenhagen: Tusculanum, 2009), 486.

<sup>260</sup> Text from Smith (2006: 22-23), but revised to incorporate my translations of *nḥt* and *ymnn*.

<sup>261</sup> *RTU*, 332 n. 43.

Mesopotamia, Canaan, Ugarit and Egypt are replete with [...] incestuous stories that are far from pejorative in tone'.<sup>262</sup>

Line 49 affirms that the two women are 'att 'il ('wives of El') forever. The repeated refrain of the women, that El's penis is erect and firm, foreshadows the sexual activity and copulation that takes places in lines 49-54. This sexual activity results in the birth of the gods Dawn (*šhr*) and Dusk (*šlm*) who should likely be identified with the Goodly Gods of the ritual section given that the description of their birth parallels that of the Goodly Gods (see lines 49-54 and 56-59).<sup>263</sup>

What is noteworthy in the sections that deal with the sexual activity of El and the birth of the twin gods is the absence of explicit reference to El's penis. In the preceding lines, the tone is heavily erotic and euphemistic, with clear references to the divine member, and yet in lines 49-51 and 55-56 where there is 'kissing and conception', the penis becomes implicit. The visible penis has served its part in the ritual and mythic sections. In the former, El's penis undergoes ritual circumcision and renders it ideal, phallic; in the latter, his penis entices the two women. In both sections, the visibility of the penis is anticipatory of the sexual act. The *visible* penis thus serves more to highlight it as a sign of power, authority and El's fertile body than as an instrument of sexual activity.

## Conclusion

KTU 1.23 demonstrates the sexed nature of divinity and reveals to its readers/listeners the tangibility of El's body. This is not an incorporeal deity but one who participates in an act which confirms the materiality of bodies: sex. However, the stark presence of

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<sup>262</sup> Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 102.

<sup>263</sup> Pace Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 105 n. 53.

El's penis is not, as one might suppose, a shocking feature; rather, it is already assumed that the gods are sexual beings. On account of this, the language surrounding El's sexual activity with the two women does not need to be written about in a graphic manner; the divine penis does not principally operate to show that El *is* sexual, but rather words to signify other facts of his character grounded in phallic expectations: authority, power and lordship over the arena of fertility.

El's penis is a proleptic sign and, in the context of food and sex thinking one another (à la Ken Stone), it is an anticipatory signal to what Mark Smith understands to be the 'divine meal'.<sup>264</sup> In other words, the divine penis in KTU 1.23 is always already encoded with the purpose of the ritual and the denouement of the myth: the final entry of the Goodly Gods and ritual participants into the sown field and the banquet of food and wine found there (lines 68b-76). Smith calls this banquet the 'trajectory' of KTU 1.23 and views the sexual aspects of the text as merely backdrop.<sup>265</sup> For Smith the text works unidirectionally to the end goal of the feast, meaning that 'the text is not primarily concerned with sexual relations [...] the text is about the food for these gods'.<sup>266</sup>

To restrict the meaning of this text to the feast is short-sighted when one considers that the sexual aspects of KTU 1.23 are integral to its outworking. El's field (*šd 'ilm*) and his goddess consorts are mentioned in the ritual section along with a viticultural description of the circumcision of *mt wšr*, whom I take along with Wyatt to be El. The *šd 'ilm* is most likely synonymous with the sown field in which the banquet takes place and epitomises the effective creative power of agricultural and its ability to turn wilderness into fertile ground just as the pruning of *mt wšr* renders his body fertile.

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<sup>264</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 163.

<sup>265</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 140.

<sup>266</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 140.

The divine penis and the field are signs of one another in KTU 1.23. While the trajectory, as Smith notes, does appear aimed at the concluding feast, the sown field and the feast nonetheless serve as reminders of El's virility and sexuality; it is not possible to have one without the other in KTU 1.23.

KTU 1.23.1-7, which describes the presence of human royalty in the ritual space, presupposes the text's liturgical nature; that is, its nature as a text which is repeatedly enacted. As such, the ritual participants will already be aware of the rite before they take part and thus, for them, the field is always already sown, El always already circumcised and fertile, the goddesses always already hunt and the meat for the feast of the Goodly Gods always already secured. If the king and queen in line 7 can be identified with El and his goddess consort(s),<sup>267</sup> then this ritual is a confirmation of the royal family's power. In Catherine Bell's schema of ritual, KTU 1.23 has elements of the 'political rite' insofar as 'those claiming power demonstrate how their interests are in the natural, real, or fruitful order of things'.<sup>268</sup>

It is precisely because of this that one cannot relegate the role of sexuality in the narrative to the backdrop. Although the role of the royal couple in KTU 1.23 is ambiguous regarding the question of *hieros gamos*, that is, whether they are engaged in sexual relations to mirror the divine coupling of El and his wives, it is clear that, in consonance with prevailing Mesopotamian ideas about the function of sexuality,<sup>269</sup> 'the reproduction and creative organization of the universe' is a particular concern of KTU 1.23.

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<sup>267</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 162-3.

<sup>268</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University, 1997), 129.

<sup>269</sup> Dale Launderville, *Celibacy in the Ancient World: Its Ideal and Practice in Pre-Hellenistic Israel, Mesopotamia, and Greece* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2010), 183; Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004), 20.

Both human kings and the Goodly Gods, each in some way pictured as El's offspring, are breastfed by the goddess Athirat.<sup>270</sup> This dual association with both El and Athirat links the king to order and triumph over and against chaos, displayed in KTU 1.23 in the figure of the sown field contrasted with the wilderness (especially since *šd 'ilm*, 'field of El', can also be translated 'divine breast' or 'breast of the gods'). Noting the connection between agricultural fertility and divine semen in ancient West Asian mythologies,<sup>271</sup> it is not difficult to imagine that a similar link structures the image of the sown/seeded (*mdr'*) field of KTU 1.23. In other words, by their very presence in the sown field, the Ugaritic royal couple are associated with divine fertility. Similar attributes are given to the ancient Israelite king:

And he (the king) shall come down like rain (מטר) upon the cut grass (רא), like showers that drop upon the earth (Psalm 72.6).

The description of the king as like the rains on cultivated ground associates him with Yahweh the rain bringer (Gen. 2.5; Exod. 9.23, 33; Deut. 11.17; 28.12; 1 Sam. 12.17-18; Job 38.25-30; Zech. 10.1),<sup>272</sup> and one wonders whether the spatial dimension to Psalm 72.6 implies that the king himself has also come down from Yahweh as his rain/seed to fructify the earth. The fructifying role of the king would connect him to the broad ancient West Asian theology of gardens in which kings were 'in a ritual and

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<sup>270</sup> Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Form of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 170; John Day, 'The Canaanite Inheritance of the Israelite Monarchy', *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (New York; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 72-90: 81-82.

<sup>271</sup> Samuel Noah Kramer, *From the Poetry of Sumer: Creation, Glorification, Adoration* (California; London: University of California, 1979), 29-30; Francesca Rochberg, 'A Short History of the Waters of the Firmament', *From the Banks of the Euphrates: Studies in Honor of Alice Louise Slotsky*, ed. Micah Ross (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 227-44: 229; Ewa Wasilewska, *Creation Stories of the Middle East* (Philadelphia; Jessica Kingsley, 2000), 158-60.

<sup>272</sup> Note that Israel is also compared to rain in Mic. 5.6 (Heb. v. 7), as are Moses' teachings in Deut. 32.2.

mythic sense [...] “gardener[s]” of the gods’.<sup>273</sup> Though the royal family in KTU 1.23 do not explicitly appear to participate in gardening activities, it would be shortsighted to exclude the influence of this prevalent imagery on the text, especially if the world pictured in KTU 1.23 plays on similar motifs one finds in the Garden of Eden narrative, as argued by Wyatt.<sup>274</sup>

Ultimately, the mention of El’s divine penis in the text serves to bring remembrance (like Sumerian Enki’s), in this case to the events which, in the textual world, have not yet happened, but of which the reader/listener is already aware. In the ritual section, for example, the use of horticultural and phallic imagery in lines 8-11 to describe El’s circumcision is prolepsis in that the deity is always already circumcised, virile and fruitful. As part of a ritual text, however, it might be uncritical to characterize the purpose of El’s circumcision as purely aetiological; that is, as an explanation for the origin of the ritual itself. Bell notes that within the ritual environment ‘space and time are redefined through the physical movement of bodies,’<sup>275</sup> so that in a regularly performed text, the purpose must be more than explanatory. What does the circumcision of El mean for the ritual space and its structure(s)? The divine penis in the myth section is certainly more visible than it is in lines 8-11, but it is nevertheless encoded by way of phallic and fecund images of ‘staffs’ and vines. In a sense, the circumcision serves to ensure the penis’s later visibility as it is through this ritual that El’s body becomes suitable for the two women and the ritual space itself along with the agricultural environment in general.

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<sup>273</sup> Francesca Stavrakopoulou, ‘Tree-Hogging in Eden: Divine Restriction and Royal Rejection in Genesis 2-3’, *Theology and Human Flourishing: Essays in Honor of Timothy J. Goringe*, ed. Mike Higton, Jeremy Law, and Christopher Rowland (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 41-53: 44.

<sup>274</sup> Wyatt, ‘The Religion of Ugarit’, 533-35.

<sup>275</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 99.

Cutler and Macdonald argue that KTU 1.23 is a 'liturgical ploy' designed to end famine,<sup>276</sup> an interpretation they base on their reading of those lines which Wyatt takes to be a reference to El's circumcision. Cutler and Macdonald read *mt wšr* as 'a double symbol of great disaster'<sup>277</sup> which the ritual actions of KTU 1.23 seek to correct. Yet, it remains possible to read El's circumcision alongside Cutler and Macdonald's insights as the circumcision of the divine penis is an act of stabilization that brings order to the chaotic outback in which the ritual section takes place.

The dichotomy between order and chaos, between wilderness and sown land, represents a liminal situation in the text, a Jasperian *Grenzsituation* ('boundary situation') characterized by 'death, chance [...] and the uncertainty of the world'.<sup>278</sup> A society facing such situations, writes Ricoeur 'returns to the very roots of its identity; to that mythical nucleus which ultimately grounds and determines it'.<sup>279</sup> As noted, Eusebius wrote of El circumcising himself in an apotropaic ritual to counteract the impending danger of war. In this situation, what is the 'mythic nucleus' Ricoeur writes about? Francesca Stavrakopoulou's work demonstrates the connection between circumcision and the ritual of the firstborn sacrifice proves useful here as the violence El faces in *Praep. Ev. I 10* is resolved through circumcision of the divine phallus. On a reading which connects circumcision to child sacrifice, the part (the foreskins of El and his allies) is substituted for the whole (the country and the children offered up in times of war). René Girard also associates circumcision and child sacrifice, arguing that in

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<sup>276</sup> B. Cutler and J. Macdonald, 'On the Origin of the Ugaritic Text KTU 1.23', *Ugarit Forschungen* 14 (1982), 33-50: 41.

<sup>277</sup> Cutler and Macdonald, 'KTU 1.23', 41.

<sup>278</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University, 1964), 22.

<sup>279</sup> Paul Ricoeur and Richard Kearney, 'Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds', *The Crane Bag* 2 (1978): 112-18: 114.

the texts of Genesis and Exodus one encounters a transition from the latter to the former,<sup>280</sup> from the whole to the part.

This whole/part distinction is operational in KTU 1.23 where the proleptic penis is the part and the sexual act or birth of the Goodly Gods, the ritualistic *telos*, the whole. This phallic prolepsis is also found in KTU 1.10 III 7-8:

<i>b' l ysg'd mli [...]</i>	Baal advanced, full [...]
<i>il hd mla us[b'h]</i>	The god Hadad filled [his] fin[ger]

Wyatt translates these lines 'Baal advanced, [his penis] tumescent / Divine Hadd, [his] pha[llus] erect',<sup>281</sup> recognizing the euphemistic force of *usb'* ('finger'). These lines appear in the narrative just before the reader is informed of Baal's ascent up the holy mountain to claim kingship (1.10 III 11-14). The sequence of events in KTU 1.10 III 5-35 is quite like that in KTU 1.23; both contain mentions of the visible penis, descriptions of divine birth and a message brought to the father of the child(ren) that confirm it. In KTU 1.10 III, Baal's kingship is explicit and associated textually with his erect/full penis and his ability to sexually arouse the lady Anat (III 9-10, cf. 1.4 III 38-49). In this way, the whole is Baal's kingship and dominance and the part, its signifier, his erect and full penis.

In these Ugaritic myths, the divine penis is a sign of the *telos*, a signifier that adumbrates but is not the whole focus of the narrative in which it appears. The penis is proleptic not in that the narrative itself 'flashes forward', but in that the mention of the penis and its phallic associations to power, authority and masculinity serve to

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<sup>280</sup> René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* (London; New York: Continuum, 2003), 239.

<sup>281</sup> RTU, 158.

remind the myth's readers/listeners of key events which take place in the myth connected to these attributes. In KTU 1.23, El's penis reveals his overt masculinity, especially considering its cosmic proportions and the two women who laud it and its erect state. The myth does not end there, however, and proceeds to consolidate this masculinity in progeny and the sown field where El's sons might be satiated. In KTU 1.10 III, Baal's penis is likely displayed in its erect state and its appearance is congruent with his ascent up the cosmic mountain to obtain kingship and dominion. Ultimately, the divine penis, El's phallus, can be viewed as part of the mythic nucleus which grounds the identity of the communities who produced these myths for from the phallus (and even its 'pruning') comes fertility, earthly abundance and the quelling of chaos. The 'uncertainty of the world' is confronted by the seeded land which provides nourishment, flowing wine which evokes life-giving divine fluid and the establishment of the repetitious, ordered cycles of Dawn and Dusk.

## DIVINE SEXUALITY IN EGYPT

### Introduction

In this section, I will focus on three themes in Egyptian mythological texts which I have identified as having ties to the divine penis: (1) creation, (2) judgement and (3) resurrection. In relation to the first, there are generally considered to be four major creation mythologies operant in Egypt arising from the cult centres at Heliopolis, Hermopolis, Memphis and Thebes.<sup>282</sup> These creation narratives range from creation by masturbation to creation by divine fiat. The theme of judgement is prominent in the mythology of Horus and Seth, with sexual activity on Seth's part functioning as a way for him to assert his dominance over Horus (though ultimately Seth's sexuality acts against him). Lastly, resurrection is a strong component of the Osiride myth in which Isis hunts for Osiris's body parts after he has been slain and dismembered, though the retrieval of Osiris's penis proves a complication in the text.

### Creation

Atum is the one who developed growing ithyphallic, in  
Heliopolis,  
He put his penis in his grasp  
that he might make orgasm with it,  
and the two siblings were born—Shu and Tefnut.  
(Pyramid Text 527).<sup>283</sup>

Ithyphallic deities, gods with erect penises, are not uncommon to Egyptian representation of male deities. The most well-known example is the god Min, who is often depicted with a raised hand and erect penis.<sup>284</sup> In PT 527, quoted above, Atum's

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<sup>282</sup> Gordon H. Johnston, 'Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 165 (2008), 178-94: 181.

<sup>283</sup> James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, Yale Egyptological Studies 2 (New Haven, 1998), 13.

<sup>284</sup> Lynn M. Meskell and Rosemary A. Joyce, *Embodied Lives: Figuring Ancient Maya and Egyptian Experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 106.

erect penis is the original creative locus; through an act of masturbation, he-and-she<sup>285</sup> brings forth Shu and Tefnut, the gods of air and moisture, as well as the other seven chief deities of the Ennead.

Later traditions, however, personify the creator's hand as a goddess, associated variously with Hathor-Nebhet-Hetepet and Iusas.<sup>286</sup> This enforced heterosexualization of the myth is mirrored by other versions in which Atum's mouth is given female-coded, womblike qualities: Atum ejaculates into his-and-her open mouth and spits out Shu and Tefnut (CT 2:18).<sup>287</sup> Atum's mouth becomes the uterus in a move which displaces what is considered female genitalia to the face region, a common cultural motif surrounding women.<sup>288</sup> Yet Atum's mouth is not merely a 'symbolic' uterus and since Atum is a penis deity, this is not a case where female-coded genitalia are transposed to the mouth; rather, Atum's mouth *is* another one of his-and-her sexual organs. As such, Atum can be understood as a deity whose whole body is a self-sufficient reproductive system. As Atum is the creator from whom all gods ultimately derive, this myth codifies the cosmos as a holistic and sexual structure.

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<sup>285</sup> The use of 'he-and-she' is intentional here as the dual pronoun for Atum appears in some strands of Egyptian thought. In CT 2:161a, Atum says: *ink pn tn*, 'I am he (and) she'. In CT 2:160g-161a, Atum proclaims that he-and-she gave birth to Shu (*ink ms šw*), and since Atum first begets the twin deities Shu and Tefnut (god and goddess respectively), it is possible that *ink pn tn* refers to the male and female potentialities that lie within Atum as Shu and Tefnut.

<sup>286</sup> J. Leclant, 'Gotteshand', *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, vol. 2, ed. W. Helck *et al* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975): 813-15.

<sup>287</sup> Harco Willems, *The Coffin of Heqata (Cairo JdE 36418): A Case Study of Egyptian Funerary Culture of the Early Middle Kingdom* (Leuven: Peeters, 1996), 293.

<sup>288</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, 'The Nakedness of a Woman's Voice, the Pleasure in a Man's Mouth: An Oral History of Ancient Judaism', *Off With Her Head: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California, 1995), 165-84.

Atum Scarab!

When you became high, as the high ground—  
when you rose, as the *benben*, in the Phoenix Enclosure in  
Heliopolis—

You sneezed Shu,

You spat Tefnut,

And you put your arms about them, as the arms of *ka*, that your  
*ka* might be in them.

(Pyramid Text 600).<sup>289</sup>

In PT 600, Shu and Tefnut's origin is figured in terms of spit, though one can still recognize the sexual undertone of this creative act when one considers that in CT 2.18, Atum ejaculates into his-and-her mouth and spits out Shu and Tefnut. Moreover, Atum's position as *bnbn* brings the sexual aspects of the text to the fore since *bnbn*, while an architectural term denoting the capstone of a pyramid, can also signify penile tumescence,<sup>290</sup> and *bnnt*, derived from the same root, is a place mentioned in the Edfu inscriptions from which creation originated by means of *mtwt n Nwn* ('Nun's semen').<sup>291</sup>

The rising of Atum as the *benben* in PT 600 implies Atum's phallic nature and in his role as *benben*, the divine erection and site at which creation begins, Atum's body is completely phallicized. Additionally, Atum permits Shu and Tefnut to participate in his-and-her *ka*, the essence of the deity, such that Atum can then continue to be part of creation as it unfolds and comes into being; the phallic implications of this should not go unnoticed as the propagation of Atum's *ka* will ensure the god's continued existence and becoming in the world.

<sup>289</sup> Allen, *Genesis in Egypt*, 13-14.

<sup>290</sup> Lana Troy, 'Engendering Creation in Ancient Egypt', *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods and Strategies*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (London: Routledge, 2013), 238-69: 259.

<sup>291</sup> Eve A. E. Raymond, *The Mythical Origin of the Egyptian Temple* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1969), 64-65.

In Memphite theology, creation moves away from explicitly bodied notions of creation to creation by divine fiat. Ptah is the 'self-begotten' creator, emphasizing his innate generative ability. Lines 48-62b of the *Memphite Theology of Creation* name the gods as those brought forth 'in Ptah', implying the monadic and holistic nature of Ptah whom one may compare with Atum of the Coffin Texts who is a self-sufficient reproductive body and in whose *ka* Shu and Tefnut are enveloped.

In this move towards a word-based creation, Ptah is named the 'heart and tongue' of the Ennead (52a) through which all creation comes; the text continues:

(Thus) it happened that the heart and tongue gained control over [every] (other) member of the body, by teaching that he is in every body and in every mouth of all gods, all men, [all] cattle, all creeping things, and (everything) that lives... (53).

Line 55 mentions the Heliopolitan creation mythology in which Atum engenders Shu and Tefnut by an act of divine masturbation and compares this with Ptah and his creation by word (tongue) and thought (heart). In the Ptah account, the word replaces penis, or rather, the word becomes phallic and the penis, logic. The functions of the ideal penis are sublimated into those of the world. All living beings in Ptah's created order are indwelt or permeated in some sense by the creator deity. This indwelling presence is effectively Ptah's claim over life and hence over progeny and fertility.

The creative word is not limited to narratives of creation and its presence elsewhere in the Egyptian corpus provides an insight into how one understands the phallic word in creation texts.

In one text,<sup>292</sup> the goddess Isis sets out to discover the secret name of Re who is introduced as ‘the divine god [...] who made heaven, earth, water, the breath of life, fire, gods, men, small and large cattle, creeping things, birds, and fishes’. The goddess is compared to Re for she is ‘craftier than a million men and choicer than a million gods’, yet what she lacks is knowledge of Re’s own name. To obtain this information, she creates a snake to poison Re so that he must disclose his name to Isis in order for her to heal him. To learn Re’s name is to acquire knowledge of creation, for the name/word links back to primal flourishing:

I am he who made heaven and earth [...] I am he who made the bull for the cow, so that sexual pleasures might come into being [...] I am he who opened the year and created the river [...] I am Khepri in the morning, Re at noon, and Atum who is in the evening.<sup>293</sup>

For Isis to trick Re into revealing his name is an act of usurpation on her part, to secure the word of the god who brings forth sexual pleasure and in his evening manifestation is Atum, the deity who creates by his own sexual pleasure.

The use of a serpent by Isis should not go unnoticed; in ancient West Asia, it was regarded as a symbol of new life and healing,<sup>294</sup> and is connected with female-coded sexuality in depictions of snakes from Beth-Shan, where the animal appears on a 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE Canaanite cult object formed ‘in the [shape] of a vagina’,<sup>295</sup> and Elam, where a pot shows ‘three pairs of serpents’ depicted to resemble a vagina and labia.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> ANET, 12-14.

<sup>293</sup> ANET, 13.

<sup>294</sup> DDD, 744.

<sup>295</sup> Balaji Mundkur, *The Cult of the Serpent: An Interdisciplinary Survey and its Manifestations and Origins* (Albany: SUNY, 1983), 181.

<sup>296</sup> Mundkur, *The Cult of the Serpent*, 181.

James H. Charlesworth has argued that the snake may be understood as a phallic symbol,<sup>297</sup> though Mundkur believes this association and its propagation relies too heavily on Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>298</sup> In this particular Egyptian text, the serpent should not be seen as representative of Isis' masculinity but the opposite: it is a sign of her femininity and confirms her healing abilities through which she seeks to obtain access to the masculine and creative prerogatives of Re.

As with the Sumerian myths examined earlier, here is also a female figure who attempts to appropriate a male deity's power for herself, though unlike the Sumerian material, Isis appears wholly successful in her endeavour; she becomes 'the Mistress of the Gods, who knows Re (by) his own name'.<sup>299</sup> It is her acquisition of Re's name that ultimately gives Isis access to the powerful word that permits her to heal the sun god.<sup>300</sup> Re's name is an integral part of his identity and his reticence to reveal it suggests there is a connection between his name and the creative abilities that inhere within him. If the name of the deity is phallicized and able to be disclosed, it suggests that the phallus (and what it stands for) is a commutable component of divine bodies. Indeed, the assumption that lies behind the Sumerian texts in which the goddesses challenge the male gods is that phallicness is a quality that can be seized and apprehended. It may be for this reason, if one can detect this ideology in the biblical texts, that Ezekiel 1.26-28 'transcendentalizes' Yahweh's body (and penis) into the heavenly realm: to protect him and his 'assets' from any potential usurpation.

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<sup>297</sup> James H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized* (New Haven: Yale University, 2010), 222-224.

<sup>298</sup> Mundkur, *The Cult of the Serpent*, 174, 179.

<sup>299</sup> ANET, 12.

<sup>300</sup> ANET, 14.

Other images of creation include iconographical depictions of the divine siblings Geb and Nut (earth and sky, respectively) in which Nut is pictured stretched over Geb, whose erect penis points towards his sister Nut.<sup>301</sup> In some instances, Nut is replaced by ithyphallic Osiris.<sup>302</sup> The sexuality of both Geb and Nut are heavily emphasized in these representations and in some relief, Shu, the god of air, holds up Nut to support her, with his hands outstretched to her breasts and pubic area. The iconography accords with mythological accounts of the separation of heaven (Nut) and earth (Geb) in which the two are born together in sexual embrace but are separated by their father, Shu.<sup>303</sup>

The heavenly realm is therefore coded as sexual, with Geb's penis ever longing for his sister, Nut. In one papyrus (pBM 7312), Geb, like Atum, is shown in an act of autofellation, 'impregnating himself through his mouth'.<sup>304</sup> Meeks and Favard-Meeks suggest the physical distance between Geb and the sky goddess Nut requires Geb to fellate himself, since they cannot reach each other to copulate 'normally'.<sup>305</sup>

In addition to space, time is also sexually coded in these Egyptian myths: the sun is continually swallowed and then birthed by the naked sky goddess at sunset and sunrise respectively,<sup>306</sup> and the fertility of the Nile and its regular inundations are connected to Osiris' semen,<sup>307</sup> such that the year and its seasons are intimately bound

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<sup>301</sup> Meskell and Joyce, *Embodied Lives*, 104.

<sup>302</sup> John Baines, 'R. T. Rundle Clark's Papers on the Iconography of Osiris', *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 58 (1972), 286-95: 291.

<sup>303</sup> Meskell and Joyce, *Embodied Lives*, 104.

<sup>304</sup> Jacobus van Dijk, 'The Birth of Horus According to the Ebers Papyrus', *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap 'Ex Orienta Lux'* 26 (1979-80), 10-25: 13 n. 22.

<sup>305</sup> Dimitri Meek and Christine Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptian Gods*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: John Murray, 1997), 66. Although note that the deity above Geb in pBM 7312 is seemingly not the sky goddess Nut, but rather another penis and bearded deity whom Meskell and Joyce identify as Osiris (2003: 104).

<sup>306</sup> Meeks and Favard-Meeks, *Egyptian Gods*, 60.

<sup>307</sup> Paul G. P. Meyboom and Miguel John Versluys, 'The Meaning of Dwarfs in Nilotic Scenes', *Nile into Tiber: Egypt in the Roman World: Proceedings of the IIIrd International Conference of Isis*

up with divine fertility. The birth of the sun and the Nilotic inundations are examples of *creation continua*,<sup>308</sup> acts that demonstrate the continuous nature of creation for the Egyptians; as creation is not viewed as a singular event, the divine penis is preserved as a persistent presence in the creation mythologies of ancient Egypt.

### Death and Resurrection

Jan Assmann describes a series of Coffin Texts which contain spells and incantation designed to aid the deceased person's *ba* (their image or substance).<sup>309</sup> Of importance for this discussion is CT 2.67-72 (spell 94) in which Osiris creates the deceased's *ba* by his semen.<sup>310</sup> This *ba* (or at least the *ba* of justified souls) can continue to enjoy sexual pleasure in the heavenly realm,<sup>311</sup> with the implication that, at least for some individuals, the *ba* is still invested in the body's sexual materiality.

The system by which care for the dead was provided also reveals the abiding materiality of the deceased. For example, in the afterlife, the dead required nourishment and food offerings were given by the living to the deceased to sustain them in the other life.<sup>312</sup> Later mortuary practices such as embalment and mummification aimed to construct a new eternal body for the deceased; this new body would often be given items and attributes connected with particular deities so that the

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*Studies, Leiden, May 11-14 2005*, ed. Laurent Bricault, Miguel John Versluys, and Paul G. P. Meyboom (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 170-208: 200; H. S. K. Bakry, *The Main Elements of the Osiris Legend with Reference to Plutarch and Certain Folk-tales*, [etheses.dur.ac.uk/9519/](http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/9519/) (Durham Thesis: Durham University, 1955), 10.

<sup>308</sup> Hans-Peter Hasenfratz, 'Patterns of Creation in Ancient Egypt', *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (London; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 174-78: 176.

<sup>309</sup> Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, trans. Ann E. Keep (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1992), 157ff.

<sup>310</sup> Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2005), 94.

<sup>311</sup> Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 94.

<sup>312</sup> John Baines and Peter Lacovara, 'Burial and the Dead in Ancient Egyptian Society: Respect, Formalism, Neglect', *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2.1 (2002), 5-36: 11-12; John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum, 2001), 13.

deceased would be divinized in the ritual process.<sup>313</sup> One spell identifies the individual's body parts with specific gods:

[M]y hair is Nun,  
 my face is Ra,  
 my eyes are Hathor,  
 my ears are Wepawet,  
 my nose is She who presides over the lotus leaf,  
 my lips are Anubis...<sup>314</sup>

This identification of body parts with deities inaugurates the deceased into the community of divine beings in the afterlife. The burial practices discussed emphasize this theme of community: the inclusion of food, drink, jewellery and other items left with the individual's body underlines the vision of a social afterlife. Moreover, that the living feel the need to feed the dead further creates a social bond between the two: the living are involved with the dead, and the dead with the living. According to Assmann, feeding rituals intended to 'integrate the deceased into the communal feasting of the gods and the transfigured ancestral spirits'.<sup>315</sup>

In this context, one can understand the nature of continued bodily functions in the hereafter. Eating and drinking are by no means private activities and, for the dead, represent the bond between them and their descendants. In this way, the propagation of one's lineage is not simply about having children; it secures one's name to ensure one is remembered among one's kin and society at large.<sup>316</sup> Within one's name inhered the power and prestige of one's family and ancestors which children, as one's heirs, were responsible for propagating and maintaining. In this sense, children bear the politics of the family name. In the myth of Horus and Seth, for example, in which the two gods struggle for kingship over Egypt, Horus, as son and heir of Osiris,

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<sup>313</sup> Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife*, 17.

<sup>314</sup> Meskell and Joyce, *Embodied Lives*, 70.

<sup>315</sup> Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 337.

<sup>316</sup> Meskell and Joyce, *Embodied Lives*, 69-70.

represents the continuation of the Osiride line and his prevailing in the dispute between him and Seth results in Horus becoming king of both Upper and Lower Egypt, therefore safeguarding the continuation of the Osiride line after Osiris' death.

Plutarch's *De Iside and Osiride*<sup>317</sup> contains another mythology which draws on these same relationships between death and the propagation of family lineages. This text further stresses the role of the divine penis and its function within the worlds of life and death. The myth suggests that in the symbolic register of ancient Egyptian mythology, the divine and ideal penis serves as a sign of re(s)erection and new life from death as it does in CT 2.67-72 (mentioned above).

Chapter 13 of *De Iside et Osiride* outlines Osiris' mission to civilize the world, to free the Egyptians 'from their primitive and brutish manner of life'.<sup>318</sup> The god uses no force of violence to accomplish this task but relies solely on his 'persuasive discourse' (λογος). Word is thus coupled again with the ability to quell chaos and bring order; after all, it is Osiris who taught the Egyptians the art of agriculture, law and worship, all activities that rely on the triumph of order over chaos for their existence. Agriculture requires the cultivation of 'wild' earth, law is justice imposed on chaotic evil while worship and its associated rituals are the enacting of order on 'the chaotic randomness of human experience'.<sup>319</sup>

In the text, Osiris' 'persuasive discourse' (λογος) relates to the cultivation of fruit (καρπος), a visible manifestation of growth and new life. Like its Hebrew counterpart פרי, the word καρπος connotes not only fruit but progeny as well, and its connection with law (νομος) in chapter 13 strengthens the tie between virility, fertility and the

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<sup>317</sup> All references to chapter numbers in *De Iside et Osiride* follow that of *Moralia*, vol. 5, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University, 1999) in the Loeb Classical Library.

<sup>318</sup> J. Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* (Cambridge: University of Wales, 1970), 137.

<sup>319</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University, 1997), 63.

establishment of order over and against chaos. To engender stability and order is necessarily to be fertile.

Osiris' identity as fertile establisher, however, is challenged by Typhon (that is, Seth) in chapters 13-18. He, along with his companions, tricks Osiris into a coffin and sends him out to sea. The displacement of Osiris' body to the sea, a place commonly associated with chaos in ancient West Asian mythologies (see here Hesiod's use of *ποντος ατρυγέτος*, 'unharvested sea', and its association with the netherworldly Tartarus in *Theogony* 696, 737), is thus a displacement from his previously ordered existence in an effort to deprive him of his identity. This is especially noticeable in chapter 18 when Seth, who later happens upon Osiris' body in the coffin, cuts him into fourteen pieces and scatter them once more into the waters.<sup>320</sup> For the Egyptians who placed a great emphasis on the preservation and wholeness of bodies, Osiris' mutilation represents a destruction of seeming finality.

Isis, Osiris' sister-wife, goes out in search of the god's body parts and finds all of them save the penis, which, according to Plutarch, was consumed by fish that the Egyptian abstain from (chapter 18). This is then a three-part destruction of the Osiride penis: firstly, it is removed from Osiris' body; secondly, it is thrown into the unruly waters and finally, it is completely destroyed by unclean sea creatures. Osiris' other body parts are never explicitly name, thus foregrounding the penis in the texts; indeed, the whole destruction of Osiris' member implies the importance of the penis for Osiris' identity, an identity which Typhon/Seth makes a concerted effort to deny along with the associated phallic qualities of virility, fertility and life.

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<sup>320</sup> Although *De Iside et Osiride* ch. 36 perhaps suggests it was only the penis (*αιδοιον*) of Osiris which Typhon/Seth cast into the sea.

Isis fashions a replica of Osiris' penis to take its place and thereafter 'consecrates' it (chapter 18). In its consecration, it becomes the focal point of Egyptian worship, and Diodorus informs his readers that Isis commanded these phallic simulacra to be placed into temples for worship (*Lib. His.* 1.22.6-7), while Plutarch writes that the goddess ordered the phallic statues to be borne in processions (*De Iside et Osiride*, ch. 36). The Osiride penis becomes a cult statue and its (new) location in the temple as a consecrated object places it in direct contrast to what it was before and in opposition to what Typhon/Seth purposed for it. The replica has phallicized the Osiride penis.

Egyptian temples, like many others in ancient West Asia, were idealized as the centre and origin of the world,<sup>321</sup> and in the mythosymbolic landscape they stood upon the mound which emerged from the primaeval waters.<sup>322</sup> The Osiride phallus, having been moved into temple space, becomes intricately associated with divine creation (in opposition to its erstwhile destruction) and order over chaos (in opposition to the consuming waters into which Seth cast it). In the temple, it stands as a monument to Osiris' virility and victory over the cunning Typhon/Seth and his plans. Assmann notes that temple spaces are the 'reification[s] of cultural memory'<sup>323</sup> which provide a mythical link back to the beginning (temporally and spatially) of the cosmos. The presence of the phallus in such a space therefore signals the primacy and divine nature of the phallus itself—and this is indeed the phallus proper, not merely the anatomical organ, since Osiris had his replaced by (or transformed into) an ever-erect, fertile (and perhaps better) 'copy'.

The procession of the phallus demonstrates that the phallus belongs to the gods—a member (!) of the divine council itself. In the Theban 'Feast of the Valley', a

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<sup>321</sup> Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2001), 39.

<sup>322</sup> Assmann, *The Search for God*, 38.

<sup>323</sup> Assmann, *The Search for God*, 39.

two-day annual festival in which the boundaries between the world of the living and dead are blurred, part of the celebration is the procession of god statues.<sup>324</sup> These statues are not merely representations of the gods but are the gods themselves by virtue of the indwelling *ba* in the statues.<sup>325</sup> One should thus not simply see the phallus in procession as a divinized representation of a god's body part but perhaps as a deity in itself. According to Herodotus, in the Egyptian Dionysian phallic processions (*Histories* 2.48), the phallus is replaced by a controllable puppetlike image whose penis is almost the same size as the image itself. The size of the phallus in comparison to the body is a sign of its importance to the god to whom it belongs (in this case, Dionysus).

As said, the new phallus Isis constructs is not simply a representation of a penis, but must be a penis as well since the goddess uses it to impregnate herself with Osiris' heir. Iconography at the temple of Seti I in Abydos attests to this mythology: the goddess Isis, depicted as a falcon, hovers over the dead and mummified Osiris whose penis has been re(s)erected so that Isis can conceive even after Osiris' death.<sup>326</sup> The *Great Hymn to Osiris* found on Amenmose's stela (*Paris Louvre C 286*) mentions Isis' journey to find her dead brother and Horus's posthumous conception: '[Isis] jubilated, joined her brother [Osiris] / Raised the weary one's inertness [his penis] / Received the seed, bore the heir [Horus]'.<sup>327</sup>

This act of conception reveals Osiris's triumph over Seth's nefarious plans and legitimates the institution of kingship insofar as kings used the name Horus as a royal

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<sup>324</sup> Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University, 2011), 67.

<sup>325</sup> Assmann, *The Search for God*, 44-46.

<sup>326</sup> Meeks and Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life*, fig. 8; Barbara S. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1999), 162; Neil Walls, *Desire, Discord and Death: Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Myth* (Boston, MA: ASOR, 2001), 106-107.

<sup>327</sup> Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: The New Kingdom*, vol. 2 (California; London: University of California, 2006), 83.

title in ancient Egypt.<sup>328</sup> This myth of Horus's origin cements the bond between the Pharaoh and the power of Osiris' phallus. Indeed, the relation between Horus and the Pharaoh implies his liminal, and thus divine, nature since, as the result of the unification between the living Isis and re(s)urrected Osiris, Horus straddles the cosmic realms. Moreover, the impregnation of Isis by Osiris underscores the strength of Osiris' semen which can even break through the barriers of death.

Several instances of Egyptian iconography attest to Pharaoh's relationship to divine phalluses. At Senwosret I's Karnak chapel, there are many depictions of Pharaoh before an erect Amun-Re or Min.<sup>329</sup> The phallic nature of Pharaoh's position cannot be downplayed. The erect Amun-Re in the Karnak inscriptions is referred to as the father of the Pharaoh, and Amun-Re himself calls Senwosret I 'son of my body' and 'thou whose flesh I endow with life [and] dominion'.<sup>330</sup> The close correlation between Osiris, Pharaoh and the inundation of the Nile is also evocative of their phallic bond. Both Osiris and the Pharaoh are identified with the Nile in Egyptian texts,<sup>331</sup> and the Nile's watery fertility, as mentioned above, is also connected to Osiris's seminal discharge. Indeed, ideologies which connect a god's semen to irrigation or sources of water is not uncommon and, as in other Semitic languages, the Egyptian words for water (*mw*) and semen (*mwyt*) are related.

In the end, the phallus which Isis constructs, through which she 'play[s] the part of a man' (*P. Louvre* 3079) because she arouses Osiris,<sup>332</sup> serves as the perpetual answer

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<sup>328</sup> Toby A. H. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London: Routledge, 1999), 248.

<sup>329</sup> Tom Hare, *Remembering Osiris: Number, Gender and the Word in Ancient Egyptian Representational Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1999), 146.

<sup>330</sup> Hare, *Remembering Osiris*, 146.

<sup>331</sup> ANET, 373-363; Rivka Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 76.

<sup>332</sup> Jaime Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods: Myths, Salvation and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras*, trans. Richard Gordon (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 46 n. 63.

to the fragmentation that haunts Osiris' body. Seth, in taking the deity's penis, attempts to degender Osiris, to take from him the marker which encodes masculine identity. The phallus, however, transcends death and as far as Osiris functions as the prototypic Pharaoh and is identified with the Pharaoh's family line, his death-defying phallus upholds kingship and denies Seth the same.

### **Judgement**

As well as appearing in matters of life, death and resurrection, the divine penis also occurs in contexts of judgement. The text about the struggle between Horus and Seth for the right to kingship will be the focus of this section.<sup>333</sup> This myth narrates various contests which must be undertaken by the two gods to prove they have the right to rule. Seth, as will be seen, asserts himself phallically to try to disrupt and delegitimize Osiris' phallus on which Horus's claim to kingship stands, for as Osiris' son, Horus is the most obvious choice for the heir to the thrones of Egypt.

The goddess Neith champions Horus as Osiris' legitimate heir and recommends that as compensation, Seth should take the goddesses Anat and Astarte to wife. . This recommendation effectively distances Seth from Egypt as Anat and Astarte are both foreign deities. In presenting Seth with two foreign goddesses, especially in a West Asian context where genealogy and bloodlines are emphasized, the implication is that Seth is only worth of mixed descendancy rather than lordship over Egypt. Horus, on the other hand, is Osiris' son and his father's triumph over death suggests he has the necessary qualities to ensure a continual, eternal and resurrecting Egypt. The sun god Re, however, identifies Horus's youth as an impediment to Horus'

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<sup>333</sup> ANET, 14-17.

claim to the Osiride throne. As Horus has only recently been weaned from his mother's breast,<sup>334</sup> argues Re, he is not as strong as Seth, a deity of storm and chaos. Indeed, Seth's attack on Osiris, whom he let drown (CT 3.261b) is a manifestation of the confusion and disorder he can cause.<sup>335</sup> In other texts, Seth bears the *ḥpš*, a scimitar that signifies strength and can give life or take it.<sup>336</sup>

Another aspect of the text which problematized Horus' claim is his mother; as in the Sumerian texts, there is tension between male and female deities in the realm of masculinity. Although Isis wishes her son to rule, the text frame her in masculine-coded terms. In one of the contentions between Horus and Seth were both appear in the form of a hippopotamus to see who can stay under the water the longest, Isis spears Seth that her son might have the advantage. Hunting hippopotamuses is known to have been a pharaonic activity and the image of the 'harpooner' (*mšnw*) is well attested.<sup>337</sup> Isis enacts the role of king and performs masculinity such that she fundamentally renegotiates both that of Horus and Seth. She has renegotiated Horus's because she has done for him what he was meant to do for himself, and Seth's because he has been speared by a woman, speared with, one could say, Isis's phallus.

In retaliation, Horus decapitates his mother. Since Isis is not a physically phallused deity, Horus's action is a type of castration, one intended to divest her of her masculine attributes. Neal Walls identifies Isis with the phallic mother who interferes in the 'masculine contest' between the two gods.<sup>338</sup> He furthers that Horus asserts his independence from his mother 'by arising in symbolic erection from the water and

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<sup>334</sup> ANET, 15 n. 1.

<sup>335</sup> Henk te Velde, *Seth, God of Confusion: A Study of His Role in Egyptian Mythology and Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 85.

<sup>336</sup> Velde, *Seth*, 87-88.

<sup>337</sup> G. J. Botterweck, 'בהמה', *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1999), 6-20: 18.

<sup>338</sup> Walls, *Desire*, 109.

depriving her of her head, a common phallic symbol'.<sup>339</sup> In typical masculocentric fashion, Horus boasts that the weapon with which he decapitates Isis is six times heavier than the harpoon she used.<sup>340</sup> In other words, Horus's phallus is bigger and heavier than Isis'. The now othered state of Isis, effected through castration, allows Horus to begin his proper subject formation away from the mother. Horus' act directly addresses the problem which Amun-Re puts to the gods at the beginning of the text with regards to Horus's claim to the throne, that is, the inexperience of youthfulness. If there is in fact a reference to a breastfed Horus in Amun-Re's speech, then the decapitation of Isis ensures that the link between Horus and his mother is severed. Horus acts to show Amun-Re, the All Lord, that he is not the proverbial 'mummy's boy'.

The battle of the phalluses is a key component of these contentions and this is nowhere as obvious as it is in the episode that features the rape of Horus by Seth. Rape and war are intricately linked in ancient West Asia,<sup>341</sup> and both are instantiations of a hypermasculinity; Seth's rape of Horus asserts his active nature and makes Horus the passive 'partner'. As Meeks and Favard-Meeks state, same-sex rape signifies lack in the one forced to be submissive and conversely libidinal excess in the rapist.<sup>342</sup>

The contention does not end with Seth's rape of Horus, however, for Horus uses his hand to capture Seth's semen. When Horus informs his mother, Isis cuts off his hand and constructs him another. David F. Greenberg sees Horus' dismemberment as Isis' reaction to Seth's 'contaminating' semen,<sup>343</sup> but in light of the

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<sup>339</sup> Walls, *Desire*, 109.

<sup>340</sup> Walls, *Desire*, 109.

<sup>341</sup> L. Juliana Claassens, 'Like A Woman in Labor: Gender, Postcolonial, Queer, and Trauma Perspectives on the Book of Jeremiah', *Prophecy and Power: Jeremiah in Feminist and Postcolonial Perspective*, ed. Christl M. Maier and Carolyn J. Sharp (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 117-32: 124 n. 25.

<sup>342</sup> Meeks and Favard-Meeks, *Egyptian Gods*, 69.

<sup>343</sup> David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988), 131.

close association in Egyptian iconography between hands and phalluses (the ithyphallic god Min, for example, is pictured with erect phallus and upraised right hand as testament to his virility), Isis' 'castration' of Horus may be preventative; that is, in 'castrating' Horus with her 'weapon',<sup>344</sup> Isis ensures Horus's phallus is not dominated by Seth's semen; the reconstruction of Horus's hand invokes Isis' previous restoration, that of the enduring erection of Osiris. Moreover, when Horus catches Seth's semen, he is akin to the Sumerian goddess Ninhursag who removes the semen from Uttu after Enki rapes her. This act, I argued, masculinized Ninhursag and feminized/degendered Enki, for she seizes control of that which makes Enki the 'Father' and creator. Though Horus is male, in the rape Seth forces him into a position coded as female, so that Horus's action represents the challenge of a 'female' subject to masculine power.

Though Horus poses this challenge to Seth's virility, it is nonetheless Isis who remains the phallicized body. She is the phallic mother who has subsumed into her the paternal phallus and represents the threat of castration to her son, perhaps so that he remains perpetually infantile and she authoritative. That Isis disposes of her son's hand and replaces it with one of her own design reveals her authority over his body, and if the hand/penis association holds, power over his genitalia as well. In this text, Isis is the many-phallused goddess, wielding spears and other weapons to dominate the narrative. Not only does Isis infantilize her son and question his masculinity, but Seth does so as well when he declares that he has 'played the man' with Horus to feminize him (as Isis did with Osiris). One wonders whether the contentions are truly between Horus and Seth, or whether Horus becomes the site of an intersibling dispute between Isis and Seth as to who is the most masculine, fitting the pattern observed in the

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<sup>344</sup> Greenberg, 131.

Sumerian myths of a female deity challenging a male one, although here Isis is the victor, not Seth. Isis' continual involvement in the plot as well as her displays of masculinity, contrasted with Horus's often ineffective actions, make her masculine performances integral to understanding the contest for leadership in the text. Although it is Horus who is set to gain kingship, Horus's ascension to the throne would also ensure Isis' own elevated position. After all, the office of queen mother was known in Egypt as it was in various places in ancient West Asia,<sup>345</sup> including Judah where it was known as גבירה (the same word used in 1 Kgs. 11.19 of Pharaoh's wife).

In retaliation for what Seth did to her son, Isis masturbates Horus to obtain a portion of her son's semen and spreads it onto a lettuce leaf to trick Seth into consuming it. In masturbating her son, Isis again literally takes command of the phallus (since now it is a reconstructed penis) and uses Horus's semen to gain an active position over Seth, who, when he eats the semen-coated lettuce, becomes pregnant thereby conferring upon him, in the context of this mythology at least, a socially inferior female-encoded position.

Isis' actions are used against Seth in the council of the gods. Seth argues that his rape of Horus proves he should receive rulership because he has demonstrated his masculinity and played the man with Horus; Horus denies the claim. To settle the dispute, Thoth, god of wisdom, calls forth the semen of the two gods as a witness to give its own account. Like the blood which 'cries forth' from the ground in Genesis 4.10 as a witness against fratricidal Cain, that the semen is able to articulate itself shows the integral link it has to personhood; it enters the community of speakers present in the myth. When Thoth calls forth the semen, Horus is vindicated as Seth's semen

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<sup>345</sup> Lana Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History*, Boreas 14 (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1986).

emerges from the waters but Horus's comes forth from Seth's body, signalling Horus's claim over his rival; in the act of eating, Seth has had done to him what he did to Horus (though in other versions of this myth, Horus emasculates or damages the testicles of Seth, while Seth blinds Horus with his finger/phallus).<sup>346</sup> There can be no doubt that Horus, despite his youth, shows himself the more masculine and the god more aligned with the life-giving qualities semen embodies which will enable him to perpetually rule over Egypt.

Though the contentions continue, the phallus has been shown to occupy a privileged position; it inscribes masculinity and the space it carves out can be inhabited by any deities irrespective of their bodily anatomy—Isis being the prime example of a goddess who occupies this phallic space. The contention between Horus/Isis and Seth essentially occurs within this phallic arena, as attested by Osiris' reaction when called upon by Thoth to judge the dispute: he reminds the gods that he himself is the source of the 'barley' and 'emmer' which nourish the gods, and asks them why therefore they are 'defrauding' his son Horus from his rightful place.<sup>347</sup> Ultimately Horus triumphs and Isis rejoices offering him a doxology:

Horus has risen as Ruler, life, prosperity, health!  
 The Ennead is in feast, heaven in joy!  
 They take their garlands, seeing Horus, son of Isis  
 Risen as great Ruler of Egypt.  
 The hearts of the Ennead exult,  
 The entire land rejoices  
 As they see Horus, son of Isis  
 Given the office of his father,  
 Osiris, lord of Busiris.<sup>348</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> Meskell and Joyce, *Embodied Lives*, 110.

<sup>347</sup> Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 222.

<sup>348</sup> Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 223.

## Conclusion

The role of the phallus is without equal. In these texts, it is not so much a biologically fixed possession of certain bodies, but is, as stated above, commutable. It is not an object that only male deities have or desire, but is an object which goddesses are also able to engage with and use in its many representational forms, from phallic simulacra to weapons and other masculine-encoded paraphernalia. It is, however, as commutable, open to contestations and this vulnerability requires the phallus to be constantly affirmed, as in the Sumerian myths where the repeated exposure of Enki's penis is a confirmation of phallic integrity.

The purpose of the phallus spans all facets of existence from creation to death and even beyond. The *creation continua* ideology that structure Egyptian mythology ensure that the phallus remains an integral and persistent part of Egyptian society as it is conceived in the myths. In the heavenly realm, the divine penis is responsible for creation, in the hereafter it gives rise to souls (*ba*) and on earth, it upholds the king and his power.

One key facet of the divine penis in these Egyptian mythologies is the way it is presented as the solution to divine or social problems: it united Osiris' fragmented body thereby allowing Isis to conceive and bear Horus who himself is a sign of Pharaonic supremacy; it bestows earthly fertility via the regular inundation of the Nilotic water; and it operates as a sign of judgement and symbol of divine law and justice. Unlike Ugaritic material where there is a tension between the visible and invisible divine penis, in Egyptian mythology it is more explicitly tied to facets of the larger cosmic system and even incorporated as part of the system itself (see, for example, Atum as *benben*, the erection; or his-and-her phallus as the point of creation).

## PART TWO

### BIBLICAL TEXTS

The first part of this thesis concerned portrayals of the divine penis in other ancient West Asian mythologies and identified several key themes:

- (1) Its comparability to the temple in what it represents.
- (2) Its association with royalty, kingship and authority.
- (3) Its role in cosmic creation and order over chaos.
- (4) Its ability to inaugurate gendered division and therefore its function to uphold patriarchy and subjugate female-coded spaces (such as the earth) and persons.
- (5) Its connection to male speech.

The biblical texts I have selected to explore, as outlined in the introduction, were in part chosen because their subjects matters correlated with the themes identified in West Asian mythologies more broadly. Moreover, as the biblical texts chosen are fundamentally grounded in a phallic logic, they will provide a way to compare the phallic ideologies in the biblical texts against its West Asian background.

The first biblical text to be looked at will be Genesis 1-3 because it presents an account of cosmic creation as well as the creation of the first human male/female couple and as such issues of gender and sexuality are prominent. Moreover, the relationship between the humans and deity in Genesis 1-3 is one of resemblance so that one may ask what it means for divinity if gendered and sexual humans are created in the divine image.

The second set of texts comes from the prophets and examines the figure of the זונה ('whore'), which itself, like Genesis 1-3, works within the structural relationship

between God, man and woman in the 'marriage metaphor'. Against the *הוֹרָה*, the text explores what constitutes proper male and female sexuality, human and divine. Following this, I have chosen to focus on Ezekiel 36-37 and Isaiah 6.1-7 (the account, so Eslinger claims, which mentions Yahweh's penis) since both texts, although not centred on the figure of the *הוֹרָה*, nevertheless involve the application of female-coded attributes to male figures, and in this sense mirror the gendered instability of the *הוֹרָה* and provides room to question whether such instability also works in similar ways.

The final set of texts concentrate on those which are not structured by the prophetic marriage metaphor, but which are still grounded in the expectations placed upon the penis. In this instance: urination, circumcision and the loins of Jacob, the first to be called Israel. All highlight the fact that, even without the organization of language around marriage, Yahweh's body is still phallicized and able to impart that phallicization to his people.

## NAKED KNOWLEDGE

### *Adam, Eve and Divine Sexuality in Genesis 1-3*

*God created the human in his own image,  
in the divine image he created it;  
male and female created he them.*

Genesis 1.27

*Yahweh, the Divine One, formed the earthling from the  
soil of the ground,  
and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,  
and the earthling became a living being.*

Genesis 2.7

### **Introduction**

The cornerstone of biblical anthropology so-called is found here in Genesis 1-3. It is convenient to differentiate between the two mythological strands preserved in the text<sup>349</sup>; the first 'Priestly' (P) narrative (Gen. 1.1-2.4a) in which the deity creates humans by divine fiat and according to the divine image (צלם אלהים) and the second, the Yahwist's (J), whose deity Yahweh forms humanity (אדם) with his hands and enlivens them with his breath.

Both strands imply that the human creature is an image or representation of its creator (see epigraphical quotations). This is explicitly stated in Genesis 1.27, while in Genesis 2.7, the verb יצר ('to form') hints at the comparability between human bodies and cult statues also built to embody the divine presence (see the use of יצר in Isa. 44.2, 9, 10, 12, 21 and 24). There is an implication in both passages that the creator deity is likewise embodied, though historically there has been a reticence to explore the gendered/sexual aspects of that body. After all, if gendered and sexual beings are

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<sup>349</sup> Harm Goris, 'No Creation Stories in Holy Scripture: Von Rad's View on the Relationship between Covenant and Creation Revisited', *Strangers and Pilgrims on Earth: Essays in Honour of Abraham van de Beek*, ed. E. Van der Borght and P. van Geest (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 669-682: 676.

made in their creator's image, it is justifiable to question whether the creator is likewise gendered/sexual. If human creatures can reproduce, does the creator also have sexual organs capable of reproduction?

The terms 'man' (אִישׁ־זָכָר) and 'woman' (אִשָּׁה־נְקֵבָה), a general approach to which is found in the methodological section, form the backdrop against which the deity's body will be read. Moreover, to what extent do the relationships Genesis 1-3 posits between the man, woman and God indicate about God's own relationship to sexuality? The connections observed between these three principle actors will also become relevant for the next section on the relationships between Yahweh and Israel, conceived as a collection of Israelite men but also as a wayward woman, and will continue to explore how far maleness is equated with plenitude and femaleness with restriction.

### **Gendered Bodies**

When God (אלהים) creates humankind according to his image, he creates them 'male and female' (זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה). The passage insinuates that to be 'male and female' is the image of God. David Penchansky argues that Genesis 1.26-27 places צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים and זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה in parallel such that one may imagine the deity as possessing both masculine and feminine qualities; this, he writes, is a move against notions in which creation occurs through a divine consort pair. In this monotheistically leaning worldview, this deity can be understood as 'self-fertilizing' because he inhabits male and female positions simultaneously.<sup>350</sup> In this way, perhaps God is like Egyptian Atum who is explicitly named as the divine 'he-and-she', a creator who creates with his-and-herself because his-and-her aloneness in the cosmos makes this necessary.

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<sup>350</sup> Penchansky, *Twilight of the Gods*, 49.

Unlike Penchansky, Phyllis Bird argues that ‘he created them male and female’ should not be taken as an elucidation of Genesis 1.27a-b, but rather belongs to the statement of blessing that follows in Genesis 1.28 in which the benediction to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ necessarily requires the male/female pair.<sup>351</sup> In other words, the phrase ‘says nothing about the image which relates *adam* to God nor about God as referent of the image’.<sup>352</sup> Such an idea, writes Bird, would be antithetical to the ideals of the Priestly writer who, she says, would have regarded the idea of attributing sexuality to God ‘utterly foreign and repugnant’.<sup>353</sup> However, Bird begs the questions and already assumes an asexual/genderless god in her analysis of צלם אלהים in Genesis 1.26-28:

This audacious statement of identification and correspondence, however qualified by terms of approximation, offers no ground for assuming sexual distinction as a characteristic of *adam*, but appears rather to exclude it, *for God [...] is the defining term in the statement*’ (emphasis mine).<sup>354</sup>

The italicized sentence, given as the reason for why sexual distinction does not inhere in אדם, presupposes that God is devoid of sexuality. On what grounds is this assumption based? Bird argues the case on two fronts: firstly, that the Priestly writer maintains the distance between God and humans and thus avoids anthropomorphism for the deity, and secondly, that P uses technical language to differentiate between divine action and its comparable human counterpart (although Bird only offers the use of ברא as an example).<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Bird, ‘Male and Female’, 148.

<sup>352</sup> Bird, ‘Male and Female’, 155.

<sup>353</sup> Bird, ‘Male and Female’, 148.

<sup>354</sup> Bird, ‘Male and Female’, 148.

<sup>355</sup> Bird, ‘Male and Female’, 148.

From where does the idea that the Priestly writer does not impute corporeality to God arise? As stated in the methodology section, the deity performs a number of actions which imply divine embodiment: in Genesis 1.1-2.4a, God speaks (אמר), makes (עשה), sees (ראה), works (מלאכה) and also rests (שבת); in Genesis 17, he appears (ראה) to Abraham (v. 1), speaks (אמר) to him (vv. 1, 3, 9, 15, 19) and then departs (עלה) from him (v. 22); in the P material found in Exodus, God meets (יעד) and speaks (דבר) with people (25.22; 29.42-43), allows certain individuals into his presence (לפני יהוה) (28.30, 35) and promises to dwell (שכן) among the Israelites (29.45-46).

Despite the implications of these verbs, scholars sometimes describe the Yahwist creation account (Gen. 2.4b-24) as (more) anthropomorphic,<sup>356</sup> even though the Yahwistic writer does not, like the Priestly author in Genesis 1.1-2.4a, explicitly mention any of the deity's body parts. In J's account, Yahweh forms (יצר) the human and breathes (נפח) into it (2.7), he plants (נטע) a garden and places (שום) the human there (v. 8), he speaks (אמר) commandments (v. 16), he creates (עשה) a helper for the earthling (v. 18) and he takes (לקח) one of the human's ribs, closes (סגר) its flesh, and from it builds (בנה) a woman (vv. 21-22). Additionally, the presence/absence dichotomy which structures the Priestly notion of God in the above texts is also reflected in J's conception of deity. In P, that God works and then rests, that he appears and then departs, that people can be in his presence and then outside of it, reveals the integral nature of the presence/absence binary. There is a similar binary at play in Genesis 3 when Yahweh walks (הלך) through the Garden of Eden and the man and woman hide (חבא) themselves from his presence (vv. 8-10). Furthermore, Yahweh's question in v. 9, 'Where are you?', exposes the god's limitations; his inability

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<sup>356</sup> Bernard F. Batto, 'The Divine Sovereign: The Image of God in the Priestly Creation Account', *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 143-186: 143; André LaCocque, *The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2006), 22.

to see and know where Adam and his wife are means that he has a bounded space of interaction. This idea of interactive bounded space occurs in both Genesis 17, where God appears before Abraham, and in Exodus's temple ideology by which access to the deity is restricted.

Within Hamori's classification system, Yahweh's walk in the Garden is categorized as 'concrete anthropomorphism',<sup>357</sup> while God's speech-acts in Genesis 1 are 'transcendent anthropomorphism'.<sup>358</sup> To classify the former account as an example of concrete anthropomorphism and the latter as transcendent when neither mentions nor describes divine body parts is hermeneutically suspect. While it is significant that no divine body parts are explicitly mentioned in J's or P's creation narrative, Hamori's stark separation between walking and speaking conveys a certain view about what *counts* towards embodiment, about what is privileged in our notions of what constitutes bodies. Is walking (הלך) concrete because it is visually observable, unlike spoken words? Or perhaps it is space that shapes our understanding of bodies, such that a walking body demonstrates spatiality in a manner that speech seemingly does not.

The setting of the two creation narratives may also play a part in how materiality is accorded to the two authors. The Yahwist's, for example, is often viewed in terms that picture his account as 'earthy', while the Priestly writer's version is considered more aloof and cosmic (even though ארץ, earth/land, is the central theme of Genesis 1.1-2.4a). A corollary of this distinction is how their respective theologies are characterized: historically, the Yahwist has been understood as intellectually inferior ('primitive') in comparison to the Priestly writer, whose theology is taken as

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<sup>357</sup> Esther Hamori, *'When Gods Were Men': The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 28.

<sup>358</sup> Hamori, *'When Gods Were Men'*, 32.

transcendent and more universal. In writing of anthropomorphism in the Hebrew Bible, Ludwig Köhler argues that on the whole there is not much disparity between the anthropomorphisms in one part of the Bible than another.<sup>359</sup> However, where Köhler does find a substantial difference is between the Yahwist and the so-called Elohist, where the Yahwist ‘speaks of actual visible appearances of God’ but the Elohist restricts himself to ‘appearances in the night and in a dream’.<sup>360</sup> This apparent contrast leads Köhler to conclude that the Elohist is more ‘refined’ and more ‘profound’ theologically.<sup>361</sup>

If one is open to questioning this division between P and J as regards their discourses on materiality, and if one accepts the morphism suggested by the verbs in both accounts, then the question of God’s gender and sexuality become relevant for each one. It is not the case that one can simply dismiss implications of anthropomorphism in P based on our inherited ideas about who the Priestly writer is and what his concerns are. If the reason for the exclusion of Genesis 1.27c (the creation of male and female  $\text{אָדָם}$ ) from definitions of the divine image is rendered problematic, where should our reassessment start?

Paul Niskanen begins with an analysis of the grammar and tripartite structure of Genesis 1.27 and concludes, contra Bird, that v. 27c is neither a reiteration of v. 27a nor the introduction of a new theme,<sup>362</sup> rather the third colon ‘stands at the very crux of its (the image of God’s) interpretation’.<sup>363</sup> If notions of P’s aversion to divine

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<sup>359</sup> Ludwig Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. A. S. Todd (Cambridge: James Clark Co., Ltd., 2002), 24.

<sup>360</sup> Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, 24.

<sup>361</sup> Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, 24.

<sup>362</sup> Paul Niskanen, ‘The Poetics of Adam: The Creation of  $\text{אָדָם}$  in the Image of  $\text{אלהים}$ ’, *JBL* 128.3 (2009), 417-36: 423-24.

<sup>363</sup> Niskanen, ‘The Poetics of Adam’, 424.

corporeality are rightly regarded as suspect, the similarity between God and humans denoted by צלם and דמות ('likeness') can move beyond exegeses that regard this semblance metaphorically or nonliterally. Carly Crouch, for example, writes about the image in Genesis 1.26-28 as a way for the biblical writer to articulate the parental relationship between God and humanity. However, she explicitly rejects any literal interpretation of this relationship,<sup>364</sup> instead arguing that its purpose is to 'evoke the responsibilities of child to parent and of parent to child in the minds of its readers'.<sup>365</sup> Even Paul Niskanen, who connects the צלם to the deity and procreation, because 'it is God who creates and brings forth life',<sup>366</sup> shies away from the more material implications of the phrase:

Just as no one would identify human dominion with divine, so too one should not ascribe too much to the comparison the Priestly writer suggests in referring to human gender and procreation.<sup>367</sup>

How much is 'too much'? And how much of the divine צלם are we permitted to gaze at? Niskanen points out that the association between the image and human sexuality occurs again in Genesis 5.1-2 in which Adam begets a son after his own image (כצלם). For Niskanen, that the connection between image and sexuality only occurs in these Genesis texts and not in any other extant ancient West Asian material suggests that this is a 'unique insight'.<sup>368</sup> If this is a unique insight and no other West Asian material connects the divine image to human sexuality, then this should strengthen the bond between the image and sexuality. Indeed, the thrice-repeated verb ברא in Genesis 1.27 underlines the importance of this declaration and signifies the cohesion of all

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<sup>364</sup> Carly Crouch, 'Genesis 1:26-27 as a Statement of Humanity's Divine Parentage', *Journal of Theological Studies* 61 (2010), 1-15: 1 n. 1.

<sup>365</sup> Crouch, 'Genesis 1:26-7', 1.

<sup>366</sup> Niskanen, 'The Poetics of Adam', 432.

<sup>367</sup> Niskanen, 'The Poetics of Adam', 434.

<sup>368</sup> Niskanen, 'The Poetics of Adam', 433.

three cola as a unit. While זכר and נקבה are terms also used of animals in the Hebrew Bible, it is significant, as Niskanen argues, that animals are not gendered as humans are in Genesis 1, thus emphasizing the association between creation in the image and creation of אדם as male and female.

Many interpretations of the צלם rely on the now standard idea that the Priestly writers borrows from royal and cultic ideologies to construct his theology of image,<sup>369</sup> such that the image designates humanity's right to rule and subdue the earth. One might also ask, given the cohesion of the statements in Genesis 1.27 indicating that image and gender/sexuality are bound up in one another, whether the phrase זכר ונקבה can be seen as the assertion of humanity's right to rule and subdue as well. In other words, is gender integral not only to reproduction *but also to dominion*? And if so, does the same apply for divine beings as it does mortals?

Tablets from the vicinity of Emar published by John Huehnergard contain texts which deal with issues of inheritance that may provide a new way to understand the Priestly writer's creation account. Tablets 1, 2, and 3 describe the dispositions of the estates of three men: Zikri-Dagan, Muzaza and the son of Yašur-Dagan. In both tablets 1 and 2, the phrase MUNUS ù NITAḤ ('female and male') describes the men's daughters:

*ú-na-ra* DUMU.MUNUS-*ia*  
*a-na* MUNUS ù NITAḤ *aš-ku-un-ši*

(Tablet 1, lines 6-7)

*al-ḥa-ti* DUMU.MUNUS-*ia*  
*a-na* MUNUS ù NITAḤ *aš-ku-un-ši*

(Tablet 2, lines 9-10)

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<sup>369</sup> Batto, 'The Divine Sovereign', 179-85.

In these texts, Unara and Alhati are established (*škn*) as female and male, an assignment that Huehnergard calls a 'legal fiction',<sup>370</sup> one designed to assure the financial stability of the daughter upon her father's death. Z. Ben-Barak argues the phrase is a hendiadys by which male privileges are given to the daughters allowing them to receive familial patrimony.<sup>371</sup> In both the second and third tablets, the men's wives are established as 'father and mother' (*a-bi ù AMA*) so that they, rather than their sons, will assume control of the estates after the death of their husbands.<sup>372</sup>

If זכר ונקבה in Genesis 1 can be read similarly as hendiadys, what does it imply about the human creature(s) God has created (ברא)? If it is a matter of inheritance, of obtaining one's rightful place in the created order (cf. Deut. 32.8-9), then the creation of האדם as male and female, given the tension between the singular (אתו, him/it) and plural (אתם, them) to describe the אדם creature, might insinuate what many other biblical scholars have suggested: a bi/multigender Adam. Yet my concern here is not about a so-called 'hermaphrodite'<sup>373</sup> earthling who is later split into individual male and female persons, but rather identity as a means of dominion. If *MUNUS ù NITAḤ* functions to fictivize gender (and fictionality does not equate to unreality)<sup>374</sup> for those who are daughters or mothers such that this fictionality has material repercussions in familial structure, then maybe the same applies with regards to the gender(s) of האדם. That is to say, the multigender identity of האדם permits the human creature access to

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<sup>370</sup> John Huehnergard, 'Five Tablets from the Vicinity of Emar', *Revue d'Assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* 77.1 (1983), 11-43: 27.

<sup>371</sup> Z. Ben-Barak, 'The Legal Status of the Daughter as Heir in Nuzi and Emar', *Society and Economy in the Eastern Mediterranean (c. 1500-1000 B.C.): Proceedings of the International Symposium Held at the University of Haifa from the 28th of April to the 2nd of May 1985*, ed. M. Heltzer and E. Lipiński (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1988), 87-98: 93-94.

<sup>372</sup> Huehnergard, 'Five Tablets from the Vicinity of Emar', 27.

<sup>373</sup> Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 19 n. 11.

<sup>374</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xv.

everything that is in the purview of both זכר and נקבה, or of everything that pertains to the spectrum disclosed by this arguably meristic pair.<sup>375</sup>

If the dominion of האדם relies on this multilayered access, then perhaps this may explain the presence of chief deities in ancient West Asia who are described, according to Johannes C. de Moor, as both mother and father.<sup>376</sup> In the Ugaritic text KTU 1.23, El may be addressed by two women as both mother and father, and in Egypt, as noted, the creator deity Atum identifies as the divine 'he-and-she'. There are also powerful goddesses who display a gendered duality through their actions or by what they wear; the Sumerian deity Inana, for example, says:

When I sit in the alehouse, *I am a woman, and I am an exuberant young man*. When I am present at a place of quarrelling, I am a woman, a figurine brought to life. When I sit by the gate of the tavern, I am a prostitute familiar with the penis; *the friend of a man, the girlfriend of a woman*. (ECTSL 4.07.9, lines 16-22; emphasis mine).

Inana's fluidity is an attribute that she can extend to others as well:

Inana was entrusted by Enlil and Ninlil with the capacity [...] *to turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man, to change one into the other*, to make young women dress as men on their right side, to make young men dress as women on their left side, to put spindles into the hands of men [...] and to give weapons to the women (ECTSL 2.5.4.11, lines 19-24; emphasis mine).

The goddess Anat from Ugarit is another deity who crosses the demarcations between male and female. In the Ugaritic legend of Aqhat (KTU 1.17-19), the goddess covets the bow of the eponymous hero, but when she asks for it, Aqhat replies: 'bows are for

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<sup>375</sup> Margaret Moers Wenig, 'Male and Female God Created Them: *Parashat Bereshit* (Genesis 1:1-6:8)', *Torah Queeries: Weekly Commentaries on the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Gregg Drinkwater, Joshua Lesser and David Shneer (New York; London: New York University, 2009), 11-18: 16.

<sup>376</sup> Johannes C. de Moor, 'Duality in God and Man: Gen. 1:26-27 as P's Interpretation of the Yahwistic Creation Account', *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel: Papers Read at the Tenth Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and Het Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België, Held at Oxford, 1997*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 112-25: 123.

warriors (*mhrm*)—do women ever hunt?’ (1.17 VI 39-40).<sup>377</sup> Anat’s masculine warriorlike status is further exemplified in the scene of KTU 1.3 II 11-15:

She binds heads to her waist,  
and girds palms around her belt;  
She plunges her knees into the blood of guardians (*dmr*),  
and her limbs into the innards of warriors (*mhrm*).

Here Anat lays low the *mhrm*, the warriors, who are directly contrasted to women (*tintt*) in *Aqhat*; in other words, Anat excels in her masculinity and surpasses even that of those who are meant to delineate the boundaries of masculinity itself. In KTU 1.3 II 11-15, the goddess Anat fragments the male body and attaches various parts of it (notably the extremities) to her own person, resulting in a liminal body comprised of both male and female.

The masculine-encoded warrior state of Anat is further suggested by an Egyptian text (Chester Beatty VII) which states she ‘acts like a warrior [and] wears a skirt like men and a sash like women’.<sup>378</sup> This mixture of what is appropriate to men and what is appropriate to women reflects the predilection to imagine the divine as composite, such as the sphinxlike cherubs who transgress the boundaries between human and animal (cf. Ezek. 10.14). Compositeness and ambiguity are defining features of the Kristevan notion of abjection,<sup>379</sup> properties by which subjects are held outside the realm of the viable because there is in the composite a collapse of the distinction between ‘subject’ and ‘object’, an indefinability. This applies especially so to gender, the system through which human lives are even made intelligible to society.

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<sup>377</sup> Michael D. Coogan and Mark S. Smith, *Stories from Ancient Canaan* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 42.

<sup>378</sup> J. van Dijk, ‘Anat, Seth and the Seed of Prē’, *Scripta Signa Vocis: Studies about Scripts, Scriptures, Scribes and Languages in the Near East, Presented to J. H. Hospers by His Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. H. L. J. Vanstiphout, K. Jongeling, F. Leemhuis, G. J. Reinink (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1986), 31-51: 33.

<sup>379</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University, 1982), 4.

Prohibitions on same-gender sexual behaviour (Lev. 18.22; 20.18) and wearing garments or objects 'inappropriate' to one's gender (Deut. 22.5), which are both an 'abomination' (תועבה), are examples of the blurring of distinction and the collapse of the boundary between self and other. In divinity, however, this collapse is the very thing that renders deities (and certain humans, as I shall explore) holy and powerful, that which can provoke awe, fear and reverence from human worshippers.

In the Priestly text, therefore, it is not unwarranted to read both אלהים and אדם as gendercrossed, plural beings (note the tension in pronouns used for אדם and the divine 'we' who creates) who are presented as such to signify their dominion. It is noteworthy, as Niskanen argues, that Genesis 1.1-2.4 does not mention the creation of animals in a gendered manner; in doing so, the emphasis rests firmly on the male/female gendering of humanity and, by extension, divinity to signal their power.

A similar tension exists in the Yahwist's narrative as well, for even though woman is taken from man, an act which already complicates the gendered scene as far as it reverses the seemingly 'natural' birthing order, the Yahwist authors adds in Genesis 2.24 that אשה and איש are to be 'one flesh' (בשר יחד), a phrase understood to denote the sexual union of man and woman. Yet this union is not to be taken as the desire for the two persons to reunify into the original androgynous state that they erstwhile had existed in, as de Moor argues.<sup>380</sup> While the Priestly source mentions the creation as אדם as 'male and female', the Yahwist does not; it is not until the declaration by אדם in Genesis 2.23 that man (איש) and woman (אשה) enter the narrative:

And the human being (האדם) said:  
     This one (זאת) is now bone of my bones,  
         and flesh (בשר) from my flesh.  
 She (זאת) shall be called woman (אשה),  
     for from man (איש) she (זאת) has been taken.

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<sup>380</sup> De Moor, 'Duality in God and Man', 119-21.

Although one might argue that the human's declaration already presupposes the identification of אדם and איש, it is noteworthy that the creature's announcement in this passage introduces the two gendered terms איש and אשה simultaneously, such that it is impossible to tell at which point in J's narratives the אדם-creature is supposedly already איש. The absence of these gendered terms from the Yahwistic narrative until Genesis 2.23, arguably the denouement, serves to accentuate their appearance in this passage; at the point the human speaks in v. 23, there are two bodies—an already-existing bifurcation—and it is Adam's speech which formally brings man and woman into narrative existence.

בשר is perhaps the closest word we have in Biblical Hebrew that corresponds to our notion of the body.<sup>381</sup> If this is the case, then what Genesis 2.24 represents is more than the sexual unification of man and woman; it is the creation of a 'fictional' body, an ideological skin that enshrouds the two persons, like the fictivized genders mentioned in West Asian texts above. It is possible then that this fictional body works in the same way as the one in Genesis 1.1-2.4a: as a means to assert dominance.

What is noteworthy in J's account, in contrast to P's, is that the Yahwist does not include a statement which implies an explicitly direct correspondence between God and humankind in terms of form or image. Unlike Genesis 1.26-28, which does not exclude the possibility of a gendered deity, the Yahwist's narrative appears to focus on the man/woman pair at the expense of (or to conceal) any overtly gendered language for the deity. While J does use the verb יצר ('to form'), a verb used in Deutero-Isaiah to describe the creation of a divine cult statue (44.9-10, 12), when he writes about the formation of אדם, there is no reference to the image in which אדם as cult

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<sup>381</sup> Løland, *Silent or Salient Gender*, 71.

statue is built (in contrast to Gen. 1.26-28). After all, J again uses יצר of the animals, who are also living beings (נפש חיה) Yahweh forms from the ground (Gen. 2.19). For the Yahwist, all living creatures that he makes are infused with the breath of life (Gen. 6.17; 7.15, 22; 8.21).

The Yahwist's statement in Genesis 3.22, on the other hand, that the earthling has become like 'one of [the gods]' (כיחד ממנו), does provide the reader with a point of contact between humans and divinity: לידע טוב ורע, to know good and bad, and hints that it is knowledge which is the means of dominion in this narrative. The use of the verb ידע ('to know') can be read in an erotic way, as a reference to the sexual awakening of both the man and the woman to the other. The implication of Genesis 3.22, with its statement that humanity tends towards divinity in this act of 'knowing', is that divine beings themselves are sexual subjects.

### **Sexual Bodies**

When the primal human pair eat from the tree of knowledge of good and bad, an action that the serpent frames as threatening to God because God wishes to safeguard his own divine knowledge, their initial experience of awareness is of their own nakedness (Gen. 3.7). This is the first use of ידע attributed to humans in Genesis; the second is Genesis 4.1, 'and knew האדם (ידע) Eve his wife and she became pregnant...' If in 4.1, the concept of knowledge is directly associated with sexual activity, then it is imaginable that 3.7 is a statement of the man and woman's sexual exploration of their own bodies—an awareness that they are, in fact, sexual creatures.

Yahweh's statement about humanity's likeness to God does not occur until after the couple have sexually perceived their own forms *but also not until* Yahweh clothes them (Gen. 3.21-22). If the act of veiling renders the pair like gods, what makes the

act good in itself? Perhaps like Yahweh, it is incumbent upon a sexual subject to veil themselves that they might safeguard their knowledge; that is, the knowledge by which a body can even become knowable. For the Yahwist, knowability may be mediated through encounters with (other, sexual) bodies.

That to be *knowingly* uncovered is problematic is demonstrated by the depiction of the serpent (נחש) who, in Genesis 3.1, is described as ‘more ערום than any field animal’. Though ערום is generally rendered ‘crafty’, others have noted that it puns with the word for nakedness (ערום).<sup>382</sup> The serpent’s craftiness is bound up with its nakedness and it can be no coincidence that the creature appears to have access to knowledge that has not elsewhere been revealed in the narrative (Gen. 3.5). The Yahwist’s use of זרע (‘seed’, ‘offspring’) in relation to the serpent (Gen. 3.15) means there are at least three sexual characters in his account: the man, the woman and the serpent.

The question that deserves more exploration is that of Yahweh’s body and whether it too is sexual. If so, how does this body interact with the other sexual bodies in the narrative and what exactly do these interactions tell us about the expectations the author and his community have of their deity.

The position of the man in the narrative accentuates the masculine character of Yahweh, but, at the same time, he fails to live up to the masculinity required of his status as אִישׁ. There are occasions in the text which present both אדם and the אִישׁ in socially feminine positions, but this is not problematic for the author. For instance, the birth of Eve situates אדם, the one who becomes אִישׁ, as a birthing male, in turn making Yahweh the one who plays the midwife (cf. Ps. 22.9-10); however, such gendered

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<sup>382</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1990), 187; Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus*, 89.

plenitude is not unexpected considering similar motifs involving other West Asian deities.

Yahweh's removal of Eve from אדם may be read as the extraction and transformation of the earthling's womb. Augustine also writes about Adam's womb (*uterus*) as the place from which 'flows the salt sea-water which the turbulent human race'.<sup>383</sup> As in Biblical Hebrew, the Latin *uterus* need not be gender specific; it can refer to the 'abdominal cavity in general',<sup>384</sup> just like the Hebrew בטן. Yet, as with Augustine's statement that locates the history of human progeny in Adam's *uterus*, what becomes of Eve in Genesis 3.20, that is, her naming as Mother of All Life (אם כל-חי), hints at a similarity with Adam's body. Before the separation of אדם into איש and אשה, there lodged within the human creature this wombed potential, and it is in the separation of אדם from that which connotes motherhood that its existence as איש begins. The traditional equation of woman with lack (i.e., of penis) is here reversed; it is the איש who is born from/into lack, while woman is the possessor of life.

Nevertheless, as noted in the methodology section, this lack is not inherently a problem, whereas Eve's link to motherhood constrains her outlook and potential to the material outworking of her body. On the other hand, the lack that Adam has is what permits him to display socially gendered plurality since he is able to fill this lack with the femininity represented by Eve and not change his essential form or obstruct his access to masculinity (in fact, he returns to the predivided, plural state of אדם). Eve, however, is whole after her extraction from אדם and the enactment of masculinity is fundamentally an addition and thus augmentation of *who* she is and *how* her body is.

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<sup>383</sup> E. G. Clark, 'Adam's Womb (Augustine, *Confessions* 13.28) and the Salty Sea', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 42 (1997), 89-105: 90.

<sup>384</sup> E. G. Clark, 'Adam's Womb', 90.

For Adam, the problem emerges when he enacts femininity at the expense of masculinity or fails to keep his position over Eve.

When Yahweh banishes the man (but not explicitly the woman) from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3.23-24), the writer uses the two verbs שלח and גרש, both technical terms for divorce in other parts of the Hebrew Bible (Lev. 21.7, 14; 22.13; Deut. 22.19, 29; 24.1; Jer. 3.1; Mal. 2.15).<sup>385</sup> Again, though this portrays Adam in a socially feminine position as Yahweh's wife, it is not in itself problematic. The application of these two marriage-related terms does mean that the relationship between God and the man can be framed sexually. Eilberg-Schwartz cites the rabbinic *Genesis Rabbah* to show that this imagery is not at all foreign to the interpretative history of the passage.

In the passage he cites (*Gen. Rab.* 19.10), R. Levi narrates a story in which a snake-charmer's wife lives a happy and fulfilled life married to her husband; the only limitation placed on her is that she not open a particular casket which, her husband tells her, is full of snakes and scorpions. Convinced by another woman, however, that her husband is in fact trying to hide his 'finery' from her, she reaches into the casket and gets bitten by snakes. When her husband finds out, R. Levi compares his response to the question God asks Adam, 'Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' (Gen. 3.11).<sup>386</sup>

One might have assumed that the wife mentioned was Eve, the first to reach for the fruit, yet the biblical passage to which R. Levi alludes demonstrates that, in this scenario, the wife is Adam. In the Genesis account, the question asked of Adam is proof of the man's inability to live up to the ideals of masculinity, for even though it is

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<sup>385</sup> Raymond Westbrook, 'The Female Slave', *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, Tikva Frymer-Kensky (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 214-38: 235.

<sup>386</sup> H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis* (London: Soncino, 1961), 156.

the woman who reaches for the fruit, Yahweh assumes that the responsibility properly rests with the man, who has clearly failed to safeguard himself and his wife. Moreover, the man's immediate reaction to God's question is to blame his wife, with apparently no regard for the responsibilities expected of him. In fact, that the man remains silent in Genesis 3 until he levels accusations against his wife (3.10-12) reveals the demasculinization of the male creature, whereas Eve, on the other hand, is an acting, speaking subject in chapter 3, who takes for herself the masculine prerogative of speech. In short, Adam's articulative lack and Eve's prominent position in Genesis 3.1-12, like Genesis 2.24, represent a reversal of expected roles. If Adam and Eve are sexually ambiguous characters in that what one expects of them in this regard is questioned and deconstructed by the text itself, what does this mean for Yahweh, who creates and interacts with them both?

In her discussion of 'homosociality', Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that women are necessary as a third term to ensure the formation and stability of male-male relationships,<sup>387</sup> at least of the heterosexual variety. These type of relationships, according to Sedgwick, solidify and promote patriarchy and its various operations. For Yahweh and Adam, who may be understood to occupy the position of the deity's wife, אשה is not only the womb that allows איש to propagate אדם-kind, but in this capacity, she is also a surrogate mother for Yahweh and Adam as a homosocial male pair. It is Eve's presence that allows Yahweh and Adam to exist and continue as such a couple and it is because of her that the writer can use שלח and גרש to describe the expulsion of Adam from the Garden of Eden, Yahweh's abode. Note that the writer does not

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<sup>387</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University, 1985), 25-26.

mention either *אֵשֶׁת* or *חַוָּה* ('Eve') along with the man when Yahweh casts him out; either Eve is not accorded enough personhood to warrant mention because, under her husband's authority, she is a means to an end (she exists *for* Adam, cf. Gen. 2.18), or she is not formally a part of the relationship between Yahweh and Adam.

The rupture in this homosocial relationship occurs precisely at the moment that the patriarchal structure is challenged and Adam neglects to act in a way that maintains masculine dominance. The punishment meted out to Adam and Eve are intended to rectify the situation and reassert the rule of the divine male. In Genesis 3.16, Yahweh tells the woman that her 'desire' (*תְּשׁוּקָה*) will be (re)oriented towards her husband; queer readings are often quick to notice how heterosexuality in this passage appears to be a postlapsarian imposition as imposed to a foreordained mode of being in nascent human society. To put it another way, this reading suggests heteronormativity/compulsory heterosexuality is a result of 'the Fall', thus a punishment, rather than an original blessing; Ken Stone draws our attention to this very point:

It is a striking fact, for example, and one too often ignored, that the first reference to female heterosexual desire in the Bible appears in God's description of the negative consequences of Eve's transgression.<sup>388</sup>

Another reading of Genesis 3.16 is that Yahweh's utterance *presupposes* desire in the same way that it appears to presuppose Adam and Eve's ability to reproduce in the prelapsarian world. Childbirth is not seen as a new process instituted only in the transgression of the cosmic pair, but rather the punishment augments it such that it becomes an arduous and sorrowful (*עֲצִיבוֹן*) task. In this way, it parallels Adam who is

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<sup>388</sup> Ken Stone, 'Bibles That Matter: Biblical Theology and Queer Performativity', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 38 (2008), 14-25: 23.

likewise condemned to laborious tasks and the sorrow (עצבון) that attends them (Gen. 3.17-19, 23).

Yahweh creates the man to 'work and guard' the land (Gen. 2.15) and his expulsion from Eden reframes this activity; before the גרש, the divorce, Adam occupies the place of many ancient West Asian kings in that he is the gardener of the gods, a decidedly royal occupation.<sup>389</sup> Afterwards, his agrarian duties are curtailed and henceforth he must 'scratch a living' (NLT) from the earth.<sup>390</sup> It must be noted that although the woman's desire is (re)oriented, there is no similar commandment or suggestion in the text that Adam need have desire towards Eve. The woman's punishment that she (re)desire her husband works to keep her in what is considered her rightful and appropriate place. Yahweh is invested in the male-male relationship between him and Adam such that Adam's desire for Eve is not required or simply of little consequence.

The divorce between Adam and Yahweh, in which Adam loses access to the privileges of his relationship with Yahweh, suggests that Adam has violated both a feminine position relative to Yahweh and a masculine one relative to Eve. In listening to Eve, Adam forfeits a masculine role in that he is meant to be hierarchically superior and she his 'helper' (Gen. 2.18) and, since he has obeyed the words of another (that is, not remained faithful), he disrupts the socially feminine position he inhabits for Yahweh. His actions have compromised the fullness or plenitude exhibited by the original אדם creature from whom he takes his existence.

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<sup>389</sup> Francesca Stavrakopoulou, 'Tree-Hogging in Eden: Divine Restriction and Royal Rejection in Genesis 2-3', *Theology and Human Flourishing: Essays in Honor of Timothy J. Goringe*, ed. Mike Higton, Jeremy Law, Christopher Rowland (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 41-53: 43-48.

<sup>390</sup> On the meaning of לאבד in Genesis 2.23, see Nicolas Wyatt, "Supposing Him to Be the Gardener" (John 20,15): A Study of the Paradise Motif in John', *ZNW* 81 (2009), 21-38, in which he argues the prepositional ל should be understood to denote Adam's move away from the tilling which had been assigned to him in the Garden.

After Adam and Eve leave Eden, the man ‘knows’ (יָדַע) the woman and she conceives and bears a son, Cain (קַיִן); she proclaims, ‘I have procreated (קָנָה) a man with Yahweh (אֶת־יְהוָה)’ (Gen. 4.1b). David Bokovoy calls this passage ‘one of the most controversial verses in the biblical account of prehistory’,<sup>391</sup> and one need hardly wonder why when this verse presents the possibility that Yahweh is the biological father of Cain (though this interpretation is explicitly rejected by Bokovoy).

In an effort to ameliorate the implications of this passage and to dissuade the reader from understanding Genesis 4.1 in a sexual manner, many English Bible translations render the prepositional phrase אֶת־יְהוָה (‘with Yahweh’) in a manner that suggests Yahweh is a secondary auxiliary cause of Eve’s pregnancy:

‘I have produced a man with help of the LORD’ (NRSV)

‘With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man’ (NIV)

‘With the LORD’s help, I have produced a man!’ (NLT)

‘I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD’ (ESV)

‘I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD’ (NASB)

In each of these translations, the use of the word ‘help’ reveals that these translators are willing to admit that *in some sense* Yahweh is involved in the procreative process, but do not go as far as implying sexual congress between Yahweh and the woman. Even Bokovoy, who argues for a procreative understanding of קָנָה writes that it is ‘obvious’ that Yahweh does not have intercourse with Eve, but rather that ‘from a

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<sup>391</sup> David Bokovoy, ‘Did Eve Acquire, Create, or Procreate with Yahweh? A Grammatical and Contextual Reassessment of קָנָה in Genesis 4:1’, VT 63 (2013), 19-35: 19.

theological perspective, the deity certainly had a mysterious, albeit direct divine role to play in the first act of human procreation'.<sup>392</sup> Bokovoy discusses how the text of Genesis may position Eve as a goddess figure,<sup>393</sup> but does not provide sufficient reasons, if Genesis 4.1b is an 'earlier form of the Cain myth' in which the deities Yahweh and Eve engender 'man' (אִישׁ),<sup>394</sup> for why it is 'obvious' the Yahwist does not understand his appropriation of these words in an equally sexual manner. Perhaps the reapropriation of these words by Eve suggests something particular about the identity of Adam as much as it does about Yahweh.

In Genesis 2.7, Yahweh creates the first human creature in an act that resembles many West Asian theologies of cult statues; for example, the enlivening of the clay statue in 2.7b by divine breath parallels in some ways the Babylonian rituals of *mīs pî* and *pî pî*, the Washing- and Opening-of-the-Mouth ceremonies, in which a statue is 'recreate[d] ritually [...] as the god'.<sup>395</sup> Michael Dick notes that the Washing of the Mouth ritual may be so called because it alludes to 'the action of the midwife to cleanse and open the breathing passage of the newborn at birth'.<sup>396</sup> The actions of Yahweh in Genesis 2.7, therefore, reveal a deity who himself engages in ritual activity to create a (re)presentation of himself in the world.<sup>397</sup>

If Adam is a manifestation, or extension, of the deity, then he is not unlike kings in West Asia who are themselves depicted and written as gods or godlike.<sup>398</sup> In the

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<sup>392</sup> Bokovoy, 'Did Eve Acquire, Create, or Procreate with Yahweh?', 33.

<sup>393</sup> Bokovoy, *Yahweh as a Sexual Deity in J's Prehistory* (PhD diss., Bradeis University, 2012), 258-262.

<sup>394</sup> Bokovoy, *Yahweh as a Sexual Deity*, 261.

<sup>395</sup> Michael B. Dick, 'The Mesopotamian Cult Statue: A Sacramental Encounter with Divinity', *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Neal H. Walls (Boston: ASOR, 2005), 43-68: 60-61.

<sup>396</sup> Dick, 'The Mesopotamian Cult Statue', 61.

<sup>397</sup> See further Stephen L. Herring, *Divine Substitution: Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

<sup>398</sup> Tallay Ornan, 'The Godlike Semblance of a King: The Case of Sennacherib's Rock Reliefs', *Ancient Near Eastern Art in Context: Studies in Honor of Irene J. Winter by Her Students*, ed. Jack Cheng and Marian H. Feldman (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007), 161-178; Tallay Ornan, 'A Silent

Hebrew Bible, for example, King Solomon sits on the throne of Yahweh (כִּסֵּי יְהוָה) (1 Chr. 29.23), and by doing so, Yahweh ‘exalts’ (גָּדַל) him and bestows the glory of kingship (הוֹד מְלִיכוּת) upon him. In Psalm 2, the royal figure described by the author is both begotten by the deity (v. 7), and thus his son, and set upon Mount Zion (v. 6), the dwelling place of God(s). Moreover, the author of Psalm 45 calls the king by the divine epithet אֱלֹהִים (v. 6),<sup>399</sup> a unique occurrence in the Hebrew Bible as this title is nowhere else applied to the king without qualification. In 2 Samuel 14.17, for instance, King David is described as ‘like an angel of God’ (כְּמַלְאֲךְ הָאֱלֹהִים) in his discernment of good and bad (הַטוֹב וְהָרַע), calling to mind Yahweh’s statement that Adam and Eve had become like ‘one of the [gods]’ (כְּאֶחָד מִמְּנוֹ) in their own knowledge (Gen. 3.22).

What does this mean for Eve’s statement in Genesis 4.1b? If the imagery does derive from an older Israelite creation tradition, then Yahweh is indeed a sexual deity; the question, however, is whether the verse retains its heritage in its present context. In arguing that Adam is written as a royal figure,<sup>400</sup> albeit one who fails, I suggest that, like other kings in West Asia, he acts as an agency of the divine. In this way, Eve’s statement in 4.1b reflects the phenomenon found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in which intercessory creatures manifest the appearance and authority of the one on whose behalf they are sent. The מַלְאֲךְ יְהוָה, for instance, has the name of Yahweh

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Message: Godlike Kings in Mesopotamian Art’, ed. B. Brown and M. H. Feldman (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 569-595; Irene J. Winter, ‘Touched by the Gods: Visual Evidence for the Divine State of Rulers in the Ancient Near East’, *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond*, ed. Nicole Brisch (Chicago; Illinois: The Oriental Institute, 2012), 75-101; Paul John Frandsen, ‘Aspects of Kingship in Ancient Egypt’, *Religion and Power*, 47-73.

<sup>399</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 28-29. Though note M. Dahood’s translation, ‘The eternal and everlasting God has enthroned you’, *Psalms, vol. I* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 273.

<sup>400</sup> See further Walter Brueggemann, ‘From Dust to Kingship’, *ZAW* 84 (1972), 1-18.

within him (Exod. 23.21), while the מלאך האלהים, the messenger of the gods, announces himself as the God of Beth-El (האל בית-אל) in Genesis 31.13.

In this sense, Yahweh's sexuality is implied insofar as Adam is a sexual creature as well. As regards previous iterations of this mythology, I concur with Bokovoy that the text of Genesis 4.1 reflects an older and more overtly sexual portrayal of the Israelite deity, but I disagree that it has necessarily lost this sexual force in view of the role אדם plays as a Yahwistic royal cult image. In other words, in Genesis 4.1, האדם ('the man') is Adam *and* Yahweh, or Adam in his capacity as Yahweh's earthly, sexual manifestation.

In either case, Yahweh maintains more of an active role in Eve's family than Adam does after the expulsion from Eden. In fact, after Adam names the woman 'Eve' (Gen. 3.20), he speaks no more. Eve credits Yahweh with both the births of Cain and Seth, while Yahweh is the one who intervenes in the dispute between Cain and Abel and not Adam, who does not comment on his sons' activities. One wonders whether, in its present context, the (implied) reference to Yahweh's sexual liaison with Eve works because Adam cannot offer Eve the masculinity she needs and hence Yahweh must take on that role. Indeed, while Eve's presence lets Yahweh and Adam exist as a homosocial pair, by which Adam can enact the expectations the phallus brings to bear upon a subject, Adam fails and jeopardizes his position in this phallic economy. He submits to the one who is created to be his helper (עזר) and fractures the patriarchal bond which upholds the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, Adam's actions upset the balance between divine and human sexuality and the relationship between them. The awareness (עדי) that they are naked is the first experience Adam and Eve have of their newfound knowledge, an experience which leads them to fashion coverings for their

loins (Gen. 3.7). It is in Genesis 3.21-22 when Yahweh clothes the couple completely that Adam's body (and only the man's) is transformed into one like the gods' (v. 22).

As I argued earlier, knowability, for the Yahwist, is mediated by encounters with and experiences of other sexual bodies. The naked bodies of Adam and Eve ensure that Yahweh can gaze upon and know them; the hiddenness of the body, on the other hand, occludes Yahweh's ability to know the humans and indeed this may be one of the reasons Adam's expulsion from the Garden is framed in terms of גרש, divorce; that is, Adam's body as a veiled body is no longer available to Yahweh as the object of the divine sexual/knowing gaze.

The event demonstrates the loss of Yahweh's ability to know Adam in a particular way, to gaze upon his nakedness and have knowledge of him. It is precisely his own nakedness which Adam wishes to conceal. One might say that Adam becomes aware of himself as a presence in the Edenic scene; he is aware that he has become an object for the Other, or rather, that there exists the possibility for him to now be the Sartrean 'looked-at'. In fact, in Genesis 3.7, one reads that after consuming the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad, 'the eyes of both were opened'; the sight of Genesis 3.8 inaugurates shame, that which they previously did not possess (2.25). Jean-Paul Sartre cites this Genesis text in his discussion of 'the look' and how shame is attendant with the knowledge of being perceived, arguing that the Edenic pair's attempt to clothe themselves is precisely a desire to 'hide one's object-state [...] to claim the right of seeing without being seen'.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. H. E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), 312.

This conception of sexuality in terms of sight is also found in the prophets in the framework of Yahweh's marriage to Israel. For example, the terms גלה ('to uncover') and ראה ('to see') appear together in Leviticus 20.17, Isaiah 47.1-3, Ezekiel 16.37 and Nahum 3.5, all of which describe the exposure of one's nakedness to onlookers.

If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees (ראה) her nakedness, and she sees (ראה) his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people; he has uncovered (גלה) his sister's nakedness, he shall be subject to punishment. (Lev. 20.17)

Your nakedness shall be uncovered (גלה),  
and your shame shall be seen (ראה).  
I will take vengeance,  
and I will spare no one.  
(Isa. 47.3)

[T]herefore, I will gather all your lovers, with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated; I will gather them against you from all around, and will uncover (גלה) your nakedness to them, so that they may see (ראה) all your nakedness.  
(Ezek. 16.37)

I am against you,  
says the Lord of hosts,  
and will lift up (גלה) your skirts over your face;  
and I will let nations look (ראה) on your nakedness  
and kingdoms on your shame.  
(Nah. 3.5)

What is apparent in these passages is the issue of the misdirected gaze. In Leviticus 20.17, sexual sight is constrained by kinship ties, such that siblings are not permitted to look at each other's nakedness. In Ezekiel 16.37, the referent is the relationship between Yahweh and his people and Yahweh exposes his wayward wife to the lovers she has illegitimately pursued, so that they may look upon her in her shame/nakedness. Although Nahum 3.5 concerns the city of Nineveh, the same rhetoric is at play: images of adultery (v. 4a) and transgressive women (v. 4b) come

together to portray the city as debauched and worthy of punishment. In Nahum 3, it is especially vitriolic in that Yahweh covers Nineveh's face (v. 5a $\beta$ ) and thus deprives from her the sight that would constitute her as a subject; Yahweh's punishment is precisely to reverse the direction of sight, and therefore sexuality, so that her sexuality becomes shameful and a 'spectacle' (ראי) before the nations (v. 6).

What does all this mean for Yahweh in Genesis 2-3? I have already discussed how the clothing of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3.21 presupposes that deities are also clothed and that the state of being clothed itself is a mark of divinity, at least in the nascent human society pictured in Genesis 2-3. Combined with the insinuation in Genesis 2.5 that open eyes are also normative of divine beings, one can see that the binaries of covering/exposure and sight/ignorance reveal deities to be seeing yet covered beings, in contrast to the primordial human pair who are nonsighted and exposed. In the erotic and sexual environment of Genesis 2-3, and noting how sight functions alongside sexuality elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and its explicit sexual codification in 3.7, Yahweh emerges as a sexually bodied and sexually knowing deity.

This sexual deity is one who later divorces (גרשׁשלח) Adam, implying a relationship between the god and his creature, while Eve in this affair occupies a goddess-cum-surrogate position (see Gen. 3.20). In this manner, the patriarchal bond between Yahweh and Adam can be upheld, with Eve's presence as birthing-mother functioning as the third term that enables this homosocial relationship to exist between the two male characters.

## Conclusion

The creation accounts of Genesis 1-3, both the Priestly and Yahwist source, disclose a deity who is bodied and thus allow the reader to ask questions of exactly how that body is constituted, in much the same way that the hint of the divine body in Ezekiel 1.26-28 permits Ezekiel's readers to think about how the embodiment of Yahweh works in contexts where the text describes the marriage between Yahweh and Israel.

The Priestly narrative of Genesis 1.1-2.4a presents the deity as a gendered being and most likely draws on common West Asian motifs of plenigendered deities. It is precisely the plenigendered nature of אלהים which gives the deity his authority and, through it, bestow a similar authority on אדם, who is given the prerogative of royal dominion (רדה). It is to be noted that the animals in P's account are not granted the same gendered existence since they are the ones who must come under the authority of אדם as the plenigendered one.

In contrast, the Yahwist's account, though it contains a theology of one-fleshness which may share commonalities with the fictivized genders of Genesis 1.26-28, figures authority more in terms of knowledge (ידע). Although the human creature (אדם) is imagined in royal terms, as Brueggemann observes regarding the dust (עפר) imagery, it nevertheless remains that both Adam and the animals are formed from the ground (יצר מן-האדמה). In Genesis 1.26-28, it is the image (צלם) that separates humanity from the rest of creation; for the Yahwist, knowledge, sexuality and clothing are what sets Adam and Eve (and also the gods) apart from the animal kingdom.

This knowledge is connected to the awakening of Adam and Eve to their nakedness and, along with clothing themselves, this is what makes them like one of the gods, though it is only Adam who is individually identified as godlike. In the world of Genesis

2.4b-3.24, gods are knowing beings, an idea played out in the prophetic texts in the context of Yahweh's relationship with Israel where knowledge of God, especially in Hosea (4.1, 6; 6.6), is the telos of such relationship.

Though the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad is made 'pleasing to the sight', along with others in Eden (Gen. 2.9), that the human (אדם) is put there specifically to cultivate it for God suggests that the aesthetics of the garden are *for the gods who dwell there*, and not for the human, whose purpose is like that of the humans in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*: to have the toil of the gods laid upon them (6.5-8, 33-36). In the worldview of the Yahwist, at least before Adam and Eve's failure, gods are made to look, and אדם to be looked at: it is this configuration of sight that defines the cohesiveness of the relationship between God and אדם.

Genesis 2.4b-3.24, again like the prophetic texts, uses the figure of a woman to construct the relationship between God and man, and, like the female figure of Israel, this woman transgresses in a way marked as erotic; she gazes, and thus transgresses the proper order of sight, and locates her desire somewhere other than divine maleness. Eve partakes of the fruit of the knowledge tree after she sees that it is a 'delight to the eyes' and 'desirable to observe' (Gen. 3.6).

Eve's gaze opposes the common West Asian motif in which it is *men* who direct their sight at agriculture. In a world in which the land is feminized, ploughed and kept by men, Eve's action represents a transgressive erotics. In the punishment that is meted out to her, her desire (תשוקה)<sup>402</sup> is redirected to her man/husband (איש), out of whom she was taken. Since the man is taken from the ground, it confirms that the

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<sup>402</sup> The LXX reads ἀποστροφή ('returning'), assuming a reading of תשובתך ('your return') instead of תשוקתך ('your desire').

agricultural look is his prerogative, and yet in Genesis 3.6, when Eve looks at the tree, Adam does not, but only takes what Eve gives him, and therefore the pair disrupt the gendered order into which they were brought. Indeed, in the very action of taking (לקח) fruit from the tree, Eve eschews the marriage convention in which men take (לקח) women to wife.

Eve's refusal to be taken and looked at reflects the prophetic accusations at Israel who takes (לקח) strangers and commits זנה (Ezek. 16.32), who looks at men (ראה), sees them with her eyes (עינים), and by זנה, uncovers her nakedness (ערוה) (Ezek. 23.14-18).

Of course, it is not only Eve who refuses to be looked at; Adam too hides from God after he and his wife try to cover themselves (Gen. 3.8), and in so doing, as said, removes himself from the realm of sexual objects to become a knowing, sexual subject. It is important to notice that Yahweh is only concerned with the whereabouts of Adam and how *he* came to the knowledge of his nakedness (Gen. 3.9-11), for it shows that it is with him that Yahweh has the relationship, confirmed by the divorce language used when Yahweh sends him from the garden, the same language drawn upon by the prophets to talk of זונה-Israel.

Though there are no explicit references to divine genitalia in either Genesis 1.1-2.4a or 2.4b-3.24, divinity *is* gendered in the Priestly account, and this gendering, through which subjects assume their subjectivity, paves the way for the Yahwist's account of sexual beings. The language and motifs used in Genesis 2.4b-3.24, that of (sexual) knowledge, nakedness and marriage, in a context which imagines a likeness between deity and humanity, reveals the divine realm to be just as sexual as the earthly one. Indeed, if knowledge and sexuality are the markers of difference between אדם and the animals for the Yahwist, that אדם achieves this through usurpation of divine space (the

landscape and agriculture of Eden) confirms that the provenance of sexuality and the attendant corollary of bodied knowledge is heaven itself. It is no wonder then that in fear of a further disruption, this time of the tree of life, Yahweh worries that Adam 'might *extend his hand and take*' (ישלח ידו ולקח) from that tree.

The next set of texts I explore draw on the so-called 'prophetic marriage metaphor' to depict the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, where the former is 'husband' or 'lord' and the latter his 'wife' or 'woman'. As this chapter examined those passages which can be taken as an aetiology of male and female, in which the male is equated with a plenitude permitting a fullness of gender, and the female with gendered restriction, the next chapter will investigate whether this motif also runs throughout the prophetic texts which, like Genesis 1-3, also foreground a fundamental relationship between God, 'man' and 'woman'.

## 'TIS PITY SHE'S A זונה

### *'Harlotry', Gender and the Prophetic Phallus*

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to interrogate the prophetic literature and its construction of the relationship between Yahweh and his wife Israel. I have chosen to do this through an analysis of the figure of the זונה (traditionally rendered 'whore'), for while Yahweh's relationship is with a faithful Israel, it is the זונה, the unfaithful Israel, who brings the sexual imagery of the prophetic texts to the fore. The זונה is a figure against whom the prophets can articulate what a legitimate relationship between Yahweh and Israel ought to look like. After all, those excluded from social life, those who live on the margins, prop up those in the centre who are granted legitimacy and autonomy.

Since the penis in West Asian myths is a means by which gender is inaugurated, assigned and upheld, those persons who are assumed male because of the presence of an anatomical penis are considered to have easier access to what the phallus signifies. Those who are assumed female are done so because of a perceived lack; in other words, it is the phallus, the idealized penis, which 'sets in motion the endless signifying chain which makes [...] subjectivity possible',<sup>403</sup> that is to say, the gendering of bodies on the basis of genitalia is necessary for the formation of the subject in social life.

As Rosalind Minsky notes, girls enter language in the negative since their gender is based on phallic lack; what they lack is 'the sign of essential full subjectivity'. The only way for the girl to remedy this less-than status is by adherence to culturally sanctioned heterosexuality,<sup>404</sup> what Butler would call the heterosexual regime or

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<sup>403</sup> Rosalind Minsky, *Psychoanalysis and Gender: An Introductory Reader* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 156-7.

<sup>404</sup> Minsky, *Psychoanalysis*, 159.

matrix. In the texts selected for analysis, the exclusion of the *זונה* demonstrates that a similar rhetoric is operational, for the *זונה* who goes after many lovers seeks to discover and obtain the phallus for herself. However, the phalluses she seeks are foreign, and thus by 'becoming an object of Desire' for these non-Israelite men (who represent Israel's illicit worship of foreign gods), her identity, formed by relation to the phallus,<sup>405</sup> is likewise constructed as foreign and hence non-Yahwistic. She does not passively accept Yahweh as the giver of her identity, but wishes for an active occupation of phallic space.

For the prophets, *זונה*-Israel's religious malpractice places them outside a legitimate relationship with Yahweh. In terms of fealty to the Yahwistic cult, Israel fails because, as I argue, she seeks false phalluses: the lovers after whom she pines, the phalluses she worships, are illusory in the sense that in the world of the text they are powerless, unreal and frail. Moreover, the plurality of phalluses she seeks are another infraction since it represents the accretion of masculinity and such hypermasculinity ought not to be in the purview of one consigned to a subject position founded on phallic lack.

If the prophets admonish Israel to return to Yahweh, the real husband, the truly fertile one able to give progeny to his wife over and against these foreign phallused gods, one is indeed confronted with the very plausible question of Yahweh's own phallus. What are the qualities given to Yahweh's sexuality within the 'marriage metaphor' and does the picture that emerges of Yahweh and his body conform to phallic ideals?

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<sup>405</sup> Minsky, *Psychoanalysis*, 159.

The root זנח appears in the Hebrew Bible approximately eight dozen times and a range of translations and meanings have been proposed for it. Julia M. O'Brien writes that the root refers to 'a professional [sex worker]' and by extension 'any promiscuous woman',<sup>406</sup> while Irene E. Riegner contends that it signifies 'non-Yahwist religious praxis [which] embraces criminal activity'.<sup>407</sup> Various English translations of the Bible use 'whore', 'harlot' and 'prostitute', but Phyllis Bird notes that '[t]he problem that besets all English translations is that there is no single English root word that can [...] cover the range of usage exhibited by forms of Hebrew ZNH'.<sup>408</sup>

Another issue that may complicate the matter is the context in which the word appears; for the purposes of this chapter, I confine myself to appearances of the word in the prophetic literature in the Hebrew Bible where the 'marriage metaphor' is prominent; namely, Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel. Given the sexual language involved in the articulation of the metaphor, it is pertinent as regards the divine phallus. What does the presence of זנח language communicate about the relationship between Yahweh and his wife Israel? Since the marriage metaphor 'relies on a contrivance of gender roles for its stability',<sup>409</sup> namely the representation of male/female imagery within the metaphor's matrix, I am interested in how זנח interacts with these gendered categories and what this in turn can tell us about the function of the divine phallus, given the part it plays in the inauguration of gender in other West Asian myths.

Through analysis of זנח, I will show that the זנח questions the male-female binary and perhaps exists outside of it. In prophetic literature, the act of זנח committed

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<sup>406</sup> Julie M. O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor: Theology and Ideology in the Prophets* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 65.

<sup>407</sup> Irene E. Riegner, *The Vanishing Hebrew Harlot: The Adventures of the Hebrew Stem ZNH* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 18.

<sup>408</sup> Phyllis A. Bird, 'Prostitution in the Social World and Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel', *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Laura K. McClure (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 2006), 40-58: 43.

<sup>409</sup> Renita J. Weems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 25.

by Israel, I argue, distances Israel from the category of ‘woman’ and ruptures Israel’s link to it. The interplay of gendered images is an important part of these texts because the interaction between male and female imagery allows us to observe the slippages these categories undergo, where they contest each other and whether the distance and differences between them can speak productively to the purpose of Yahweh’s own gender and sexuality.

David Clines identifies not-being-a-woman as one facet of masculinity in the biblical texts (specifically the David narratives).<sup>410</sup> If male-coded bodies are constituted by their non-enacting of feminine qualities, then arguably it is femininity which becomes the locus of identity. Being a man is a case of enacting a negative, performing what Judith Butler calls ‘a host of “not-me’s”’.<sup>411</sup> Butler makes a similar point in her *Bodies That Matter*, arguing that subjects are constituted through abjection—a rejection of those bodies that are part of the “uninhabitable zones” of social life’.<sup>412</sup> To not be counted with these bodies is to inhabit socially recognized positions of autonomy and life.

However, does נַחַשׁ even fit neatly into the opposition between male and female or rather is it a gender performative separate from the binary altogether, if that is possible? Does it exist in the disparity between male and female performativities—in the ‘uninhabitable zones’?

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<sup>410</sup> David J. A. Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT Supplement Series 205, GCT 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 212-243.

<sup>411</sup> Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London; Brooklyn: Verso, 2009), 141.

<sup>412</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3.

One text that suggests *זונה* belongs to the larger category of *אשה* ('woman') is the prohibition in Leviticus 21.7 that priests not 'take a whoring woman (*אשה זונה*)'; similarly, they must not take a 'divorced woman' (*אשה גרושה מאישה*). The verse forces a separation between the 'harlot' (as well as the divorcee) and the category of woman through the insinuation that it is impossible to occupy the two positions simultaneously for if Leviticus 21 implies that the *זונה* cannot be a wife, the question is whether the *זונה*, the one who enacts *זנה*, can even occupy the position of woman as well, given that the term terms are both represented by *אשה* in the biblical texts.

Phyllis Bird argues that *איש* and *אשה* refer to relationships between persons at a societal level,<sup>413</sup> though she separates these societal terms from the terms which appear in Genesis 1 (*זכר ונקבה*), which she describes as 'biological', as discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>414</sup> David E. S. Stein similarly argues that *איש* is a term of 'affiliation',<sup>415</sup> and that it generally designates membership of a particular group.<sup>416</sup> To use the language of Judith Butler, what scripts must be adhered to in order to inaugurate the gendered subject? What stylization is it necessary to perform to bring forth subjects who are *איש* and *אשה*?

If Genesis 2.23-24, an arguably aetiological account of the creation of human persons, reflects hegemonic ideas of men and women, then man is defined by his 'acquisition' of a woman, and likewise a woman is defined by her membership of a man's household. The 'one flesh' (*בשר אחד*) of which Genesis 2.24 speaks implies that one telos of the relationship between men and women is in their union. The man's

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<sup>413</sup> Phyllis Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), Kindle edition, ch. 7.

<sup>414</sup> Bird, *Missing Persons*, ch. 6.

<sup>415</sup> David E. S. Stein, 'The Noun *איש* (*Āš*) in Biblical Hebrew: A Term of Affiliation', *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8 (2008): 1-24.

<sup>416</sup> Stein, 'The Noun *איש*', 24.

statement in 2.23, that woman (אשה) is ‘bone of [his] bone’ and ‘flesh of [his] flesh’ is given as the reason for this telos: man and woman were made for each other because woman was made from man. Given that the practice of polygamy was a part of ancient Near Eastern culture, predominately in elite circles where men could financially support multiple wives, the ‘one flesh’ model may in fact signify the subsumption of the female body into the man’s new household, which he has formed apart from his mother and father—if the בשר אחד also refers to sexual congress between man and woman, then it is indicative of the woman’s role in the propagation of the man’s dynasty.

Although the arrangement in Genesis 2.24, by which the man leaves his mother and father, is contrary to what one would expect, since the woman would normally leave her family to be joined to her husband’s, it is the man who is the active subject of the verbs in Genesis 2.23-24; the woman, by contrast, is the object of the actions of others: she is built (בנה) by Yahweh, brought to the man by Yahweh, and then named by the man in order that he might demonstrate his authority over her, as he has done so with the animals (Gen. 2.19). When she does exercise her agency in Genesis 3.1-13, conversing with the serpent and eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad, it disrupts the cosmic order.

This narrative demonstrates the common predisposition to inscribe the male as active and the female as passive; the male as the one who employs language to name and have authority, and the female as she who is marked by deviant speech acts. William L. Holladay draws attention to Jeremiah 30.5-7 which invokes ‘a standard curse’ by which one’s enemies are turned into women.<sup>417</sup> This curse draws from an

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<sup>417</sup> William L. Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26-52* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 167.

established cultural script in which to be a woman is to be weak and antithetical to everything that male warriorship connotes.

In these stories, the scripts which produce the categories of male and female are in constant tension and their boundaries clash against one another to produce stable discourses by which the biblical characters materialize their gender. In the Eden myth, both Adam and Eve transgress the scripts, which for the cosmic order proves catastrophic. The punishment Yahweh inflicts on the woman in particular in Genesis 3.16, that her desire shall be toward her husband, seems intended to rectify and strengthen these gendered borders. Deborah Sawyer notes, '[f]or women, identity, and with it desire, is constructed outside and beyond any notion of self as subject'.<sup>418</sup> In other words, with reference to Genesis 3.16, Eve's identity is constructed through her relationship to man; in the words of Irigaray, whom Sawyer cites:

“Are you a virgin?” “Are you married?” “Who is your husband?”  
“Do you have any children?” these are the questions always  
asked, which allow us to place a woman.<sup>419</sup>

It is these questions which we also find asked of the זונה in the prophetic literature. The difference, I argue, is that while these questions do allow us to place the זונה, they place the זונה outside of both sexed scripts. Butler notes that ‘the construction of gender operates through *exclusionary* means’<sup>420</sup> and that matter is a ‘*process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity*’

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<sup>418</sup> Deborah F. Sawyer, ‘Gender Criticism: A New Discipline in Biblical Studies or Feminism in Disguise’, *A Question of Sex: Gender and Difference in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Deborah J. Rooke (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 2-17: 11.

<sup>419</sup> Luce Irigaray, ‘Divine Woman’, *French Feminists on Religion*, ed. Morny Joy, Kathleen O’Grady, Judith L. Poxon (London: Routledge, 2002), 41-48: 47-48.

<sup>420</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xvii.

(emphases hers).<sup>421</sup> The זונה exists in an abject space in reference to the male/female binary; this is not to say that masculine and feminine imagery is not used in connection with the זונה, but that female-coded symbols, for example, are simultaneously used for and denied to the זונה. The biblical authors work to render the materiality of the זונה ‘unthematizable’, to desubjectivize the זונה and place her in those “unliveable” and “uninhabitable” zones of social life’.<sup>422</sup> In doing so, the biblical writers constitute the ideal subject who, although not actually present *in* the texts, is nevertheless *behind* the text as the אשה who represents Yahweh’s wife idealized. Moreover, the constitution of this idealized subject *also* constitutes Yahweh in that the expectations placed on the ideal אשה allow one to understand the husband who in turn stands behind her, setting the standards by which the אשה can emerge as this ideal figure in the first instance.

Butler writes that it is the abject figure who haunts the subject as a ‘spectre’ that ‘threaten[s] to expose the self-grounding presumptions of the sexed subject’,<sup>423</sup> but in these prophetic texts, we may also say it is the אשה who haunts זונה-Israel as the figure against which Yahweh judges their fidelity and faithfulness. The sexual and gendered standards which Israel must adhere to flow necessarily from how Yahweh acts in sexual and gendered ways and how he uses them to constrain and manipulate Israel’s identity as his wife.

The texts selected for examination come from Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel. I begin with Hosea since the first revelation to the prophet is Yahweh’s command for him to take a ‘promiscuous woman’ to wife. The biblical writer presents this wife in ambiguous terms as to her gender, yet unlike the deity or earthling in Genesis 1-3, this

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<sup>421</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xviii.

<sup>422</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xiii.

<sup>423</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, xiii.

is not accorded to her as a positive asset. In this way, the woman's presentation provides a clear contrasting text to analyse how motherhood is juxtaposed to divine fatherhood and how female waywardness works to construct divine masculinity.

After Hosea, Jeremiah's text also grapples with the issue of human and divine parentage and questions the gendered category of the wayward women in that the prophetic text animalizes her and her sexual desires and so problematizes her position as Yahweh's partner. As in Hosea, there are concerns about what motherhood means and how it relates to Yahweh's position as divine father and lover. In these previous two prophets, the themes of life and death are contrasted in the figures of father Yahweh and mother Israel. Isaiah brings this imagery to the fore in Isaiah 57 with its description of an Israelite sexual and/or mortuary cult. It explores the misappropriation of divine sexuality and how it transforms it into a sign of death instead of life.

Finally, I examine Ezekiel 16 and 23, two biblical texts which portray Yahweh as a sexually offended lover who metes out sexual violence upon Israel to bring her back into line with the expectations of her gender and position. These texts also provide insight into the evolution of Yahweh's sexuality and its close association with Yahwistic language such that one may observe how other facets of Yahweh and his body are phallicized/sexualized.

## Hosea

The first words spoken by Yahweh to the prophet Hosea are a command that he take a 'promiscuous woman'<sup>424</sup> (אשת זנונים) as Israel commits 'great whoredom' (זנה תזנה) in their abandonment of Yahweh (מאחרי יהוה). The presence of the אשת זנונים is one of the most striking features of the texts for it not only breaks the proscription in Leviticus 21.8, but the antithesis of זונה and אשה in the priestly imagination renders Hosea's wife/woman, Gomer, a liminal person.<sup>425</sup> Yvonne Sherwood notes that many (male) commentators wish to 'tone down' or 'eradicate' the אשת זנונים from the text:

Many critics spirit the offensive woman out of the text by consigning her to a later redaction, arguing that she is just a metaphor, or claiming that the 'wife of harlotry' is a symbolic role, played by the prophet's otherwise virtuous wife.<sup>426</sup>

These kinds of exegetical moves effectively remove the force of the rhetoric Hosea employs. Yahweh, seemingly intent on the purity of the Israelites elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, here commands a prophet to take to himself a אשת זנונים, a figure of disparaged female sexuality. From the outset, then, the reader is confronted with a liminality which will characterize Hosea's narrative in general.

The name of this אשת זנונים, Gomer, further marks this liminality as the name is elsewhere used in the Hebrew Bible and West Asian inscriptions as a male name

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<sup>424</sup> Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet: Hosea's Marriage in Literary-Theoretical Perspective* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 19.

<sup>425</sup> Phyllis Bird argues that most commentators 'speak inaccurately of Hosea's marriage to a harlot' (2006b: 80), since the word used is not זונה, but אשת זנונים. In either case, my argument rests not on Gomer's reputed behaviour or profession, but on the way in which the author of Hosea uses language to destabilize Gomer's identities.

<sup>426</sup> Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, 20-21; see also Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 222.

(Gen. 10.2-3; 1 Chr. 1.5-6; Ezek. 38.6; Samaritan Ostraca 50.1).<sup>427</sup> Although presented as אַשָּׁה, Gomer's name questions her gender and though R. Abma derives the name from a root that denotes completeness (גמר), perhaps the measure of Israel's iniquity,<sup>428</sup> one may also see the more forceful Akkadian *gāmaru*, 'destruction, to bring to an end', behind the name, placing Gomer in direct opposition to the idea of fertility and growth promised by Yahweh in his covenant to the Israelites.

Furthermore, the names of Gomer's children (Jezreel, Loruhamah and Loammi) are also indicative of Gomer's gendered instability. Loruhamah and Loammi can be translated 'She is not Pitied'/'No Mercy'<sup>429</sup> and 'Not My People' respectively,<sup>430</sup> both indicative of Yahweh's attitude to the people of Israel and their religious malpractice. Yet the name Loruhamah, which derives from רָחַם ('to be compassionate'), also connotes the womb (רֶחֶם); Loruhamah is therefore the Not-Wombed. The name thus functions to deny Gomer a key component of that which is perceived to constitute womanhood (אִשָּׁה)<sup>431</sup> and distances the children from Gomer's body at the same time it questions her femaleness. To use the name Loruhamah in view of Yahweh's role as Opener-of-the-Womb (Gen. 29.31; 30.22; 1 Sam. 1.5-6) is to reject the idea that Yahweh was directly involved in Loruhamah's conception and birth. Similarly, the name Loammi questions Yahweh's paternity and the potential wordplay between עַם ('people') and אִמָּה ('mother') would also deprive Gomer of her link to motherhood.

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<sup>427</sup> Marvin L. Chaney, 'Accusing Whom of What? Hosea's Rhetoric of Promiscuity', *Distance Voices Drawing Near: Essays in Honor of Antoinette Clark Wire*, ed. Holly E. Hearon (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 97-116: 112-113.

<sup>428</sup> R. Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)* (Assen: Van Gorcum and Comp., 1999), 142.

<sup>429</sup> Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 226.

<sup>430</sup> A. A. Macintosh, *Hosea*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 21, 27.

<sup>431</sup> Esther Fuchs, 'The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible', *Women in the Hebrew Bible: A Reader*, ed. Alice Bach (New York: Routledge, 1999), 127-139.

On the other hand, the name Jezreel (יזרעאל) means 'God will seed',<sup>432</sup> and points towards the end of chapter 2 (vv. 23-25) in which Yahweh seeds (זרע) the land of Israel, his people. Yet before the end of chapter 2, Yahweh asks his people to plead with their mother (אמכם) that she turn away from her 'harlotry' (זנונים) and adultery (נאפויה), for Yahweh explicitly states in v. 4 that he is not her husband/man (אישה) and she not his wife/woman (אשתי). Turning again to Irigaray's questions, this (m)other is not a virgin but a זונה, is not married and has no husband; however, there are children, but their status and paternity is thrown into question throughout Hosea 1-2.<sup>433</sup> In Hosea 1, the prophet uses language to sever the link between Yahweh and Israel/Gomer as well as between him and the children who are meant to be his. As Yahweh is not Israel's איש, he can address the community specifically as children of *their mother* (Hosea 2.4); the bond between Yahweh and Israel is disrupted by Israel's questionable status as both mother and child, characterized in this text by the gendered liminality of Gomer.

In Hosea 2.5-12, Yahweh announces his intention to subject his former wife to sexual violence.<sup>434</sup> In this act, Yahweh's former wife becomes and is confirmed as the (m)other,<sup>435</sup> for as Beauvoir writes, 'violence done to another is the clearest affirmation of another's alterity'.<sup>436</sup> The violence against the (m)other is characteristic of privileging

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<sup>432</sup> Although A. A. Macintosh interprets יזרעאל as 'God will scatter', as in Zech. 10.9. He further cites Ugaritic texts in which Anat 'scatters' (*dr'*) the remains of Mot's corpse throughout the land after she has killed him (1997: 18); both senses of the term Jezreel are evident in Hosea 1.4 where it refers to God's scattering Israel and in Hosea 2.22 in which Jezreel occurs in a passage about Israel's flourishing.

<sup>433</sup> Dale Launderville, *Celibacy in the Ancient World: Its Ideal and Practice in Pre-Hellenistic Israel, Mesopotamia, and Greece* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), 159.

<sup>434</sup> Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroines: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 181-182.

<sup>435</sup> Bellis argues that this articulation of the Israelite men in which they are depicted as female 'play[s] on their fears of woman as "other"' (1994: 179).

<sup>436</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (London: Vintage, 2010), 85.

the male over the female and works to silence nonmale voices (note, for instance, that Gomer never speaks in the entirety of Hosea, but Yahweh places words in her mouth in 2.5, 12, 17 with the phrases, ‘for she said...’ and ‘I will take from her mouth...’) As Hélène Cixous reminds us, male sexuality operates on a binary of activity/passivity by which men conceive of women as “dark continents[s]” to penetrate and to “pacify”.<sup>437</sup> This is often how Yahweh’s actions work in the prophetic books, especially in Ezekiel 16 where Yahweh declares to his wife, ‘You shall never open your mouth again because of your shame’ (v. 63)—‘Censor the body and you censor breathe and speech at the same time’.<sup>438</sup>

In Hosea 2.5, Yahweh attacks the (m)other’s body and promises to make it like a wilderness (מדבר) and a parched land (ארץ צייה), to kill her with thirst. There are particular resonances here with Exodus and Deuteronomic traditions: for example, the מדבר appears as a locus of chaos and pestilence (דבר); it is simultaneously where Yahweh appears (Exod. 16.10) and an area characterized by hunger, thirst and death (Exod. 15.22; 16.3; Deut. 8.15). In Hosea, the threats against the (m)other work to divest her of any fecund symbolism associated with maternity. In Psalm 107.35 and Isaiah 41.18, parched land is placed in opposition to spring of water and in Isaiah 35.1, it stands opposed to the image of a blossoming crocus (תפרח כחבצלת). The root פרח evokes young birds (אפרח) nestled by their mothers (Deut. 22.6) as well as sprouting flowers (פרח) and perhaps also פרה and פרא, verbs that denote fruitfulness.

In Hosea 2.7, the author berates the (m)other for, as the NRSV puts it, ‘act[ing] shamefully’ (הבישה). The assumed root is בוש, ‘to be ashamed’, yet it is possible to

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<sup>437</sup> Hélène Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1.4 (1978), 875-893: 877 n. 1.

<sup>438</sup> Cixous, ‘The Laugh of the Medusa’, 880.

read הַבִּישָׁה as a *hifil* perfect from יָבֵשׁ פִּי, 'to dry up', in which case Hosea 2.7 may be translated:

For their mother enacted זָנָה—  
the one who conceived them *has dried up*.

Compare this to Hosea 9.16:

Ephraim is struck down,  
their root is dried up (יָבֵשׁ),  
they will bear no fruit (פֵּרִי).  
Even though they give birth,  
I will kill the beloved ones of their womb (בֵּטֶן).

Hosea 2.7 is therefore extremely evocative imagery. The root יָבֵשׁ, like the parched land of 2.5, is contrasted with vegetation, the sea, the river and everflowing streams (Isa. 15.6; 19.15; Ps. 74.15). All these positive images are associated with the land's fertility and growth, and so the parallelism between זָנָה and יָבֵשׁ is intended to separate the (m)other from any vestige of bountiful female fertility. The language of 'drying up' fits well with the rest of 2.7 in which Hosea's former wife seeks food, water, flax and oil from her lovers, unaware that it is in fact Yahweh who gives her all these things (v. 10). As a result of her ignorance, Yahweh takes these gifts away from her (v. 11) and punishes her by exposing her body (v.12) and uncovering her 'lewdness', her 'pudenda' (גְּבוּלוֹת). Here again is a denial of fertility for, like יָבֵשׁ, the root גָּבַל denotes withering or fading and is often used in conjunction with vegetation vocabulary (Ps. 1.3; 37.2; Isa. 1.30; 28.1; 40.7-8; 34.4; Ezek. 47.12).

The sexual violence in this passage, Alice Ogden Bellis argues, 'makes the point that punishment precedes reconciliation',<sup>439</sup> in which case the (m)other's body is

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<sup>439</sup> Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroes*, 182.

the possession of Yahweh for only he has the authority to implement this violence, this sterility, on Israel/Gomer's body—Gomer lacks bodily autonomy; she is exiled from her own body, and a 'woman without a body...', writes Cixous, 'is reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow'.<sup>440</sup>

Feminist theologians and biblical scholars have critiqued prophetic literature for its promotion of a theology in which Yahweh acts as an abusive husband and how close these texts are to personal accounts of domestic violence against women.<sup>441</sup> For instance, Yahweh's actions in Hosea 2.16-22 in which he allures Israel/Gomer to him has been viewed in theological terms as an act of grace on Yahweh's part.

Yahweh's violent acts are intended to regender the (m)other and bring her back into appropriate gendered relations; to make Israel conform once more to the gendered scripts of their religious culture. Yahweh restores Israel's fertility in Hosea 2.17: he will make the valley of Achor (עכור, 'trouble') a door of hope/return (פתח תקוה). The 'opening', פתח, recalls פתה, 'to allure', in verse 16 and further connotes the womb/sexual organs which may be figured as doorways in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 29.31; 30.22; Song 7.13). Yahweh reconstructs the womb he has previously withheld from othered Israel in order that she might return to her status as mother and once again may be seeded (Hos. 2.25).

Gershon Hepner however understands Jezreel's name not as I have to suggest the rewombing of Israel but rather in contrast to Loruhamah; he writes, '[i]t implies Israel will not be conceived in a mother's womb, but in the land of Israel'.<sup>442</sup> Yet Hosea

<sup>440</sup> Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', 880.

<sup>441</sup> Naomi Graetz, 'God is to Israel as Husband is to Wife: The Metaphoric Battering of Hosea's Wife', *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 126-145; *OEBB*, 372.

<sup>442</sup> Gershon Hepner, *Legal Friction: Law, Narrative, and Identity Politics in Biblical Israel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 144.

2.25 states that Yahweh will indeed seed her in/as the land precisely to ‘womb the one who was not wombed (ורחמתי את-לא רחמה)’. A comparison can be drawn to the Sumerian mythology mentioned earlier in which Enki has sex with the land in order to know its heart/womb (*šag4*); thus, the case can be made that Hosea 2.20-25 is another example of this ancient West Asian trope in which male deities have sex with goddesses figured in agricultural terms, and the reference to ‘seed’ both in v. 25 (זרעתיה [...] בארץ) and Jezreel’s name (‘God will seed’) point towards a prophetic imagination in which Yahweh is indeed a penis deity. Just as Enki impregnates the earth, so too does Yahweh.

Generally, this passage is understood to describe the restoration of Israel, employing a metaphor which envisions the Israelites as seeds that Yahweh himself plants and cultivates.<sup>443</sup> However, one cannot overlook the sexual overtones of the verb זרע in passages such as Leviticus 12.2 and Numbers 5.28 where, in the passive form, it describes a woman who has conceived; that is, has been or is able to be seeded. Gert Kwakkel is dubious about this interpretation on the basis that the *qal* form of זרע does not function like this in any other biblical text, though the passive forms of זרע insinuate that the active form of the verb may have in fact served in this manner, where Hosea 2.25 is the evidence for the assertion, or, as Kwakkel himself writes, ‘sexual connotations cannot be totally excluded for זרעתיה in Hos. 2.25’.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 28; James M. Bos, *Reconsidering the Date and Provenance of the Book of Hosea: The Case for Persian-Period Yehud* (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 110; *TDOT* IV, 149.

<sup>444</sup> Gert Kwakkel, ‘The Land in the Book of Hosea’, *The Land of Israel in Bible, History, and Theology: Studies in Honour of Ed Noort*, ed. , ed. Jacques van Ruiten and J. Cornelis de Vos (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 167-182: 176.

Hosea 2.25 describes the moment at which Yahweh becomes the deity of those called Loruhamah and Loammi and at which they themselves become Yahweh's people. In the lead up to this declaration of renewed fidelity, the erotic language of response (ענה) is drawn upon in vv. 23-24:

And in that day, I will answer (ענה), declares Yahweh,  
I will answer (ענה) the heavens,  
and they will respond (ענה) to the earth.  
And the land will answer (ענה) the grain, the new wine, and the  
fresh oil, and they will answer (ענה) Jezreel.

Gershon Hepner notes that this use of ענה evokes Song 5.4-6 which uses this same language to signify the 'male lover's entry into the female lover's room/vagina'.<sup>445</sup>

My beloved extended his 'hand' (יד) through the hole (חר),  
and my inward parts (מעה) groaned (המה) for him.  
I stood up to open for my beloved,  
and my hands dripped with myrrh,  
and my fingers also,  
upon the handles of the lock.  
I opened to my beloved,  
but my beloved had turned and gone away,  
My soul followed after his speaking as I sought him,  
but I could not find him,  
I called out, but he did not answer (ענה) (Song 5.4-6).

The male lover did not 'answer' his female beloved, though her inwards parts groaned for him, even though her hands were ready, dripping, upon her lock. Yahweh's speech in Hosea 2.23-24 can therefore be read as an erotically charged prophecy, the promises of which will regender Israel as feminine so that he can betroth (ארש) her (Hos. 2.22) that she may 'know' (ידע) Yahweh. Moreover, Yahweh will 'lie (שכב) [Israel] down' (Hos. 2.20); the use of such a sexual word<sup>446</sup> directly before Yahweh's act of

<sup>445</sup> Hepner, *Legal Friction*, 147.

<sup>446</sup> Hepner, 145; the verb שכב used in Hos. 2.20 is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to describe sexual intercourse (Gen. 19.32-35; 30.15-16; 34.2, 7; 35.22; Exod. 22.16, 19; Lev. 18.22, *et al*).

betrothal (Hos. 2.22) presents the reader with a picture of the deity preparing his bride for sexual intercourse.

Hosea 4 details the charges Yahweh brings against Israel. In vv. 1-3, the prophet declares the lack of faithfulness to and knowledge of God to be the reasons why the people and animals of the land are 'languishing' (אמל). In Isaiah, אמל denotes the depletion of fields and vines (16.17), the mourning of fishermen who cannot catch anything in their nets (19.8), the hewing down of Lebanon's great trees and the sterility of Sharon (33.9).

The punishment meted out on the priests and people of Israel is to eat but never be sated (ואכלו ולא ישבעו); they will commit זנה but not increase (הזנו ולא יפרצו) (Hos. 4.10). The concept of 'increase' (פרץ) has an integral place in biblical ideologies concerning patriarchs and land ownership. For example, Yahweh appears to Jacob in a nocturnal vision at Bethel (Gen. 28.10-22) and promises him that he and he seed shall spread (פרץ) over all the earth, while in Exodus 1.12, the term describes the proliferation of the Israelite children in Egypt. The root is also used in forceful and perhaps violent ways in other biblical passages: Isaiah 5.5, 2 Kings 14.13 and Proverbs 25.28 all describe the destruction (פרץ) of strong walls and in other texts such as 2 Samuel 5.20, the root refers to Yahweh's decisive action over enemy forces, how Yahweh acts to disperse (פרץ) or drive them away. Even in these instances, land claims are a major part of the texts' ideology; when Yahweh enacts פרץ, he does so to protect his land and his people.

The punishment Yahweh desires to bring against his people in Hosea 4 is thus a serious threat. The flourishing of the Israelite people is central to the covenant promise (Gen. 17.6, 20; 28.3; 35.11; Hos. 1.10), and Yahweh's positioning of Israel as זונה allows him to remove them from those promises. The juxtaposition of זונה and פרץ in Hosea 4 sets the זונה against the figure of the mother; notice the wordplay in Hosea 4.5-6:

You will stumble by day,  
 and the prophet will stumble with you at night,  
 and I shall cut off your mother (דמיתי אמך).  
 My people are cut off (נדמו עמי) for a lack of knowledge...

The double use of דמה, 'to cut off, destroy', following one another with reference to עם and אִם not only confirms the potential word play detected earlier in the name Loammi (לא-עמי),<sup>447</sup> but upholds the idea that the זונה cannot inhabit the sphere defined by the אשה, the woman/wife and the motherhood she idealizes. Hosea 4.6 also emphasizes the link between motherhood and obedience to law; Yahweh will 'forget' (שכה) the sons of Israel because they have forgotten (שכה) the divine law (תורת אלהים). The motif of שכה is prominent in Deuteronomy and intimately connected to Yahweh's covenant, commandments and the possession of land (Deut. 4.23, 31; 8.11). The divine forgetfulness of Yahweh in Hosea severs the people of Yahweh from his promise of futurity and fertility for them. Hosea 5.7 continues to propagate this division between progeny and 'harlotry' when its author frames children born to זונה-Israel as 'alien children' (בנים זרים)—children outside of the Israelite community. These are illegitimate children because they do not belong to Yahweh but have gone after the Baals (Hos. 2.17) and their foreignness is strongly bound up with their mother's status as זונה, employed to delegitimize her status as Yahweh's wife and as אשה.

In his promises to wayward Israel, on the other hand, Yahweh claims paternity of these Israelite and they become בני אל-חי, 'sons of the living God'; those who were not his people will become his people, those who had no mother will be mothered for Yahweh will wed the land when he causes the Baals Israel worshipped to be

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<sup>447</sup> See further word play involving the consonants א and ע in Hosea 12.8 where און ('wealth') and עון ('iniquity') are employed.

remembered (זכר) no longer; that is, they shall no more be phallused (זכר) because it is Yahweh's phallus which will seed her.

## Jeremiah

Jeremiah also employs the rhetoric of the זונה and describes in detail Israel's lust in animalistic terms (Jer. 2.20, 23b-24 below) in a move to dehumanize Israel and remove her from the realm of acceptable partners, as indicated in Levitical law (Lev. 20.15).

You are a swift young camel twisting along her paths,  
 A wild donkey used to the wilderness who gasps for breath in her  
 passion.  
 In the time of her heat who can turn her away?  
 All who seek after her will not become weary,  
 At the time of her month they shall find her.

Athalya Brenner notes the irregularity and abnormality of how female sexuality is presented here and compare it to bestiality as well.<sup>448</sup> Brenner argues, in a way that resonates with my reading of Hosea, that this 'animalization' of the 'woman-in-the-text' 'constitutes an extra step in the ongoing construction of the husband/wife metaphor'.<sup>449</sup> By her use of scare quotes around 'woman' and the pronoun 'her',<sup>450</sup> Brenner too recognizes that this animalization brings these identity categories into question.

The use of animal imagery to portray divine sex is not unknown in ancient West Asia: the Sumerian god Enki is compared to 'an impatient bull who lifts his penis' when aroused, and in the stories of Inanna and Dumuzi 'the latter is compared to a he-goat

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<sup>448</sup> Athalya Brenner, 'On "Jeremiah" and the Poetics of (Prophetic?) Pornography', *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 177-193: 182.

<sup>449</sup> Brenner, 'On "Jeremiah"', 182-3.

<sup>450</sup> Brenner, 'On "Jeremiah"', 182-3.

covering the female'.<sup>451</sup> These images stand in stark contrast to those used in Jeremiah 2.23b-2 as Yahweh is not the one figured as an animal in this passage—rather it is only female Israel so pictured. To commit זנה, then, is to be moved outside the realm of humanity itself and to render Israel's identification with an ideal אשה impossible.

Jeremiah 2.27 also suggests this as Yahweh condemns Israel for addressing humanmade, and thus impersonal, objects as their parents. Israel calls a tree their father (אבי) and a stone the one who begot them (ילדתי). Though 'bn is a divine name known at Ugarit (KTU 1.100:1), Jeremiah writes that these are gods the people have made themselves (2.27). In some ways, it echoes Ezekiel 16.17 where Israel makes what are essentially cultic dildos (צלמי זכר) for herself and commits זנה with them. Unlike in Ezekiel 16, however, these trees and stones are not 'phallic images' (צלמי זכר), which would imply a connection to the human body, but rather they are totally apart from the sensual world.<sup>452</sup>

When Israel commits זנה in other prophetic discourses, as in Hosea, it disassociates her from her own motherhood, and in Jeremiah also operates to dissolve the bond between Yahweh and Israel. Marriage language is found in Jeremiah 2.32, in which Jeremiah insinuates that Israel is no longer to be regarded as Yahweh's wife, for a bride (כלה) would surely not forget to put on her bridal garments though Israel has forgotten Yahweh. Hanne Løland sees a parallel between this verse and Isaiah 49.15.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>451</sup> Marjo C. A. Korpel and Johannes C. de Moor, *Adam, Eve, and the Devil: A New Beginning* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 44.

<sup>452</sup> Korpel and de Moor, 52.

<sup>453</sup> Hanne Løland, *Salient or Silent Gender?: The Interpretation of Gendered God-Language in the Hebrew Bible, Exemplified in 42, 46 and 49* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 184.

Can a woman forget her nursing child?  
 Or show no compassion (רחם) for the child of her womb?  
 Even these may forget (שכה),  
 yet I will not forget you.

There is the same constellation of language and ideas here as in Hosea and Jeremiah. Yahweh accuses Israel of forgetting (שכה) him, while Yahweh himself will never forget. In the Hebrew Bible, שכה is often contrasted with זכר, 'remembrance', but also the indicator of maleness (Gen. 40.23; Deut. 9.7; 1 Sam 1.11; Job 24.20; Ps. 9.12; Isa. 17.10; 23.16; 54.4), testifying to the power of Yahweh's virile remembrance. This contrast is especially pertinent in Ezekiel, for even though Israel makes statues of men (צלמי זכר) with which to commit adultery, they have nevertheless forgotten Yahweh (22.12; 23.35).

If Israel's forgetfulness opposes Yahweh's remembrance as regards their relationship, it is no wonder that the Israelite children in his diatribe against Israel in Jeremiah 2 are emphatically בני בניכם, 'children of *your* children'; they are identified wholly with זונה-Israel, though, as in Hosea, there is a promise that Yahweh will take back Israel, here contrasted with Judah, who is considered more unrighteous (Jer. 3.11-4.2). In this promise, Yahweh declares that before Israel's adultery, the Israelites were considered sons of God (Jer. 3.19) and the vision of Jeremiah 30-31, of the restoration of Israel, like Hosea, envisions a time when Israel will be God's people and Yahweh their god (Jer. 30.22; 31.1). At this time, Yahweh will, as in times gone by, 'draw in' (משך) Israel, the one whom he loves (אהב) (Jer. 31.3). The use of משך with אהב occurs only one other time in the Hebrew Bible: Song 1.4.

Draw (משך) me after you and let us run!  
 The king has brought me into his chamber.  
 We will rejoice and be glad in you,  
 We will remember (זכר) your love (דדיך)<sup>454</sup> more than wine.  
 The upright love (אהב) you.

The implication of Jeremiah 31.3, a description of former days that presage the coming ones, especially in the context of Yahweh's marriage to Israel, is that Yahweh will draw Israel once again into a sexual(ized) relationship. Jeremiah 31.4 uses language with similar undertones:

I will fill (רוה) the soul of the priests with abundance,  
 and my people will be satisfied (שבע) with my goodness.

רוה fittingly appears in Proverbs in a warning from a father to a son not to get involved with foreign and wayward women; in his admonition, the author tells his son to stay faithful to his wife and 'let her be as a loving doe, a gracious ibex, let her breasts satisfy (רוה) you at all time, in her love (אהב) be continually intoxicated' (5.19). In Proverbs 7.18, רוה is spoken by the זונה (v. 10) against whom the author cautions his son; she entices him: 'Come, let us satisfy (רוה) ourselves with love (דד) until morning, let us enjoy ourselves with intense desire (אהבים)'.<sup>454</sup>

In the prophets, שבע describes Israelite adultery and Israel's inability to be satisfied by their foreign and illegitimate lovers. Ezekiel notes that Israel is not satisfied (שבע) with all her Assyrian lovers, though there be many, and neither with her תזנות ('fornication') with the Canaanites (16.28-29), while Hosea compares Israel's acts of זנה to one who is unable to satiate (שבע) themselves though they eat (4.10).

According to Jeremiah 31 then, Yahweh, as the divine husband, will always be able to satisfy Israel:

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<sup>454</sup> The LXX uses *μαστος*, 'breast', assuming דד ('breast') instead of דוד ('love').

I, Yahweh, have heard Ephraim grieving,  
 'You have disciplined me, and I was chastised like an  
 untrained bull.  
 Bring me back and I will return,  
 For you are Yahweh, my God.  
 After I turned back, I repented,  
 And after I received instruction, I struck my thigh (יִרְךָ).'

[...]

Is Ephraim my precious son?  
 Is he a delightful child?  
 For even though I spoke against him,  
 I will remember (זָכַר) him always;  
 Therefore my inward parts (מֵעָה) yearn (הִמָּה) for him,  
 I will surely have compassion (רַחֵם) on him.  
 (Jer. 31.18-20)

Though the writer calls Ephraim a 'son' (a masculine term), Jeremiah 31.18-20 shows Yahweh's erotic love towards Israel. After Yahweh reprimands the Israelites, the text symbolizes their contrition through Ephraim striking his thigh (יִרְךָ), a word with penile associations elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 46.26; Exod. 1.5; 28.42; Judg. 8.30), but also uterine ones (Num. 5.21-22, 27). Given how זונה works to distance the one who commits it from motherhood, I would argue that Jeremiah 31.19 is a sign that Israel/Ephraim recognizes that their actions lead to a fruitless womb. Yahweh, however, assures them that he will have compassion (רַחֵם) on them, or perhaps, that he will once again womb (רָחַם) them (see my translation of Hos. 2.25 above); he will moreover remember (זָכַר), or act the man (זָכַר), with them to be the legitimate phallus (זָכַר) they require.

The NRSV translates Jeremiah 31.20, where Yahweh declares his מעה will הִמָּה for Ephraim, in a manner which downplays and ameliorates the erotics of the text ('I am deeply moved for him'), especially when one considers that the only other time הִמָּה is applied to מעה is Song 5.4 (cited above). There it is a deeply sexual image of the male beloved extending his penis into the female lover:

My beloved extended his 'hand' (יד) through the hole (חר),  
and my inward parts (מעיה) groaned (המה) for him.

Jeremiah's vision of Israel's restoration is laden with erotic imagery and even pictures Yahweh moaning in sexual passion for his partner. The rewombing of Ephraim/Israel, and thus the phallic affirmation of Yahweh, is again a means by which Israel as Yahweh's wife can assume the position of the idealized אשה and counteract the degendering brought forth by the enactment of זנה (Jer. 3.1, 3, 6, 8; 5.7).

זנה separates Israel from a fertility given by Yahweh and envisioned in terms of water, which in other West Asian sources is equated with vitalizing semen: they forsake (עזבו) the rich, fecund and life-giving water of Yahweh, מקום מים חיים, 'the Fountain of Living Waters' (Jer. 2.13). These מים חיים are contrasted in the same passage with Egyptian and Assyrian waters which Israel drinks from (Jer. 2.18) and not unsurprisingly these are the same lands with whom Israel commits adultery in Ezekiel 16 (vv. 26, 28) and 23 (vv. 3, 5, 19). If זנה is figured in terms of drinking from another well, sexual fidelity is indicated precisely by Israel's relationship to the one who *is* living water.

Jeremiah 3.1-5 opens with a comparison between a woman who remarried and Israel who has committed religious malpractice: 'If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and becomes another man's wife', writes the prophet, 'will he return to her? Would not such a land (הארץ ההיא)<sup>455</sup> be greatly polluted?' (v. 1). That the woman's body is likened to the land sheds light on what Yahweh says in v. 3 and recalls the watery images of Jeremiah 2.13: 'Thus the heavy showers (רבבים) have been withheld, and the spring rain (מלקוש) has not come'. רבבים hearkens back to the commandment of Genesis 1.26-28, 'be fruitful (פרה) and multiply (רבה)'; the רבבים have been stayed

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<sup>455</sup> Both the LXX and the Vulgate read 'woman' (γυνή, *mulier*) instead of ארץ ('land') here.

because Israel has had many (רבים) lovers (v. 1); she has dried up, just like the desiccated (יבש) mother figure in Hosea 2.7.

At Ugarit, there are reference to *rbb* [r]kb 'rpt, 'drizzle of the Charioteer of the clouds' (KTU 1.3.2.39), a title of Baal. Yahweh, however, is Israel's בעל (Jer. 3.14) and thus he is the fertility deity *par excellence* in Jeremiah. His decision to stay the waters of abundant fertility (רבים) reveals to the prophet's audience, who are accused of going after the Baals (2.23; 7.9; 9.14; 11.13, *inter alia*), that command of the land's fertility belongs exclusively to Yahweh. Baal, who is depicted in Ugaritic literature engaging in sexual activity, sometimes in the form of an animal, is denigrated by Yahweh who positions himself as the only one with whom it is appropriate to have an intimate, cultic relationship.

In Jeremiah 3, this eroticism is framed in terms of place. The language of return (שוב) appears ten times in this chapter alone and is integral to Jeremiah's understanding of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, especially as it plays with the language of unfaithfulness (משובה), used once in Proverbs (1.32) but all other instances occurring in Jeremiah (2.19; 3.6, 8, 11, 12, 22; 5.6; 8.5; 13.7) or Hosea (11.7; 14.5); see especially Jeremiah 3.12, 14 and 22, where Yahweh addresses a faithless people and asks them to return to him.

From where is faithless Israel returning? From the heights (שפים), the waysides (דרכים) and the wilderness (מדבר) (Jer. 3.2). The שפים may be read like Ugaritic *špm*, which Mark Smith translates as 'dune(s)', and in conjunction with *mdb*r (cf. Heb. מדבר), denotes a 'landscape without sustenance'.<sup>456</sup> The שפים, דרכים and מדבר are sites that imply dry sterility instead of moist fertility and it is precisely this journey from dryness to moisture that characterizes Jeremiah's understanding of the Exodus narrative:

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<sup>456</sup> Smith, *Goodly Gods*, 35.

Yahweh brought us up from the land of Egypt,  
 leading us through the wilderness,  
 through a land of deserts and pits (שוּחָה),  
 through a land of drought (צִיָּה) and deep darkness,  
 through a land no one crossed,  
 and where no person dwelt.  
 And I brought you into an orchard land,  
 to eat its fruit and partake of its goodness,  
 But you came and defiled my land,  
 and made my inheritance an abomination (Jer. 2.6-7).

The words שוּחָה ('pit') and צִיָּה ('drought') are both nouns applied to the זוּנָה in the Hebrew Bible. Proverbs 23.27 calls the זוּנָה 'a deep pit (שוּחָה)' and Hosea states that Yahweh will punish זוּנָה-Israel by making her 'like a desert (צִיָּה) land' where he will kill her with thirst (2.5). A faithful Israel by contrast is one blessed by fertile land, full of fruit (פְּרִי) and goodness (טוֹב), recalling the description of Yahweh's covenant in Deuteronomy 30 and the promises Yahweh gives Israel if they return to him:

Yahweh, your God, shall make all the work of your hand (יָד) abundant,  
 (you shall have abundance) in the offspring (פְּרִי) of your  
 womb/body (בְּטֶנְךָ, masc. form),  
 in the offspring (פְּרִי) of your animals (בְּהֵמָה),  
 and in the fruit (פְּרִי) of your land,  
 (all) for goodness (טוֹבָה) (Deut. 30.9).

These promises are reflected in Jeremiah's own vision of the new covenant where Yahweh will 'seed' (זָרַע) the houses of Israel and Judah:

Behold, the days are coming, declares Yahweh,  
 when I will seed (וּזְרַעְתִּי) the house of Israel  
 and the house of Judah—  
 [with] human seed (זָרַע אָדָם)  
 and animal seed (זָרַע בְּהֵמָה) (Jer. 31.27).

The use of זָרַע with a direct object recalls Hosea 2.25 (וּזְרַעְתִּיהָ לִּי) and positions Yahweh as the god who sows. Although Jeremiah 31.5 describes vineyards and

vegetation planted (נטע) by humans, it is Yahweh who explicitly seeds (זרע); if the זרע of v. 27b refers to human and animal semen,<sup>457</sup> then what prohibits the readers from understanding Yahweh's action of זרע in a similar light, noting that Yahweh does not זרע plants, only creature with נפש ('soul, being, body'). In either case, regardless whether this is a Yahweh who uses his own seed, the picture of Jeremiah 31.27 is nevertheless one in which Yahweh scatters semen into the earth and to whom the origin of נפש-life in the restored Israel is attributed.

Malachi 2.15 is the only text which refers to זרע אלהים, the divine seed or seed of God. The context in which it appears (Mal. 2.10-17) narrates Judah's faithlessness (בגד), for Judah has married the daughter of a foreign deity (v. 11). The implication is that Judah, as Yahweh's son, has not remained faithful to his family due to his exogamy. As Malachi writes, 'Do we (that is, Israel) not all have one father (אב)? Has not one God created us? Why then do we commit treachery (בגד) against our brothers and profane the covenant of our ancestors (אבות)?' Yahweh is אב, the patriarch and ancestor of the Judahites, and as such, exogamy is an affront Yahweh as far as marriage to foreigners and thence the introduction of their deities (imagined in Malachi as fathers) into Yahwistic worship challenges Yahweh's position as divine ancestor (אב) or it means the children born to exogamous marriages will *not* have only one אב.

Yahweh, the one to whom flesh (or blood) and spirit (שאר רוח)<sup>458</sup> belong (v. 15), in contrast, seeks זרע אלהים, divine seed—offspring not born from faithlessness (בגד), a word characterizing the זונה (Jer. 3.8). This זונה represents the possibility of foreign-born children, while Yahweh is concerned with שאר, blood kinship (Lev. 18.6, 12-13,

<sup>457</sup> Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007), 9 n. 27.

<sup>458</sup> Repointing שאר ('remnant') as שאר ('flesh', 'blood').

17; 20.19; 21.2; 25.49). The importance of the phrase זרע אלהים cannot be overstated; it is, as said, the only occurrence of the phrase in the biblical corpus and in a context where adoption is often seen as means by which the Israelites are God's children,<sup>459</sup> Yahweh's desire specifically for (his own?) seed (זרע) rather than just sons (בנים) must not be overlooked. If Malachi's בגד language presupposes the figure of the זונה, then Yahweh's search for זרע אלהים is a statement of his wish for a nation united under one father god, a deity who is a שאר-relation to his people. As in the other prophets, Malachi's Yahweh denies parental fertility to the זונה and affirms Yahweh as its true locus. It is only by correction relationship to Yahweh that this fertility can be bestowed on the people of Israel, as in the vision of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31.

What solution does the prophet Jeremiah present to permit Israel to remove herself from this זונה space? Jeremiah 4.1-4, which follows on from the prophet's diatribe against זונה-Israel in chapter 3 (see vv. 1, 3, 6, 8), figures circumcision (מול) of the heart (לבב) as the way God's people can return to him:

Till the fallow land,  
but do not sow (זרע) among the thorns (קוצים).  
Circumcise yourselves for Yahweh (המלו ליהוה),  
and remove the foreskins of your hearts (vv. 3-4).

One could note that here in Jeremiah 4.3-4, the writer addresses Israel in plural masculine terms, that is, as Israelite men, in contrast to Jeremiah 3 that envisions Israel as feminine and singular (3.1-10). As Stuart Macwilliam notes, the gendered divisions of these Jeremian texts are not uniform, but 'chaotic'; there are switches

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<sup>459</sup> Seock-Tae Sohn, "'I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People': The Origin and Background of the Covenant Formula", *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, ed. R. Chazan, W. W. Hallo, and L. H. Schiffman (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 355-72: 368-72; Janet L. R. Melnyk, 'When Israel Was a Child: Ancient Near Eastern Adoption Formulas and the Relationship between God and Israel', *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honor of John H. Hayes*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown, and Jeffrey K. Kuan, JSOT Supplement Series 173 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 245-59.

between masculine and feminine terms of address in 3.16 and 19,<sup>460</sup> and the marriage language (בעל) of Jeremiah 3.14 and 31.32 is even aimed at Israelite men in the plural. One therefore cannot discount what the language of circumcision in Jeremiah 3.3-4 means for female Israel even though circumcision is normatively coded with masculine language in the imagination of the biblical writers.

As noted, Jeremiah condemns the Israelites for cultic devotion to stones and trees who they revere as their divine parents. This is not only a case of improper practice through worshipping lifeless ‘idols’, but a repudiation of certain theologies of fertility because they mislocate the true source of fertility. As circumcision in the Hebrew Bible functions as an apotropaic fertility ritual,<sup>461</sup> a cut that ensure the penis is pruned that it might yield more (Lev. 19.23-25), Yahweh’s commandment in Jeremiah 4.3-4 therefore contrasts with Israel’s actions in Jeremiah 3.6-10 where Israel participates in non-Israelite rites and ascribes divine parenthood to Stone and Tree. Not only is *’bn* (Stone) a divine name found at Ugarit, but it occurs in construct with terms of son- and daughtership (*bn ’bn* and *bt ’bn*).<sup>462</sup> Yahweh’s mandate in Jeremiah 4.4 redresses these practices by implementing in their stead a legitimate fertility rite; moreover, the phrase המלו ליהוה may be translated, ‘be circumcised by Yahweh!’<sup>463</sup> Although Jack R. Lundbom argues that this translation does not ‘go with what follows’,<sup>464</sup> it could very well harken back to Deuteronomy 30.6 and Yahweh’s promise to circumcise the Israelites’ hearts and the hearts of their offspring, ‘that [they] might live’.

<sup>460</sup> Stuart Macwilliam, ‘Queering Jeremiah’, *Biblical Interpretation* 10.4 (2002), 384-404: 394.

<sup>461</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1990), 141-76; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh and Child Sacrifice: Biblical Distortions of Historical Realities* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 305-7.

<sup>462</sup> *DDD*, 818.

<sup>463</sup> R. Althann, ‘*mwl* “circumcise” with the *lamedh* of agency’, *Biblica* 62 (1981), 230-40.

<sup>464</sup> Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, Anchor Bible 21A (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 330.

Yahweh is an active participant in the circumcision rite of Deuteronomy 30 and potentially Jeremiah 4, whereas Israel's adultery (זָנָה) with tree and stone in Jeremiah 2-3 is Israel's acting entirely alone, as the tree and stone are nonagents for the prophet. Jeremiah 4.4 with its call to (heart) circumcision carries with it the supplementary call to submission,<sup>465</sup> to trust Yahweh with the knife of circumcision. The gendered dimension of this passage is curious as the commandment given the men of Judah and Jerusalem is also aimed at the same time at the female figure Israel of whom these men are a part. For female Israel, what does this circumcision mean? Gerlinde Baumann notes the negative portrayal of female sexuality in the book of Jeremiah,<sup>466</sup> arguing that male sexuality is 'criticized only in individual men',<sup>467</sup> whereas female sexuality is wholly deviant. Luce Irigaray's claim that 'the penis [is] the only sexual organ of recognized value'<sup>468</sup> is particularly apt here, since one could argue that it is the possession of the penis that allows these Judahite men to be addressed individually, a sign of their personhood. Furthermore, if the penis *is* the only sexual organ of recognized value, then it is no surprise to see that even female Israel is construed in relation to it, both in her acts of זָנָה and in her restoration (though in Jeremiah 4.3-4 it is *her* penis(es) and not Yahweh's that prove to be the means of restoration). However, just as Yahweh is the זָרַע-Sower in Jeremiah 31, here in Jeremiah 4, he is the one who circumcises, such that the penis comes to hold a vital importance and central role in the Yahwistic cult; he is intimately concerned with the penises and semen of his people.

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<sup>465</sup> John Martin Bracke, *Jeremiah 1-29* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 44.

<sup>466</sup> Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 124. Gail Corrington Streeter notes that in Jeremiah, restoration is often figured in terms of male Jacob, yet when punishment is brought to bear on Israel, it is the female Zion who is addressed, *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 89.

<sup>467</sup> Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 124.

<sup>468</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1985), 23.

In his discussions of circumcision in the rabbinic texts, Eilberg-Schwartz notes that the act is often pictured as ‘part of what beautifies men in God’s eyes’,<sup>469</sup> and argues that it is a feminizing ritual; circumcision, he writes, ‘makes [men] desirable women’.<sup>470</sup> Though I shall disagree with Eilberg-Schwartz in later sections on the purpose of *male* circumcision, one nevertheless find a similar rhetoric operative in Jeremiah for *female Israel*, since the point of the לבב-circumcision is to make this woman desirable to Yahweh—to render her a woman proper.

Indeed, at the end of Jeremiah 9, Yahweh condemns those who are only circumcised in their foreskin (v. 25), and laments that all the house of Israel is only circumcised in the flesh, still having foreskinned hearts (v. 26). Through enacting זנה, Israel does not act with the will (לבב) of one who circumcises hearts (Deut. 30.6; Jer. 4.4).

Eilberg-Schwartz maintains that circumcision creates a performativity in which the subjects of circumcision are in some sense femaled:

[T]he desire of heaven was nearly always imagined as male and heterosexual, [thus] Israelite women theoretically should have been the appropriate objects of divine desire. The insertion of Israelite men into this equation required their unmanning.<sup>471</sup>

However, in the Hebrew Bible circumcision is linked to masculinity: in Genesis 17.1-8, the purpose of the circumcision covenant given to Abraham is to increase his fertility such that it represents the flourishing of Israelite national identity—kings will come forth from Abraham’s loins. For the biblical writer, circumcision is a decidedly political

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<sup>469</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism* (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 171.

<sup>470</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus*, 173-4.

<sup>471</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus*, 138.

act that ensures national unity under male leadership. Moreover, 1 Samuel 31, as will be discussed later, expresses anxiety around the *femininity* of male *uncircumcision* such that Saul would rather take his own life than be killed by an uncircumcised Philistine (v. 4).

If circumcision produces a gendered performativity, for *female* Israel, it is precisely to engender legitimate femininity. For men, on the other hand, it masculinizes the body and for Israel, in her capacity as God's wife, it brings her in line with the figure of the ideal אשׁה. One might ask whether the fact that female Israel is composed of individual male Israelites means that circumcision feminizes the individual men as well, à la Eilberg-Schwartz. However, as these prophetic texts wrestle with the identity of Israel as אשׁה־זונה, the identities of individual Israelite men are subsumed into this question of gender for corporate Israel. As such, *in these contexts*, the male Israelites' penises are accorded to female Israel: they are *hers*. If corporate Israel visualized as female is circumcised, it is properly *female* circumcision, regardless of the imagined genitalia of such a figure.

The difference between the penises of Israelite men and how they function in relation to corporate Israel is that for the former, these penises may be used, displayed and affirmed. Female Israel, on the other hand, irrespective of presumed genitalia, must assume a passive role and embody the lack women are hegemonically presupposed to have. It is זונה-Israel who attempts to disrupt this lack rather than 'embody' it; she publicly commits זנה atop hills and under trees, enacting her animalistic lust (Jer. 2.23-24).

In actively pursuing foreign lovers, does she desire to obtain their penises, or perhaps their phalluses, to have them publicly for herself? Ezekiel 16.17, where Israel

makes cultic phalluses to commit זנה with, certainly insinuates this, as does Ezekiel 16.15 which describes Israel 'pouring out (שפך) her harlotries (תזנות)', the verb שפך reminiscent of שפכה in Deuteronomy 23.1 where it refers to the penis. Ezekiel 16.15 is the only place where this verb form occurs with זנה and perhaps one of the reasons זנה is so threatening is because it reveals that female Israel *is* composed of men, those identified with active and idealized penises in the gender schema of ancient Israel.

One must realize that Israel plays two roles: one as an idealized אשה (and thus the land itself) and the other as a collection of Israelite men. The only way that the heteronormative relationship between Yahweh and Israel can function is if Israel, like Yahweh, can embody a 'multigendered' identity. As Yahweh's wife, they have the status of a divine figure and as such, in consonance with West Asian presentations of divinity, they have access to a plurality of gendered positions. The difference between the two, however, is that Yahweh is a singular male figure whose worship ensures (and engenders) patriarchal rule and the primacy of the phallus and its qualities. In other words, as prime male, Yahweh is essentially the representative of the phallus itself in this religious context. While Israel may be able to present masculinity and femininity, or be envisioned as male bodies and a female one, without either impinging negatively upon the other, it must be enacted in such a way that the phallus itself remains possessed by Yahweh. It is for this reason that זנה-Israel enters into what is essentially an unliveable space, since she has attempted to remove those phallic prerogatives from Yahweh and append them to herself, to her own imagined body.

Some might question why circumcision in men is not feminizing if circumcision for women is. Here one must remember that the purpose of circumcision is cultivation, as the imagery in Leviticus 19.23-25 attests. Male circumcision therefore cultivates what is associated with hegemonic and phallic ideals of maleness: fertility, progeny, vitality,

action. Circumcision is thus a citational practice that recalls already established gender scripts and make the one circumcised ritually conform to them. For women, who are generally identified with lack and passivity, circumcision only works to establish and encourage this lack in the presumed female figure—*ex nihilo nihil fit*. As Yahweh's wife, Israel contravenes this principle and acts against the penises that are already part of her body by dint of her status as a collective of male Israelites; the circumcision undergone by male Israelites, on a collective level, ought to simultaneously masculinize them over and against individual human women, but in a cultic context, in which they communally represent Yahweh's wife, it should foster receptivity and worship of a single god who holds ultimate phallic privilege. In going after other gods, she not only disregards Yahweh's phallus but also usurps the position of a male deity.

Jeremiah 13.11 makes it transparent that Israel's relationship with the divine phallus must be passive and singular, that is, Israel must 'cling' (דבק) only to Yahweh's 'loins' (מתנים).<sup>472</sup>

For as a loincloth clings to the loins of a man,  
so I caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of  
Judah to cling to me (Jer. 13.11).

The *hifil* הדבקתי ('I will make cling') indicates this passivity and the imagery of the passage equates Yahweh with a man's loins (מתני-איש) to which Israel and Judah cleave. דבק of course recalls the creation narrative of Genesis 2 and the Edenic pair's 'cleaving' (דבק) to one another to become a single flesh (בשר אחד), that is, kin.<sup>473</sup> The identity of Israel and Judah is therefore contingent upon a phallic Yahweh; Israel's

<sup>472</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 102.

<sup>473</sup> W. G. E. Watson, 'Some Additional Word Pairs', *Ascribe to the Lord: Biblical and Other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie*, ed. Lyle Eslinger and Glen Taylor (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 179-201: 185-86.

restoration will occur when Yahweh makes Israel 'know' (ידע) his 'hand' (יד) and recognize his might and masculinity (גבורה).

## Isaiah

Language of זונה is prominent in Isaiah 57.3-13, a diatribe against the Israelites whom the prophet calls 'sons of she who commits זונה' and 'adulterous seed' (זרע מנאף) (v. 3). Isaiah 57.4 continues, 'Are you not children of transgression (ילדי־פשע), seed of deception (שקר)?', both concepts associated with נאף and the actions of the זונה is Jeremiah (3.13; 7.9; 23.14; 29.23). As in Jeremiah, there are masculine plural forms (vv. 3-5) and feminine singular ones (vv. 6-13) to describe (the) Israel(ites), suggesting, once again, the impossibility to entirely separate these gendered images (male Israelites vs. female Israel).

The religious adultery of Israel in Isaiah 57.3-13 manifest itself as child sacrifice (v. 5), offspring offered to the חלקי־נחל, 'the dead of the wadi'.<sup>474</sup> This religious devotion to the dead sets up a mortuary cult context for the interpretation of this passage; to commit זונה is to associate with death rather than life, a theme confirmed in other prophetic texts through the denial of motherhood to the זונה. Isaiah 57.8 summarizes the practices of this mortuary cult:

Behind the door and the doorpost  
 you have set up your symbol (זכרון);  
 for, in deserting me, you have uncovered (גלה) your bed (משכב),  
 you have gone up to it,  
 you have made it wide;  
 and you have made a bargain for yourself with them,  
 you have loved their bed (משכב),  
 you have gazed on their nakedness (ד) (NRSV)

<sup>474</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 170.

Scholars have read this passage in both sexual and mortuary contexts, though Stavrakopoulou argues that sexualized readings draw on an incorrect division between Canaanite religious practice which is characterized as ‘pagan’ and orgiastic and proper Yahwistic worship which is understood to be free from these sexual rites.<sup>475</sup>

The three words relevant to this discussion are זכרון, משכב and יד. The first has been linked to זכר, ‘male, phallus’, with the implication that this זכרון is not just a memorial stele (see זכר, ‘to remember’), but some type of cultic phallus.<sup>476</sup> The second, משכב, can be translated as either ‘bed’ or ‘grave’ (one’s final resting place), while יד may be rendered as ‘phallus’ or ‘memorial stele’ also (see its use in 2 Sam. 18.18). In focusing exclusively on the sexual connotations of these words, one is prone to miss the interconnectivity of sex and death in these biblical texts. In cultic terms, fertility and death are each concerned with remembrance, the propagation of one’s name and existence, whether in this life or the next.

I remain unconvinced, however, that the sexual aspects of the text may be so readily ruled out. The idea that the language of sexual deviancy in Isaiah 57.3-5 be ‘understood *solely* as a metaphor of religious malpractice’<sup>477</sup> subtly rules out the idea of a sexual Yahweh from the outset. This applies to those who view Isaiah 57.3-13 as descriptive of ‘pagan’ orgies and those who completely disregard the sexual nuances in favour of an interpretation focused on a mortuary context. For the former group, there is a failure to understand the implication that, given Yahweh and Israel are imagined in a sexual relationship, the division in the prophetic texts is not between

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<sup>475</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers: The Roles of Ancestor Veneration in Biblical Land Claims*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 473 (New York; London: T&T Clark, 2010), 116 n. 47.

<sup>476</sup> Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah 56-66*, trans. Antony P. Runia (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 7-68; Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, The New American Commentary 15b (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 554.

<sup>477</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 116 n. 47 (emphasis mine).

respectable Yahweh worship and sex-drive 'pagan' rites, but between legitimate and illegitimate fertility. It is hard to argue that one should impute sexuality to foreign cult worship without also doing the same to Yahweh's; why should this language be literally interpreted for one, but metaphorically understood for the other?

The latter group, in discounting the sexual aspects of Isaiah 57.3-13, also run the risk of discounting the idea of a nonsexual Yahweh as the language of sexual deviancy is so closely tied to that of the connection between Yahweh and Israel. If Israel's sexual deviancy *only* indexes religious malpractice, then the overtly sexual language describing Yahweh's relationship to Israel (Jeremiah's moaning deity, Hosea's seed-scattering god) can only be identified as metaphors for correct religious observance; however, one must ask what about this imagery makes it appropriate for the context. In consigning these pictures to what is essentially mere metaphor, this very involved and upfront sexual language is overlooked as a simple vehicle to express attitudes towards religious adherence. If one is serious about the bodied language utilized for Yahweh, as other West Asian myths are of their deities, then the sexual logic structuring these biblical texts can tell us a lot about how Yahweh's body, taken as read in the Hebrew Bible, is envisioned in the Israelite imaginary.

In terms of fertility, Isaiah 57.8 is a case of the Israelites *mislocating* the phallus. It is not that the Yahwistic community does not engage in ancestor veneration and other mortuary practices, since there is textual and extra-textual evidence in support of it,<sup>478</sup> but that the community described in Isaiah 57 ascribes the power of fertility to other gods and divine beings instead of Yahweh. In other prophetic texts, it is Yahweh who

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<sup>478</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 1-28; see also Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992); *pace* Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994).

ought to be the husband of Israel, and it is his authority, body and thence phallus, which should be the proper locus of religious devotion by the Israelites; but in going after other gods (figured as lovers), they have replaced Yahweh's phallus with that of another.

At the end of v. 8, the author judges the Israelites for 'gazing on their [חלקי-נחל] memorial stele/phallus'. Though חלקי-נחל may refer to the venerates dead, it is also possible to read נחל and חלק as terms designating inheritance. The LXX translates 57.6a as *ἐκείνη σου ἡ μερίς οὗτός σου ὁ κληῖρος*, 'that is your portion and this is your lot', presumably from חלק ('portion, territory') and נחלה ('inheritance'). Perhaps חלק can be pointed in participle form as חֲלֵק where it appears in 2 Chronicles 28.21 to describe Ahaz plundering Yahweh's temple (cf. חִלַּק, 'to destroy').<sup>479</sup> In the prophets, נחלה denotes Israel as Yahweh's inheritance or Yahweh as Israel's; in Jeremiah, this image is positioned against the actions of חֲלוּ-Israel (Jer. 2.7; 3.19). In this context, are the חלקי-נחל in fact those who destroy the inheritance, those who defame Israel's position as Yahweh's wife? Indeed, Isaiah 57.6 states that it is among these חלקי-נחל that Israel has her lot (חֲלֵק) instead of having Yahweh as her inheritance.

Israel does not just see (ראה) the phallus of these inheritance plunderers, but gazes (הרה) at it, a concept which has prophetic overtones in the Hebrew Bible (Ezek. 12.27; 13.6-8; 13.23; Isa. 1.1; 2.1; 13.1; 30.10; Hab. 1.1; Mic. 1.1). These prophets 'look upon' (הרה) Yahweh's word, signifying the inauguration of a prophetic sequence, demonstrated by its regular position as the beginning of prophetic books. In contrast to this, the Israelites' gaze is misplaced; instead of reflecting on Yahweh's word, the people have turned to focus their attention on improper, phallic cult objects. Richard Hess and Gary Smith argue that the problem the prophet has is that the Israelite

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<sup>479</sup> *DUL*, 388.

people are engaged in sexual and pagan cultic practices, that the crises Isaiah describes is fertility rituals *qua* fertility rituals.<sup>480</sup> A better lens through which to read this passage focuses on space and its propriety.

The similarity between *משכב* ('bed, grave') and *משכן* ('temple')<sup>481</sup> serves as a reminder of the distinction between improper and proper cultic loci, especially since the 'high and lofty mountain' of v. 7 is a metonym for temple space. Isaiah 57.5-10 contains a series of spaces in its description of the Israelites' practices: 'among the oaks/gods' (v. 5), 'in the valleys' (v. 5), 'among the dead/destroyers of the inheritance' (v. 6), 'behind the door and the doorpost' (v. 8), 'Sheol' (v. 9). The geographical space of the valley is a liminal one that marks the entrance to the underworld, to Sheol, within that which Stavrakopoulou calls the 'mytho-symbolic landscape'.<sup>482</sup> That valleys, the dead, and Sheol itself are named reveals the chthonic nature of the spaces said to be inhabited by the Israelites. It might be countered that the aforementioned high and lofty mountain, on which the temple is imagined to be, is not by its nature chthonic, yet as Stavrakopoulou notes, the mountain within the mythosymbolic landscape has its roots in the underworld as well,<sup>483</sup> and since the Israelites construct their *משכב* on the mountain, there is a move to emphasize underworldly spaces in these religious practices; this emphasis is conveyed in v. 7, 'and *there* (*אש*)', that is, on the mountain of graves, 'you went up to offer sacrifice'.

In Eshmunazor II's sarcophagus inscription, *mškb* parallels *qbr* ('tomb') and *rp'm* ('Rephaim'), the spirits of the dead.<sup>484</sup> What is noteworthy in these sarcophagal

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<sup>480</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 554; Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 259-60.

<sup>481</sup> Susan Ackerman, 'Sacred Sex, Sacrifice and Death: Understanding a Prophetic Poem', *Bible Review* 6 (1990), 38-44: 39.

<sup>482</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 62.

<sup>483</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 86.

<sup>484</sup> Matthew J. Suriano, *The Politics of Dead Kings: Dynastic Ancestors in the Book of Kings and Ancient Israel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 155.

texts is the association between the *mškb*, *rp'm* and *bn wzr'* ('son and seed', 'offspring'). Participation in the ancestral cult of the dead is explicitly tied up with the continuation of the family line and securing land for one's descendants. Isaiah 57.3-13, however, denies that the practices of the Israelites are effective in this, as the end of the poem sees the prophet contrast the dead (קבוצים, 'the gathered ones') the Israelites venerate with Yahweh,<sup>485</sup> perhaps to imply that Yahweh is *the* divine ancestor (see comments on Mal. 2.10-17 above). Israel, on the other hand, slaughters (טש) her children (v. 5); טש is used throughout the Hebrew Bible in sacrificial contexts, and the reference to the מלך-sacrifice in v. 9, the sacrifice of a child or animals,<sup>486</sup> implies this is a fertility practice *as well as* a mortuary one.<sup>487</sup> The *mlk*-sacrifice of a child in ancient West Asia, as in Isaiah 57, was intended for the good of the community,<sup>488</sup> whether it was done to proffer protection from the gods in time of war or to increase familial abundance, the end result is ultimately the same: the continuing existence of the community.

Yahweh makes clear, however, in v. 13 that is he only who can give the Israelites land and a share of the holy mountain of God: 'the one who seeks refuge in me will inherit (נחל) the land and possess my holy mountain'. Note the use of the verb נחל in contrast to the chthonic gods who plunder the inheritance in v. 6. The problem in this text cannot be that the Israelites are practising non-Yahwistic fertility rites, for mortuary rites are still fertility rites, nor can it be the motif of sexuality/fertility itself, since as Isaiah 56.1-8, examined below, makes abundantly clear, it is Yahweh who has the power of the phallus to grant his followers what is essentially eternal life.

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<sup>485</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 116.

<sup>486</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 220.

<sup>487</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *King Manasseh*, 290.

<sup>488</sup> Maria Eugenia Aubert, *The Phoenicians and the West: Politics, Colonies and Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001), 246.

Isaiah 56.3c-5 concerns itself with the eunuch who is part of Yahweh's community. The figure of the eunuch (סריס) evokes ideas of infertility and the inability to propagate a family of one's own; Yahweh, however, tells the eunuch not to call himself a 'dry tree' (עץ יבש), that is, sterile (compare the use of יבש in Hosea above), for Yahweh will give him 'a name better than sons and daughters' (v. 5). One's name (שם), by which one is remembered, perpetuates identity to ensure that one will remain a part of the community even after death. The name which Yahweh bestows upon the eunuch is accompanied by a monument (יד), a word having phallic associations; the שם and יד are within Yahweh's temple (בבית), with the eunuchs' names written on the walls (בחונתי). Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme, in her work on votive inscriptions from Mount Gerizim, writes that votive offerings were commemorated by an inscription on sanctuary walls, which she describes as 'durable votive objects' in the presence of the deity.<sup>489</sup> Similarly in Isaiah 56, the permanence of the memorial in the temple, where the god dwells, allows Yahweh to gaze continually on the names of the eunuchs, ensuring their 'everlasting name' (שם עולם).

The use of יד for the eunuch's memorial is apposite, for with its phallic connotations it serves as a 'child-surrogate',<sup>490</sup> and along with a name which shall not be effaced (לא יקרת) from the temple walls, testifies to the phallic power of Yahweh's covenant. In ancient West Asia, the practice of effacing names was a magical act aimed at destroying a person's identity in the cultural memory of the group, a type of

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<sup>489</sup> Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme, *Before the God in this Place for Good Remembrance: A Comparative Analysis of the Aramaic Votive Inscriptions from Mount Gerizim* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2013), 89.

<sup>490</sup> John Pairman Brown, *Sacred Institutions with Roman Counterparts* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 133-34.

forgetting that Anna Lucille Boozer calls ‘violent forgetting’.<sup>491</sup> The phallic monument erected by Yahweh safeguards the eunuch against any type of erasure. In Isaiah 62, a text about the restoration of Jerusalem, Yahweh declares to the city, ‘You will be called by a new name (שם חדש)’ (v. 2). Much like Isaiah 56, the שם functions to make Jerusalem the ‘boast of the earth’ (v. 7) and a fertile nation (v. 9), all of which is achieved by Yahweh’s marriage to the land (v. 4).<sup>492</sup>

The זנה motif in Isaiah 57 is bound up with the mythosymbolic landscape which places Israel outside of the land away from Zion, the cosmic mountain (v. 13). When Yahweh weds the land, it becomes ‘sought after’ (דרושה) by Yahweh; this is a reversal of Israel’s actions in which she sought (דרש) other gods/lovers (Jer. 8.2). Israel is not distanced as much or decoupled from gendered images as in the other prophetic texts, but Isaiah 57.5, with its accusations of child sacrifice, does separate Israel from privileged constructions of motherhood reflected elsewhere in the prophets. Isaiah 57.11 accuses female Israel of not remembering (זכר) Yahweh, a stark contrast to the (phallic) memorial (זכרון) of v. 8. To secure her place within legitimate, fertile relationships, Israel must re-member Yahweh, give back to him the phallus which she seeks elsewhere and for herself.

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<sup>491</sup> Anna Lucille Boozer, ‘Forgetting to Remember in the Dahlek Oasis, Egypt’, *Cultural Memory and Identity in Ancient Societies*, ed. Martin Bommas (London; New York: Continuum, 2011), 109-26: 112-13.

<sup>492</sup> Corinna Körting draws our attention to the מַת of Isa. 62.5 which reads יבעלוך בניך, ‘your sons shall marry you’, and taking into account Isa. 54.5 (בעלִיךְ עשִׂיךְ), suggests an emendation to בּוֹנֵךְ, ‘your builder’ (cf. Psa. 147.2), ‘Isaiah 62:1-7 and Psalm 45 – or – Two Ways to Become Queen’, *Continuity and Discontinuity: Chronological and Thematic Development in Isaiah 40-66*, ed. Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer and Hans M. Barstad (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 103-25: 110 n. 38.

## Ezekiel

Like the other prophetic texts, Ezekiel 16 condemns a Jerusalem who commits תועבה ('abominations') (v. 1) and breaches the covenants between her and Yahweh.<sup>493</sup> The first three opening verses centre on the verbal aspect of Yahweh's revelation to the prophet and prepare the reader for the interplay between speech and sexuality that occurs within the narrative.

Ezekiel 16.1-5 paints a picture of Jerusalem as a discarded infant of foreign parents, a child whom no one loved, left exposed in open fields. Yahweh passes by this abandoned baby and sees her 'struggling in [her] blood' (v. 6), so he speaks (אמר) to her and commands her to live. Here is the primal words which enlivens the babe and permits her to grow (צמח) and enter puberty. The verb צמח used to describe the blossoming of the girl's pubic hair is also applied to vegetation in the Hebrew Bible, creating a 'verbal bridge between the images' that allows the prophet to compare the prepubescent girl to the uncultivated wilderness.<sup>494</sup> The growth of breasts and pubic hair signal the child's availability for marriage,<sup>495</sup> and at this point Yahweh passes her by again, sees her and spreads his cloak over her to cover her nakedness (v. 8), a sign that sexual intercourse occurs by which Yahweh enters into a covenant with her.<sup>496</sup> Yahweh's gaze (ראה) sexualizes the recipient of his desire (v. 8) and his word (נאם) makes the girl his (v. 8), the sexual activity between him and the girl intended to cultivate and order her instability.

As part of this cultivation, Yahweh bathes, anoints and clothes Jerusalem; he adorns his wife with jewels and fine garments (vv. 10-14), elevating her to a royal position.<sup>497</sup> As a result, Jerusalem's fame (שם) spreads throughout the nations and it is this fame, the prophet

<sup>493</sup> Peggy L. Day, 'The Bitch had it Coming to Her: Rhetoric and Interpretation in Ezekiel 16', *Biblical Interpretation* 8.3 (2000), 231-54: 231.

<sup>494</sup> Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife*, SBLDS 130 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 93.

<sup>495</sup> Compare the Sumerian text in Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 22 (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1983), 276.

<sup>496</sup> Galambush, *Jerusalem*, 62.

<sup>497</sup> Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 278-79.

tells us, that she ultimately trusts in over Yahweh, becoming 'infatuated with [her] own beauty', using her fame to 'commit זנה' (v. 15).

The sequence of washing, anointing and clothing is a common West Asian trope and can be observed in accounts of both the goddesses Inana and Aphrodite. The goddess Inana washes, anoints and clothes herself in 'garments of power' before her marriage to Dumuzi.<sup>498</sup> Dumuzi travels to Inana's house, opens her door and is greeted by the goddess leaving her home to embrace him (ETCSL 4.08.29:B12-23). The scene linguistically parallels Ezekiel 16 in several places:

#### Ezekiel 16

וארחצך במים (v. 9)

ואסכך בשמן (v. 9)

ואלבושך רקמה (v. 10)

ואעדך עדי ... ורביד על-גרונוך (v. 11)

#### ETCSL 4.08.29

a mu-un-tu<sub>5</sub> (B13)

i<sub>3</sub> dug<sub>3</sub>-ga mu-un-šeš<sub>2</sub> (B13)

tug<sub>2</sub>pa<sub>3</sub> maḥ bar-ra nam-mi-in-dul (B14)

na<sup>4</sup>za-gin<sub>3</sub> gu<sub>2</sub>-a si-bi<sub>2</sub>-ib<sub>2</sub>-sa<sub>2</sub>-sa<sub>2</sub>-e (B16)

Ezekiel 23.40-41 contains a similar wash-anoint-clothe sequence in which Jerusalem sits on a glorious couch (מטה כבודה) for her foreign lovers. The Sumerian *Song of Inana and Dumuzid* (ETCSL 4.08.30) also mentions a couch (*ki-na<sub>2</sub>*) which Inana desires (lines 18-22) and from which she later beckons her lover to speak the word of life to him (lines 30-22). In Ezekiel 16 and 22, female sexuality is not figured so positively, and the couch (מטה) of Ezekiel 23 certainly does not function as a place of life (see ETCSL 4.08.30:47-59), but rather as a place of death and denial, for it is on the couch that Jerusalem enacts זנה. Whereas the *ki-na<sub>2</sub>* brings fertility, Yahweh brings a mob against the two female figures of Ezekiel 23, a mob which kills their sons and daughters and burns down their houses/dynasties (בית)—a complete cessation of life.

There also exist parallels between Ezekiel 16 to the *Homeric Hymn to*

<sup>498</sup> Charles Penglase, *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia: Parallels and Influence in Homeric Hymns and Hesiod* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 40.

*Aphrodite*. This hymn is part of a larger collection of thirty-three poems dedicated to deities and godlike heroes,<sup>499</sup> mostly narrating the foundation of their cults. However, *Aphrodite* is markedly different in that ‘it does not celebrate the goddess and the establishment of her powers’ like the other hymns.<sup>500</sup> Rather, the hymn functions, according to Faulkner, to embarrass Aphrodite, who, after having spent her immortal life causing gods and humans to fall in love, falls in love herself, by Zeus’s influence, with a mortal named Anchises.<sup>501</sup> Again focusing on the washing-anointing-clothing scene (*Aphr.* 61-64), the *Hymn to Aphrodite* has similar parallels to those between Ezekiel 16 and *A Song of Inana and Dumuzid* (4.08.29) does. The quotations in the table below use the Septuagint version of Ezekiel to highlights these similarities:

#### **Ezekiel 16**

καὶ ἔλουσά σε ἐν ὕδατι (v. 9)  
καὶ ἔχρισά σε ἐν ἐλαίῳ (v. 9)  
καὶ ἐνέδυσά σε ποικίλα (v. 10)  
καὶ ἐκόσμησά σε κόσμῳ (v. 11)  
καὶ περιέθηκα ψέλια περὶ τὰς χεῖράς σου (v. 11)  
καὶ κάθεμα περὶ τὸν τράχηλόν σου (v. 11)

#### **Aphrodite**

μιν Χάριτες λοῦσαν (61)  
καὶ χρίσαν ἐλαί (61)  
ἐσσαμένη δ’ εὖ πάντα περὶ χροῖ εἴματα καλὰ (64)  
χρυσῷ κοσμηθεῖσα φιλομμειδῆς Ἀφροδίτη (65)  
εἶχε δ’ ἐπιγναμπτὰς ἔλικας κάλυκας τε φαεινάς (87)  
ὄρμοι δ’ ἀμφ’ ἀπαλῆ δειρῆ περικαλλέες ἦσαν (88)

There is more commonality between Ezekiel’s account and Homer’s since Aphrodite, like the divine female figure of Jerusalem, is arguably presented in a negative manner. As said, unlike most of the *Homeric Hymns*, *Aphrodite* does not seek to establish the provenance of her cult, but rather tells the embarrassing story of Aphrodite’s love for a mortal man.

<sup>499</sup> Andrew Faulkner, *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 3.

<sup>500</sup> Faulkner, *Aphrodite*, 3.

<sup>501</sup> Faulkner, *Aphrodite*, 4.

In both *Aphrodite* and Ezekiel 16, there is a focus on lineage and genealogy. Ezekiel 16 opens with a declaration of Jerusalem's parentage (v. 1): 'Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite'. Jerusalem's foreign heritage combined with her abominable practice of child sacrifice involving offering up her and Yahweh's children before phallic cult objects, the צלמי זכר (vv. 17-22),<sup>502</sup> all demonstrate Jerusalem's negative relationship to a normative familial ideology: her past, exemplified by her parental origins, is foreign, strange and illegitimate, while her future, symbolized by her children, is diminished and destroyed.

In Ezekiel, the prophet casts aspersions of Jerusalem's lineage and deploys it to disparage her; in *Aphrodite*, one also finds a focus on Anchises' genealogy. In lines 200-238, 'there is a long digression during Aphrodite's final speech about Anchises' glorious ancestors Ganymedes and Tithonus [...] who also had love-affairs with gods'.<sup>503</sup> Moreover, when Anchises meets the disguised yet glorious Aphrodite, he addresses her in prayer and asks for 'strong offspring and a long, glorious life' (lines 103-105).<sup>504</sup> Aphrodite grants Anchises' wish and he bears a son, Aeneas, whose genealogy is traced back to mythological beginnings, a political means to bolster one's family; as Barbara Breitenberger writes, '[t]he conception of the hero Aeneas and Aphrodite's prophecy about the future lineage of Anchises [...] may be seen as a tribute paid to the family'.<sup>505</sup>

The difference between *Aphrodite* and Ezekiel 16, then, is the ways in which offspring are portrayed. In *Aphrodite*, though the goddess is essentially foiled by Zeus

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<sup>502</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 114.

<sup>503</sup> Faulkner, *Aphrodite*, 9.

<sup>504</sup> Faulkner, *Aphrodite*, 8.

<sup>505</sup> Barbara Breitenberger, *Aphrodite and Eros: The Development of Greek Erotic Mythology* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2007), 48.

into falling in love with a mortal, her and Anchises' children are still revered as the offspring of divinity. Yahweh's children, on the other hand, are identified with their sinful mother, ultimately to vilify her. A commonality that may be found between the two accounts is the emphasis on female embarrassment/shame. Commenting on the relationship between Aphrodite and Anchises, M. L. West states, 'the union that is an embarrassment for the goddess is a matter of glory for the heroic family that issues from it, and this is the real point of the poem'.<sup>506</sup> The union between Jerusalem and her foreign lovers is also an embarrassment and a shame to her, one that leads to Jerusalem's total submissive silence (v. 63).

Ezekiel 8 describes the 'image of jealousy' at the inner north gate of the temple (v. 3); this image is 'monstrous', 'loathsome' and 'drives [Yahweh] out of [his] sanctuary' (v. 4). There is speculation that the 'image of jealousy' is a reference to the goddess Asherah as 'jealousy' (קנאה) evokes Asherah's title *qnh*, 'creatrix'.<sup>507</sup> Read this way, Ezekiel 8 condemns Asherah worship and obeisance to the female body. In chapter 8, the people (mortal) go after Asherah (divine woman), which is, in Ezekiel at least, religious malpractice; in Ezekiel 16, Jerusalem (divine woman) goes after earthly nations (mortal). These relationships underline the impropriety of an autonomous (divine) female body and in fact reveals the abject nature of the female body compared to Yahweh's glorious one (Ezek. 1.26-28).

This abjection is signalled from Ezekiel 16.15 onwards when the verb נזר is applied to Jerusalem. The city take the gold and silver Yahweh gave her and fashions זכר צלמי with it (v. 17). This phrase refers to either anthropomorphic statuary ('images

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<sup>506</sup> M. L. West, *Homeric Hymns, Homeric Apocrypha, Lives of Homer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2003), 15.

<sup>507</sup> Hennie J. Marsmann, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 225.

of men')<sup>508</sup> or 'phallic images',<sup>509</sup> though the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Given the context this verse falls in, the emphasis most appositely falls on the phallic nature of the statues. In either case, translations such as 'human images' (*Jerusalem Bible*) fail to consider that this is not צלמי אדם or even צלמי אנשים; the author's use of זכר is pointedly deliberate, so it is not possible to conclude that phallic connotations are not in the purview of the author.

Kamionkowski, who reads זכר as phallus, argues that Ezekiel 16.17b ought to be rendered: 'you made yourself phallic images and used them as instruments of fornication'.<sup>510</sup> In other words, the female Jerusalem 'usurps the phallus', taking to herself a penis that she then uses not only on herself, but also to penetrate others.<sup>511</sup> For Kamionkowski, this represents the woman Jerusalem's desire to play the male role, to assume an active position; she concludes, 'chaos emerges not only as a result of cultic and social crimes, but as a result of the subversion of gender order'.<sup>512</sup>

In Jerusalem's quest to secure the phallus for herself, the prophet ensures that his listeners understand that Jerusalemite men are not living up to the expectations required of men when they make themselves passively available to the Egyptians, Assyrians and Babylonians (vv. 26, 28-29). This is further confirmed in the description of Jerusalem as a זונה who takes no payment (v. 31), but instead pays her clients (v. 33). She is poor at upkeeping her own household, failing to display responsible levels of acumen (compare this to the godly woman of Prov. 31.10-31). She does not look after her family, her children, but sacrifices them to her loves (v. 36).

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<sup>508</sup> John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel*, *Biblical and Judaic Studies* 7 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 30.

<sup>509</sup> S. Tamar Kamionkowski, 'Gender Reversal in Ezekiel 16', *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (London; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 170-85: 177.

<sup>510</sup> Kamionkowski, 'Gender Reversal', 178.

<sup>511</sup> Kamionkowski, 'Gender Reversal', 178 n. 27.

<sup>512</sup> Kamionkowski, 'Gender Reversal', 185.

The punishment inflicted on Jerusalem in vv. 35-42 is intended to bring Jerusalem back into line with the gendered constraints considered appropriate to women. At the beginning of the diatribe, there is again a focus on Yahweh's word, as at the opening of the chapter; v. 35 reads, 'Therefore, you *זונה*, hear the word of Yahweh' (*שמו דבר-*), 'this is what Lord Yahweh says (*אמר*)' (v. 36). Yahweh's word brings sexual violence upon Jerusalem—Yahweh will strip (*גלה*) Jerusalem, leaving her exposed to her lovers. The use of *גלה* ('strip') reflects back to Jerusalem's worship of the *גילוי תואבות*, the 'abominable shit gods' (Ezek. 16.36),<sup>513</sup> as well as her stripping before the nations (v. 36). Yahweh's vengeful actions will return her to the naked and bloodied state in which she was found (vv. 4-6), the state before she began to commit *זנה*.

There is also a hidden/veiled dichotomy at work in the text. Jerusalem's uncovering can be contrasted with Yahweh's apparent hiddenness, as he only speaks and does not completely reveal himself. In Ezekiel 1.26-28 the prophet sees Yahweh, but unlike other theophanies in the Hebrew Bible, the deity Ezekiel sees remains at a distance 'above the expanse'. Notable in this vision is the mention of God's 'loins' (*מתנים*), translated by Roland Boer as testicles (though in more colourful language).<sup>514</sup> What is apparent is the avoidance the prophet has in talking directly about the loins themselves: v. 27 mentions the bodied space directly *above* and *below* the loins, but the *מתנים* themselves, are curiously circumvented. Returning to Ezekiel 16, this framing of Yahweh's body highlights the stark materiality of female Jerusalem's. Although none can directly see Yahweh's loins, though they know they exist, all of Jerusalem's nakedness will be seen by a multitude of nations (v. 37). It is also female

<sup>513</sup> David Penchansky, *Twilight of the Gods: Polytheism in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 41.

<sup>514</sup> Roland Boer, 'The Patriarch's Nuts: Concerning the Testicular Logic of Biblical Hebrew', *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality* 5.2 (2011): 41-52.

Jerusalem who makes statues of phalluses to commit זנה with, again a focus on the materiality of her sexuality. This exposed materiality is forcibly fractured and fragmented when the lovers Yahweh brings against Jerusalem 'stone' (רגם) and 'hack' (בתק) her to pieces (v. 40). The verb בתק is a *hapax legomenon*, though the sense of its Akkadian cognate *batāqu* suggests not only to hack, but also the idea of division and the apportioning of parts.

Irigaray writes about the always fragmented nature of female sexuality and how, in Western discourses, it is often positioned in opposition to phallogocentric unity.<sup>515</sup> A comparable ideology of the word (אמרודבר) appears in Ezekiel 16 in which the multiplicity of Jerusalem's sexuality (ותרבי את-תזנתך) (vv. 25-26, 29) is set against the singular covenantal relationship inaugurated by Yahweh in Ezekiel 16.8. In acting outside of the covenant, Jerusalem reveals her uncontainability. Elizabeth Grosz notes how female sexuality is often represented as an 'uncontainable flow',<sup>516</sup> associated with seepage and leakiness, and thence uncleanness. When Yahweh clothes the girl in vv. 8-14, there is an attempt to contain her; to bring her under Yahweh's singular phallic economy. The attempt to usurp the phallus and realize her own sexual economy is viewed in Ezekiel 16 as a testament to Jerusalem's fragmentability, one that does not permit Jerusalem intelligibility within a gendered order.

Ezekiel 23, often paired with Ezekiel 16 because of its imagery, begins with two women, Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem). By the end of the narrative in vv. 46-49, these women have become an 'object of terror' (זאווה), a warning to all

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<sup>515</sup> Elaine P. Miller, 'Reconsidering Irigaray's Aesthetics', *Returning to Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy, Politics, and the Question of Unity*, ed. Maria C. Cimitile and Elaine P. Miller (Albany: SUNY, 2007), 93-120: 109.

<sup>516</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1994), 206.

women not to commit 'lewdness' (זמה). As in chapter 16, the multiplicity of female sexuality, here in the form of perversion, is apparent in the repetitious sexual activities she engaged in.

Ezekiel 23.14-16 attributes a gaze to Oholibah-Jerusalem: she 'saw male figures (אנשי מחקה) carved on the wall [...] when she saw them (למראה עיניה), she lusted (עגב) after them'. As with Ezekiel 16.17 and its mention of phallic cult statues, there is a *visible* representation of a penis with which Jerusalem enacts זנה. The culmination of Jerusalem's זנה occurs in vv. 19-21, just before Yahweh pronounces judgement. The prophet informs the reader that Jerusalem 'lusted after her paramours there [in Egypt], whose members (בשר) were like those of donkeys, whose emission (זמרה) that of stallions' (v. 20). The noun זרמה connotes the זרם storm imagery found associated with Yahweh (Isa. 28.2; 30.30; Hab. 3.10); the forcefulness of the זרם provides the reader with a potently graphic description of Jerusalem's desires and actions. Roland Boer captures this graphicness when he writes of Ezekiel 23.20:

So what Ezekiel 23:20 is really saying is that Jerusalem longs for an equine cum storm, a zoological zirmah, if I may coin a phrase, or bestial bukkake, as it is known in the business.<sup>517</sup>

As in Jeremiah, the bestial comparison works to stress the diminished personhood and femininity of Jerusalem. The punishment Yahweh inflicts distances her from signs of motherhood: she will have no sons or daughters (vv. 25, 47) because not only will her lovers take them from her, but she herself sacrifices them (vv. 37-39). In v. 34, Yahweh tells Jerusalem that she is to 'tear [her] breasts' (שדיך תנתקי), the site of maternal fecundity and nourishment. The first use of נתק in the Hebrew Bible is

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<sup>517</sup> Roland Boer, *The Earthy Nature of the Bible: Fleshy Readings of Sex, Masculinity, and Carnality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 144.

Leviticus 22.24 where it refers to the castration of male animals which render them ineligible for sacrifice to Yahweh because 'they are mutilated, with a blemish in them' (v. 25). The only other use of this root in Ezekiel is 17.9 which describes a withered vine unable to bear fruit.

What does this mean for Mother Jerusalem whose breasts are mutilated and torn? She is certainly no longer acceptable to Yahweh in this state and since the text disassociates her from those gendered aspects considered proper to earthly motherhood, she is degendered as well. It is worth noting that the Syriac of Ezekiel 23.24 reads, 'You shall shave/tear out your hair' (*ws' rky tgzyn*) contrary to the MT's חרשיה תגרמי ('You will gnaw its [the cup of desolation's] shards'). The Syriac *s' r* ('hair') is equivalent to the Hebrew שער mentioned in Ezekiel 16.17 in reference the girl Jerusalem's nascent pubic hair. Though the Syriac may not represent a different *Vorlage* from the Masoretic or preserve an older reading, it does at least show the attempt at harmonization between Ezekiel 16 and 23 and a recognition of the value of שער and שד ('breast') as markers of femininity (which are erased by the prophet in Ezek. 23.34).

Throughout these two accounts, one observes the phallic power of Yahweh's speech over and against the overtly exposed sexuality of female Israel. This move from phallic body to phallic speech may be a response to the precarious position of the temple (and its later destruction). If, as Herbert Niehr maintains,<sup>518</sup> Yahweh was present in the temple by means of a cult statue, which would have been an ideological standard

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<sup>518</sup> Herbert Niehr, 'In Search of YHWH's Cult Statue in the First Temple', *The Image and the Book: Icon Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of the Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1997): 73-95.

in an ancient West Asian environment,<sup>519</sup> then the cult would have needed to find new ways to talk about Yahweh's body with the temple's destruction. In Ezekiel, this is through כבוד ('glory') and שם ('name'). It should be noted that the presumed loss of iconism is not followed by the loss of an anthropomorphic Yahweh. In postexilic texts, Yahweh is still described in bodily terms: he has hands, feet, ears, eyes, a mouth with voice, a nose and wears garments. After the temple's demise, the language of embodiment was retained; what changed was the location of Yahweh's body, moved from earth to heaven, which, argued by Niehr, is the exclusive dwelling place of Yahweh in postexilic texts.<sup>520</sup>

As Yahweh still needed to interact with his worshippers and act within history, Ezekiel (and other prophets) resort to the language of Yahweh's name and glory. In Ezekiel 1, this glory is essentially human in form (vv. 26, 28) and occupies the heavenly throne. Ezekiel's language bespeaks a preservation of iconic ideology especially seen in cultic statuary and reveals glory to be the deity's body or at least an extension of it. As Yahweh now dwells exclusively in heaven rather than an earthly temple, there is a necessity for his body to be extensible. The language Ezekiel employs to distance Yahweh from himself ('this was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh') additionally implies a relocation of the temple, since the glory which had erstwhile infused the Jerusalem sanctuary now fixes itself in heaven. In face of the temple's (impending) demise, Ezekiel recognizes the futility of an earthly materiality and can only vaguely and partially discern Yahweh's 'new' celestial materiality; to speak of Yahweh's body in such a veiled way protects him and removes the power of the cult

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<sup>519</sup> C. Uehlinger, 'Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh's Cult Images', *The Image and the Book: Icon Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of the Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. K. van der Toorn (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1997), 97-155.

<sup>520</sup> Niehr, 'In Search of YHWH's Cult Statue', 75.

image, for now Yahweh cannot be captured or plundered by enemy forces as his body is no longer resident in the Jerusalem temple.

In these Ezekiel texts, שם represents a masculine and perhaps sexual manifestation of the deity and epitomises primarily masculine concerns. שם replaces, or becomes another way to index, the phallus—the culmination of sexuality, power and masculinity in the person of Yahweh. The phallic attributes of the divine penis have become mapped to the שם: Yahweh's name and his renown. The biblical authors exhort their listeners to remember Yahweh's name and this social remembrance is effected through calling upon him and the recitation of his mighty actions in the history of Israel.<sup>521</sup> This remembrance, denoted by the Hebrew זכר, appears in conjunction with שם and generally in matters of sexuality, progeny and masculinity.

Psalm 135, for instance, has the Psalmist say to Yahweh, 'Your שם is unto eternity, your זכר from generation to generation' (v. 13). The continuation of one's name is an important aspect in biblical theologies: in 2 Samuel 18.18, Absalom bemoans the fact that he has no sons to 'remember his name' (שמי הזכיר), so he sets up a יד, a memorial, and a word, as noted, laden with phallic and progenic concerns. In this respect, the common biblical motif of the יד יהוה ('the hand of Yahweh') may be more fully understood through the idea of יד as an embodiment of sexual and masculine concerns. 1 Samuel 5.1-12 is a prime example of this: after the Philistines capture the ark, not only are the hands (ידי) of the Philistine god Dagan's cult statue removed by Yahweh, but the men at Ashdod are struck in their 'secret parts' (as the

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<sup>521</sup> Philippe Guillaume, 'Exploring the Memory of Aaron in Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Yehud', *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods: Social Memory and Imagination*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Oxford: Oxford University, 2013), 95-105: 104.

כַּוַּי has it). Since Dagan is a corn deity (cf. Heb. דָּגָן), and thus a fertility god,<sup>522</sup> when Yahweh literally dis-arms him, he makes a statement about his own identity. As Theodore Jennings writes, ‘the god of phallic power [i.e., Dagan], instead of dominating YHWH, has himself been dominated: forced into head-down submission to the violent potency of the ark’.<sup>523</sup> Yahweh has asserted his position over the realm of power, and in striking the Philistines with a disease of the nether regions, with ‘the marks of anal rape’,<sup>524</sup> he confirms his hypermasculinity.

יָי appears again in Isaiah 56 to give fertility to the one who has none (the eunuch); their assurance of a שֵׁם עוֹלָם, ‘an everlasting name’, imagines Yahweh as the eternal progenitor. The deity promises that the eunuch shall never be ‘cut off’ (כָּרַת), a verb which has explicit links to land ownership,<sup>525</sup> again recalling a deity who not only secures his people’s fertility but also the land’s. To insist upon a permanent name is imperative since to be devoid of descendants threatens one’s afterlife existence,<sup>526</sup> as well as one’s social position. The author of Psalm 135 emphasizes the age-to-age endurance of Yahweh’s name, though this is not secured through Yahweh’s physical descendants in the earthly realm (though Hos. 2.25 and Mal. 2.10-17 give room to consider the lineal descent of Israel from Yahweh),<sup>527</sup> but through the communal reading and hearing of text which allows the community to know (יָדַע) and remember (זָכַר) Yahweh’s deeds in history and how his might was wrought therein (Ps. 135.1-14).

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<sup>522</sup> Lluís Feliu, *The God Dagan in Bronze Age Syria*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 279-281.

<sup>523</sup> Theodore W. Jennings, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 48.

<sup>524</sup> Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*, 48.

<sup>525</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 124.

<sup>526</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 124.

<sup>527</sup> See further texts such as Deut. 32.6 and Ps. 74.2 which use קָנָה (‘beget’) to describe the relationship between the deity and his people.

The association between remembrance, hearing and phallocentrism is also prominent in the Mesopotamian myth of *Enki and Ninmah* discussed earlier, in which Enki declares his penis a 'reminder' (*geštu*) to Ninmah. Though the Sumerian word *geštu* connotes wisdom, it also denotes the ear and should probably be read as an exhortation by Enki for Ninmah's attention. David M. Carr writes that Enki's statement demonstrates the link between sexuality and power and is normative in other Mesopotamian myths dealing with sexuality, which are often characterized by their 'focus on the phallus'.<sup>528</sup>

In Ezekiel 16, זכר, remembrance, is the means by which Israel commits her cultic crimes. This is prominent in v. 17 in which Jerusalem takes her gold and silver and fashions the זכר צלמי. Not only does Jerusalem use the phallus herself (so Kamionkowski), taking Yahweh's role, but Yahweh is further demeaned through Jerusalem's worship of their selfmade phalluses (v. 18). They treat them as cultic statues, dressing them and setting out oil before them. Although the religious significance of this is understandable, that Jerusalem gazes upon a false phallus instead of Yahweh's, considering the temple's fragile nature in this period, this may be read as an invective against mislocating the divine penis. Since Ezekiel prioritizes the word of Yahweh as the primal mode of revelation, the materialistic, phallus-based worship exhibited by the Jerusalemites worsens their crimes, since they not only *misplace* Yahweh's word, his שם, through using their own שם ('fame') to commit נה (v. 15), but they *mislocate* his body swapping humanmade objects for the embodied glory of Yahweh resident in the heavens. Moreover, these Jerusalemites *misunderstand* the purpose of the divine phallus. The Yahwistic phallus not only opens

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<sup>528</sup> David M. Carr, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 98-99.

wombs (Gen. 30.22, where Yahweh *remembers* Rachel), but the remembrance (זכר) of his covenant (that is, the cutting of the penis) increases fertility and blesses nations. Jerusalem, by misunderstanding Yahweh's word, sacrifices her children, decreases her progeny and goes against the very purpose of the divine phallus.

Following the polemic against child sacrifice in Ezekiel 16.21, the text returns to the theme of remembrance. There is ambiguity in verse 22, however, surrounding the verb זכר. It read, 'In all your abominations and your זנה actions, I did not remember (לא זכרתי) the days of your youth'. The scribes who worked with this passage assume a *qere* reading of 'you did not remember' (לא זכרת), probably to harmonize it with Jeremiah 2.2, 'I, Yahweh, remember the devotion of your youth'. If the *ketib* reading is not a scribal error,<sup>529</sup> it makes Yahweh the subject of זכר, with its implicit phallic background, so that Yahweh takes hold of the phallic word in his declaration to the wayward Jerusalem. Yet, the picture the prophet paints is one in which Jerusalem illegitimately seizes this word; Yahweh will not remember Jerusalem's youth, their marriage period, because Jerusalem 're-members' it, that is, she places another member in its stead. Yahweh, because of Jerusalem's actions, is emasculated and this is perhaps the Jerusalemites' greatest crime. Yahweh's tirade of insults from v. 22 onwards allows him to regain his lost masculinity through the repetition of words, and the punishment he inflicts on his wife in vv. 35-42, sexual violence at the hands of Israel's enemies, is a clear display of his virility, the 'war-as-rape' motif combining sex and power in the way typical of ancient West Asian understandings of gender.

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<sup>529</sup> Unfortunately, there are eight verses in Ezekiel 16 in which the written *ketib* form and the spoken *qere* form disagree over whether a verb should be read as first person ('I', as in Yahweh) or second person ('you', as in Jerusalem) (vv. 13, 18, 22, 31, 43, 47, 51, 59). In most of these cases, it seems nonsensical that Yahweh should be taken as the subject (vv. 13, 18, 31, 43b, 51, 59) lest he be the one committing these cultic crimes. However, one could argue (at a push, perhaps) that the destabilization between divine subject and the wayward object of this prophetic tirade (Jerusalem) perfectly encapsulates the essence of Jerusalem's crime: seizing Yahweh's phallic word.

The power of language, in this instance of Yahweh's phallic word, cannot be overemphasized. As Brandon L. Fredenburg writes, 'Ezekiel uses gutter language and images designed to shock the insensitive into their senses, and he makes no apology for this strategy'.<sup>530</sup> The male audience hear their deity accuse them of being penetrated by other males with sex toys and listen to him call them האשה המנאפת ('an adulterous wife') and זונה ('harlot'), firm in the knowledge that אשה-זונה שלטת ('a domineering whore') rules over them (Ezek. 16.30).

The speech the prophet makes can be construed as a linguistic attack on Jerusalem. Jerusalem is denied a voice after Yahweh begins his tirade against her: 'you' language, characteristic of vv. 15-22, where the woman is emphasized, is replaced by Yahwistic 'I' language in vv. 35-43, a return to how Ezekiel 16 begins. The last sentence spoken by Yahweh end the attack and ensures the woman's complete submission: 'You will never open your mouth again because of your humiliation'. Yahweh silences her, and therefore removes the power of the phallus from her, which she had earlier attempted to claim. Mary E. Shields notes, quite pertinently, that the woman 'is never constituted as a subject apart from Yahweh's speech and view'.<sup>531</sup> Defining the woman's body through Yahwistic speech is essentially the power of the divine phallus. Yahweh's body is only alluded to (and then sexually), while the stark materiality of the female body is underlined. There is not yet the sharp dichotomy between flesh and spirit found in later Christian tradition; instead, there is a contrast between the hidden phallus and the exposed female body. The hidden phallus is made

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<sup>530</sup> Brandon L. Fredenburg, *Ezekiel*, College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin: College Press, 2002), 141.

<sup>531</sup> Mary E. Shields, 'Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender in Ezekiel 16', *Prophets and Daniel: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 137-53: 140.

knowable through prophetic discourse, and though it is made visible by Jerusalem, who mislocate it, Yahweh later conceals it again, restoring his and Jerusalem's identities to their proper places: his as phallic lord whose word is law; hers as silent, submission sexual partner who should have Yahweh's 'word' ever on her lips. Before pronouncing Jerusalem's silence in Ezekiel 16.63, Yahweh declares to the prophet's audience that they will know him when he 'remembers' (זכר) the covenant he made with them. He will give back the phallus to his word and Jerusalem will 'know' the word-giver in the biblical sense.

One sees through Ezekiel 16 and 23 the importance and function of speech in constructing identity. We have also seen, through שמ and זכר, how central posterity is, but not posterity for posterity's sake, but in order that the progenitor might himself be remembered—that his member, his idealized penis, might ensure his immortality. In a comparable way, Yahweh, the ultimate man and epitome of masculinity, causes his followers to call upon his name to ensure his continued fertility. In most ancient Judah, this may have been achieved through iconic adoration, yet the coming templeless age caused a significant shift in how the people envisioned Yahweh's presence.

I have argued that this shift includes a move away from terrestrial materialism, which becomes implicitly demeaned in Yahweh's construction of the female Jerusalem, to a celestial corporeality in which the phallus of this Judahite god is mediated through the deity's words. Ultimately, attention to speech and its placement in prophetic denunciations of Israel reveal the need for the Word to be correctly placed and utilized; language becomes a cultic expression, through emphasis on Torah, and as such enters the male domain. Words frame Israel's adultery; she commits זנה in

pursuit of a false phallus (זכר): a misplaced, visible and constructed word in opposition to Yahweh's ordered, invisible and eternal one.

## Conclusion

The texts examined rely on the image of a deity in 'relationship' with Israel in order to function. For some theologians and biblical scholars alike, this has been characterized as the prophetic 'marriage metaphor'. In this case, the message the metaphor seeks to convey is that of Israel's religious malpractice. Under this conception, the thought structuring the metaphor is the equation of correct religious adherence with a faithful 'marriage'.

The problem with using the term 'metaphor', however, is that one may overlook the normatively bodied language used of deity in the Hebrew Bible and assume that the ancient Israelites, or at least the one who are part of the community that produced, used and propagated the biblical texts, understood their portrayals of deities to be a product of a necessary metaphorical anthropomorphism. There are indeed some passages that wrestle with this anthropomorphism, most notably Ezekiel 1.26-28 where the prophet sees Yahweh in the heavens above the firmament; in this text, Ezekiel describes what he sees as 'the appearance (מראה) of the likeness (דמות) of the glory of Yahweh' (v. 28b). Yet even in this hesitation, he acknowledges that what he sees is indeed דמות כמראה אדם, 'a likeness with the appearance of a human' (v. 26). Though the prophet may see through a glass darkly, it remains the case that for Ezekiel there *is* a visible, bodied personage (Yahweh) in the heavens. Indeed, much of the bodied language used of Yahweh's appearances in the Hebrew Bible comes across matter-of-factly and there is little to suggest that this imagery is metaphorical, that is, that a noncorporeal deity is being expressed in corporeal terms. Rather it is

likely that references to Yahweh's walking, speaking, looking, hearing or to specific body parts such as his hands, feet, eyes, nostrils, face, and even backside (Exod. 33.23), presume and take for granted the idea that Yahweh has a body.<sup>532</sup>

It is this bodied person, Yahweh, who is pictured in the Hebrew Bible in relationship with the people of Israel (the 'marriage metaphor'). Though this thesis does employ the terms 'marriage', 'husband' and 'wife' in the context of this imagery, it should be noted that this is to place it within the history of scholarship that deals with these texts. The verb used for 'marriage' (בעל) is one that denotes the lordship of the man over the woman, and indeed, the words rendered 'husband' and 'wife' are simply those for 'man' (איש) and 'woman' (אשה),<sup>533</sup> such that it becomes clear that 'marriage' in the Hebrew Bible is less about relationship *per se* and more about the strictures surrounding gender and the expectations attendant on those who occupy these gendered positions.

I am therefore uncomfortable with the opinion that these passages of scripture are 'mere' metaphors, not only because such views often operate to ameliorate the heavily problematic and misogynistic content in the prophets,<sup>534</sup> but also because it demonstrates a wariness in asking why a particular metaphor is apposite. Sallie McFague argues that a metaphor 'says what cannot be said any other way',<sup>535</sup> such that the tenor (the subject of the metaphor) and the vehicle (the image by which the subject is conveyed) are not haphazardly brought together, but both need each other

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<sup>532</sup> Benjamin Sommer, *Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (New York: Cambridge University, 2009), 1-10.

<sup>533</sup> *OEBGS*, 356.

<sup>534</sup> Sharon Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphor in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2008), 1-5.

<sup>535</sup> Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Language: Models of God in Religious Language* (London: SCM, 1983), 50.

for the meaning of the metaphor to be realized. If McFague is correct, then the imagery utilized by the prophets is a necessity; in other words, there is a quality or set of qualities about Yahweh's interactions with Israel which makes the language of 'marriage' natural in this context.

However, though the language may be metaphorical, one must bear in mind that the tenor is not Yahweh himself, but how he acts towards Israel. It is these interactions which give rise to other metaphorical mappings such as 'Yahweh is husband' or 'Israel is female'. Yet, one must be able to ask why the biblical writers are comfortable with such a formulation of the relationship between the deity and his people. Frymer-Kensky claimed that Yahweh 'is not at all phallic, and cannot represent male virility and sexual potency',<sup>536</sup> but here in the prophets the use of the unstable *נזר* figure and the actions Yahweh takes to bring her back into 'livable' space demonstrate the opposite. The texts analyzed present sexual(ized) language for Yahweh in a manner consistent with how the divine penis is presented in ancient West Asian myths: namely, it is connected to Yahweh's authority, it sets up a division between what constitutes maleness and what ought to define femaleness, and it phallicizes male speech.

M. C. Beardsley writes that absurdity may allow us to infer the metaphorical,<sup>537</sup> and it is the apparent absurdity of taking a sexual or sexually presented Yahweh seriously that allows others to argue that this language in the Hebrew Bible as regards the 'marriage metaphor' is precisely that: metaphorical. After all, if, as Yehezkel Kaufmann argues, 'God has no material aspect whatsoever',<sup>538</sup> then it is indeed absurd to take the take the implications of the 'marriage metaphor' literally. It may be

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<sup>536</sup> Frymer-Kensky, 'Law and Philosophy', 4.

<sup>537</sup> M. C. Beardsley (1958) cited in Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphor*, 31.

<sup>538</sup> Yehezkel Kaufmann, *Toledot*, 1:226-7, cited in Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 71.

the case that ideas of Yahweh ‘lying’ down Israel (Hos. 2.20), having sex with the land and scattering seed (Hos. 2. 25) or moaning and yearning in longing (Jer. 31.18-20) are, on the face of it, bizarre. However, analogous actions and themes are employed in the other West Asian literature surveyed previously and show that they are not unusual descriptions for male deities.

Ultimately, as modern readers of these ancient texts, we do not have access to information which could definitively tell us whether the communities responsible for them believed them to be ‘literal’ portrayals of their deities, and the same applies to the Hebrew Bible. What can be known and discovered, however, is the Israelite imaginary, the place from which the prophetic authors draw in constructing the sexual relationship between their deity and Israel and the space that permits such a formulation in the first place. Here I am using ‘imaginary’ to denote, in this context, the ideological landscape of the biblical communities that contains the aggregate images, understandings, beliefs, values, and so on, that affect how these communities construct reality. What is represented in this imaginary has ‘real existence due to [its] “subsistence” in people’s social practices’ and that it ‘exert[s] a *real* influence upon the structure of people’s activities’.<sup>539</sup>

In arguing that sexual language is used of Yahweh in the prophets, my point is to say that this imagery is necessary in order for the texts to function as they do, and hence a sexual Yahweh is *real*, *influential* and *indispensable* in the Israelite imaginary, the place from which ideologies are affirmed, sustained, and supported. In fact, Stuart Macwilliam asks his readers to ‘think [of metaphor] less in terms of truth’, and more in terms of power; that is, how the metaphor functions ideologically, as it is in this capacity

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<sup>539</sup> John Shotter, *Conversational Realities: Constructing Life Through Language* (London: SAGE, 2002), 80.

that the so-called prophetic marriage metaphor comes to approve, on the whole, patriarchal gender relationships and heteronormative modes of being,<sup>540</sup> as well as sustaining the image of a sexual and phallic Yahweh.

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<sup>540</sup> Stuart Macwilliam, *Queer Theory and the Marriage Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011), 67.

## YAHWEH'S PHALLUS AND EZEKIEL'S WOMB

### *The Prophet and the Valley of Dry Bone(r)s in Ezekiel 36-37*

#### Introduction

Ezekiel 16 and 23 are the *loci classici* of scholarly work that deals with the 'marriage metaphor', and so it seems odd to discuss Ezekiel 37.1-14, Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, in a similar context. Yet, within this chapter, one finds implications of an underlying eroticism that structures the passage: what are we to think, for example, of the intimate relationship between Yahweh and an Israel pictured as dead and lifeless bones? Is it possible to read a 'necrosexual' bond between the two parties? After all, Patricia MacCormack writes that necrosexual desire assumes the corpse to be the 'actual material residue of "the human"',<sup>541</sup> an image one finds in the Hebrew Bible and its construction of bones as the locus of 'the human' even after death.

Stavropoulou, for example, examines the motif of bone burning in the Hebrew Bible (1 Kgs. 13.2; 2 Kgs. 23.16, 20; Amos 2.1) and argues that it is an act that renders the bones 'socially impotent'<sup>542</sup> and removes their 'socio-religious valency',<sup>543</sup> precisely because they are *already* assumed to be more than inert objects; it is rather inertia itself that is the desired outcome of these acts of desecration. Joanne Schafer, noting the tendency of archaeology to dichotomize people and objects, such that the death of a person 'precipitates and ontological shift in the perception of the body',<sup>544</sup> that is, from subject to object, argues that this need not be the case; 'the human skeleton', she writes, 'may retain a social presence in death'.<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Patricia MacCormack, 'Necrosexuality', *Queering the Non/Human*, ed. Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 339-62: 339.

<sup>542</sup> Stavropoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 85, 88.

<sup>543</sup> Stavropoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 87.

<sup>544</sup> Joanna Schafer, *The Body as Material Culture: A Theoretical Osteoarchaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), 62.

<sup>545</sup> Schafer, *The Body*, 62.

It is my contention that when one takes the abiding agency of what is assumed inert into consideration, Ezekiel 37.1-14 can be more than a text about Yahweh's unmatched power over death (a reading exemplified by Christian theologies which see this passage as a sign of the resurrection of Christ and believers),<sup>546</sup> and instead become one which understands power to be negotiated between various acting subjects. That the bones in Ezekiel 37 are still acting subjects bespeaks a liminality that applies to the prophet as well as his people and demonstrates the gendered plurality of divine or divinely inhabited persons. This gendered multiplicity permits Yahweh to demonstrate his phallicized nature and the multiplicity of his own sexuality.

### **Bodily Displacement and Liminality**

In Ezekiel 37.1-14, liminality, the state of being 'in-between', characterizes the three main actors of the text: Yahweh, Ezekiel and the bones. The deity, for instances, possesses a multispatial presence: he is understood by Ezekiel to dwell on the cosmic mountain (Ezek. 1.2), yet is among both his people (Ezek. 37.26-27) and the dead (Ezek. 37.2). His presence among the dead is notable as far as the corpse is often inscribed as a contaminant,<sup>547</sup> so much so that Frymer-Kensky writes that 'no individual who has had contact with the world of the dead can be part of life'.<sup>548</sup> In Ezekiel, this tension is acknowledged and ironically demonstrated by the spirit, the *ruah* (a word denoting breath, life and spaciousness), who carries the prophet, and thus also itself, to the valley: a place of death and enclosure.

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<sup>546</sup> Johannes Tromp, "'Can These Bones Live?': Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Eschatological Resurrection', *The Book of Ezekiel and Its Influence*, ed. Henk Jan de Jonge and Johannes Tromp (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2007): 61-78.

<sup>547</sup> See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 329-350.

<sup>548</sup> Frymer-Kensky, *Bible and Feminist Criticism*, 330.

As a threshold to the underworld in West Asian mytho-landscapes,<sup>549</sup> Ezekiel's displacement to this chthonic valley renders precarious his social existence. Surrounded by the dead, the bones of his people, Ezekiel is the proverbial 'last man on earth'. Here again, one encounters a certain irony in the text in that the one figured as אָדָם־בֶּן־אָדָם, the 'son of man/Adam' (37.3, 9, 11, 16),<sup>550</sup> to whom God said, 'it is not good [...] to be alone' (Gen. 2.18), should here be so. The goodness of interpersonal sociality is denied to Ezekiel, and unlike Genesis 2.21-23, where God rectified the solitude of אָדָם using one of the creature's own bones, Ezekiel remains a solitary figure in front of the bones that are in some communal sense his.

Who is the prophet when he stands before (t)his dead people? Who can he be when, as Butler writes, to undergo communal dispossession is to reveal that these very community relationships that are now lost always already constitute us?<sup>551</sup> Does Ezekiel's dispossession, his diasporic body, lack a concrete self-identity, such that he more like the bones before him than the reader suspects?

If Ezekiel is undone before the valley of the dead, his undoing may function in an analogous way to Isaiah's in Isaiah 6; as Isaiah's speechlessness before Yahweh enables him to hear Yahweh's voice and receive divine commission, so too does Ezekiel's confrontation with the dead, since the deity only communicate with Ezekiel after he has led him around the valley (37.2-3):

And Yahweh said to me, 'Son of Adam, can these bones live?' (v. 3)

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<sup>549</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 62.

<sup>550</sup> See Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 129-138 on the way Ezekiel draws on the creation traditions in Genesis 1-2 to formulate his theology of Israel's restoration.

<sup>551</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London; New York: Verso, 2004), 22.

This communication is not a typical revelation of Yahweh's will, rather it is a question that invites response, making it markedly different from the deity's previous revelations to the prophet. The chapters preceding Ezekiel 37 in almost all instances open with Yahweh's word coming directly to the prophet; the exceptions are found in Ezekiel 1.1-28 and 8.1-11.14 in which the divine word does not come immediately to Ezekiel, but only following visionary experiences of divine beings. Though Ezekiel 1.3 reads, 'Yahweh's word came to Ezekiel the priest', the prophet does not hear Yahweh speak until 2.1; instead, as 1.1 ('I saw visions of God') makes clear, the sight of the divine presence precedes the auditory revelation.

In both chapters 1 and 8, the prophet gazes upon Yahweh's anthropomorphic body, though notably in both, the deity's 'loins' (מתנים) are enshrouded in fire (1.26-28; 8.2). In these chapters, Ezekiel's encounter with Yahweh is as visceral as for Isaiah in Isaiah 6; yet in Ezekiel 37, the prophet's gaze must instead fix upon the nonfleshed. In this way, Ezekiel's vision have gone from one extreme to the other, from the genitaled and life-giving god of Ezekiel 1 to the seemingly inert bones of Ezekiel 37; this spectrum of experiences places him on the borders and in-between spaces of the text.

This in-betweenness is inaugurated by Yahweh's spirit and James Robson writes that while Ezekiel may not be portrayed as an entirely 'passive' prophet, the role of רוח in his ministry 'points to a prophet constrained by Yahweh', one seized 'like an object'.<sup>552</sup> The language of 'object' is used by Sofaer to describe how a corpse may be perceived and perhaps Ezekiel too can be seen as such by the reader, for though he is clearly

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<sup>552</sup> James Robson, *Word and Spirit in Ezekiel* (New York; London: T&T International, 2006), 215.

alive, maybe it is his perceived object status that makes him suitable to be spirit-filled just like the bones in the valley later are.

If it is Ezekiel's object status and his emptiness that allows the spirit to penetrate him (Ezek. 2.2, 'the  $\text{nr}$  entered me'), it is possible to reflect on the erotic dimension of the relationship between the prophet, the bones and Yahweh. In Ezekiel 1, the reader encounters a bodied and loined god, and, in Ezekiel 2, the spirit of this deity, who to all intents and purposes may be described as 'transcendent' (he is firmly placed 'above the expanse' in Ezek. 1.26), becomes immanent in the prophet's materiality. Thus, the boundaries between Yahweh's body and the prophet's become less clear and the division between outside and in, above and below, is rendered unstable as Yahweh, who supposedly exists above on the cosmic mountain, has in his revelations to Ezekiel entered into the prophet, while Ezekiel, in order to accommodate Yahweh's spirit is seemingly outside himself and emptied.

Christopher Schmidt argues that food can offer a way to question 'the boundaries of the erotic body',<sup>553</sup> and that there can be an erotics grounded in the inversion of inside and outside, explorable through the metaphor of consumption.<sup>554</sup> At the beginning of Ezekiel, Yahweh commands the prophet to ingest 'a written scroll' (2.8-3.3) that contains the words he is to speak to the rebellious house of Israel. When he consumes it, Ezekiel indeed reverses and inverts the outside/inside binary, for in Ezekiel 2.8-3.3 what typically exits one's mouth (words) is placed into it, and so, with the taste of sweet honest, the material instantiation of Yahweh's spoken word becomes comestible.

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<sup>553</sup> Christopher Schmidt, *The Poetics of Waste: Queer Excess in Stein, Ashbery, Schuyler, and Goldsmith* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 37.

<sup>554</sup> Schmidt, *The Poetics of Waste*, 38.

In typically provocative fashion, Roland Boer reads this scene as a ‘moment of what can only be called autofellatio’,<sup>555</sup> as Ezekiel takes Yahweh’s ‘scroll’ in his mouth—where does the divine begin and the human end? In his discussion of the prophetic frenzy scenes of 1 Samuel 10.5-6 and 19.19-24, in which Yahweh’s spirit falls upon Saul and causes him to prophesy and become naked, Theodore Jennings writes that ‘[t]he possession by the spirit of the Lord is a overpoweringly erotic, and indeed sexual, experience’.<sup>556</sup> While nakedness is not part of Ezekiel’s prophetic actions, the sexual presence implied by nakedness *is* part of Yahweh’s body and its enflamed loins, a body before which Ezekiel falls to the ground in submission (Ezekiel 1.28), there to wait for the deity to ‘enter into’ (תבא בי) him (2.1-2).

The phrase ‘go/come into’ (בוא אלעל) is used in the Hebrew Bible as a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Gen. 6.4; 16.2, 4; 29.21, 23; 30.3-4; 38.2, 8; Deut. 21.13; 22.13; 25.5; Judg. 16.1; Ruth 4.1 *et al*), of a man ‘entering’ a woman; were I therefore to take Boer’s approach, I might say that Ezekiel is figured as the bottom to Yahweh’s top, since the eroticism presented here, that is according to Georges Bataille, the loss of self in the other in which ‘the being loses [themselves] deliberately’ and by which ‘the subject is identified with the object losing [their] identity’,<sup>557</sup> structures itself around the power differentials that exist between deity and prophet. The scroll fed to Ezekiel, for example, places him in a passive position as a recipient of Yahweh’s word; a position that would, as Eilberg-Schwartz might argue, feminize him.<sup>558</sup> Ezekiel 3.3 is a demonstration within the text of Ezekiel’s positively feminized subjectivity:

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<sup>555</sup> Roland Boer, *The Earthy Nature of the Bible: Fleishy Readings of Sex, Masculinity, and Carnality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012), 68.

<sup>556</sup> Jennings, *Jacob’s Wound*, 85.

<sup>557</sup> Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986), 31.

<sup>558</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God’s Phallus*, 137.

בטן תאכל ומעריך תמלא את המגלה הזות אשר אני נתן אליך

Feed your בטן and fill your מעה with the scroll that I am giving to you.

The terms בטן and מעה refer to a person's inward parts (irrespective of gender) and in the Hebrew Bible may be translated either 'belly' or 'womb'.<sup>559</sup> In Ezekiel 3.3, the two terms appear in parallel, with such parallelism only occur in four other biblical texts: Genesis 25.23, Numbers 5.22, Isaiah 49.1 and Psalm 71.6:

And the Lord said to her,  
 'Two nations are in your womb (בטן),  
 and two peoples from within you (מעה) shall be divided...'  
 (Gen. 25.23)

'May this water that brings the curse pass into your bowels (מעה) and make your womb (בטן) swell and your thigh fall away.' And the woman shall say 'Amen, Amen.' (Num. 5.22)  
 The Lord called me from the womb (בטן),  
 from the body (מעה) of my mother he named my name. (Isa. 49.1)

Upon you I have leaned from before my birth (בטן);  
 you are he who took me from my mother's womb (מעה). (Ps. 71.6)

In each of these four cases, the terms בטן and מעה are explicitly applied to women or mothers. In Ezekiel 3.3, therefore, one may understand the scroll (or 'scroll') as an object which reconfigures the prophet's bodily morphology to render it maternal and wombed. In Ezekiel 37.7, the maternal Ezekiel gives birth to the people of Israel when, at his word, bone joins to bone and receives flesh in the chthonic womb that is the valley (vv. 7-8). One cannot help note the striking parallel with the imagery of Psalm 139.13, 15: 'You begot my כלית (lit. kidneys, fig. being), you covered me in my mother's

<sup>559</sup> Løland, *Salient or Silent Gender*, 149-50.

womb [...] my bones were not concealed from you [...] when you wove me in the lowest parts of the netherworld (ארץ).

Ezekiel is able to provide this restorative, birthing word to Israel because Yahweh has already impregnated him with his honey-flavoured phallic scroll. It is worth noting that in other ancient West Asian literature, honey or syrup indexes sexuality and sexual 'sweetness';<sup>560</sup> for example, Inana and her vagina are referred to as 'sweet', and there are references to female genitalia as honey pots in some Sumerian love spells. This equation however is not particular to women: we are told Dumuzi's bed 'drips with syrup' while the sex appeal of kings is likened to its sweetness.<sup>561</sup> Yahweh's scroll thus has a certain sex appeal, such that when Ezekiel swallows this phallus (or phallic simulacrum), his body engages erotically with Yahweh's, resulting in Israel's rebirth or resurrection. Moreover, the feminization of Ezekiel's body, in the sense that its morphology resembles what is assumed to be proper to female bodies, makes it apt that he should swallow the scroll, given Dumuzi compares the sweetness of Inana's mouth to that of her vagina.<sup>562</sup>

If, as has been suggested, Ezekiel draws on the language of Genesis 2-3, then Israel's birth/resurrection is comparable to Eve's who is 'bone from [Adam's] bone and flesh from [his] flesh' (Gen. 2.23). If this mythology of Eve informs Ezekiel's text then Israel, like the prophet himself, is also feminized. In Ezekiel's case, this feminization is negatively portrayed in the previous chapter in which Israel's ways are compared to the 'uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity (נדֵה) (36.17).

Eve Feinstein draws parallels between Ezekiel 36.17 and Ezra 9.11 in which the land the Israelites were to possess is described as polluted with the 'impurity (נדֵה)

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<sup>560</sup> Leick, *Sex and Eroticism*, 123-24.

<sup>561</sup> *OEBGS*, 283.

<sup>562</sup> *OEBGS*, 283.

of the people of the lands'.<sup>563</sup> Noting that these people are encoded as male in Ezra 9.11, Feinstein writes that, as an interpretation, 'a gender-bending image of "menstrual men" is not unthinkable', though she ultimately finds it wanting.<sup>564</sup> Yet I would argue that in Ezekiel 36, this is *precisely* what occurs; that is, the bleeding female body is employed as a sign and confirmation that the Israelites do not act, in the view of the author, as men proper.

In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder writes, 'it is not easy to find anything more monstrous than the flow of a woman' (vii 15). In Ezekiel 36, a similar sentiment is at work: Israel is composed of, to use quote Feinstein, 'gender-bending' males (as far as they do not conform to gendered expectations) whose menstruation pollutes the land—the very antithesis of the vision offered by the prophet in which men are to reproduce and fill the land, in which mountains will put forth their branches (v. 8) and where everything will flourish and become like Eden (vv. 29-30, 35). The reference to Eden in 36.35 is pertinent as in chapter 37 this imagery is used by the prophet to describe the 'resurrection' of Israel; the allusion to Eden therefore presages the fruitfulness that is to be bestowed upon an Israel who will be 'blessed and multiplied' by God (37.26; cf. Gen. 1.26-28).

S. Tamar Kamionkowski proposes that the metaphorical equation of weak men with women in part structures Ezekiel 16 and 23.<sup>565</sup> In Ezekiel 36, this metaphor is deployed against Israel to render them 'menstrual men'. Moreover, in 36.3, the prophet states that the nations have made Israel a 'desolate place' (שָׁמָה), a word used to describe Tamar after she is raped (שַׁמְמָה) (2 Sam. 13.20). 'In certain figurative

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<sup>563</sup> Eva Levavi Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University, 2014), 182.

<sup>564</sup> Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution*, 182.

<sup>565</sup> S. Tamar Kamionkowski, *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study in the Book of Ezekiel* (London; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 58.

expressions', writes Harold C. Washington, 'the feminine signifies an object of violence in opposition to male violent agency'.<sup>566</sup> Thus, to imagine Israel as desolate is to frame the people as a raped, and so, in the prophetic imagination, passive and weak woman. Combined with the image of Israelites as menstruating men, the prophet questions the masculinity and virility of the Israelites; it is in the context of the incompatibility between (masculine) fertility and the wasteful, bleeding female body that the description of Israel's bones as 'dry', a description that only occurs in this text, begins to make sense.

### Israel's Dry Phallus

As stated earlier, there is an allusion to the Genesis creation narratives in Ezekiel 36-37, yet there is also a difference between the portrayals of the bones in these two texts. In the former, the rib (צלע) taken from Adam is life-giving (as are ribs in Sumerian mythology),<sup>567</sup> and Eve, formed from it, is given the epithet 'Mother of All Living Ones' (Gen. 3.20). In contrast, the bones of Ezekiel 37 are 'dry' (יבש) and 'cut off' (גזר) from Yahweh (v. 11), as opposed to Adam and Even who become one flesh (Gen. 2.24).

The use of 'cut off' (גזר) stresses the bones' lifelessness since in Psalm 88, the same language is used of the dead and the slain in their graves, no longer to be remembered (v. 5), 'cut off from [Yahweh's] hand (יד)', a symbol of his strength and virility. To describe the bones as יבש is to highlight the displacement which, as noted above, already characterizes Ezekiel himself. Yet not only does it signify displacement, but it also communicates lack as in Numbers 11.6 where it is applied to the wandering

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<sup>566</sup> Harold C. Washington, "Lest He Die in Battle and Another Man Take Her": Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Laws of Deuteronomy 20-22', *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Victor H. Matthews, Bernard M. Levinson, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 185-213: 194. See also, Pamela Gordon and Harold C. Washington, 'Rape as a Military Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible', *Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, ed. Athalya Brenner (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004): 308-25.

<sup>567</sup> Ziony Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?* (Yale: Yale University, 2013), 139-40.

and hungry people of Israel and their desire to fill and satiate themselves. More significantly perhaps, one finds the term used of the eunuch in Isaiah 56.3, who is told not to proclaim that they are 'dry trees' (עץ יבש). In this instance, it conveys childlessness on the part of the eunuch.

What Israel lacks, therefore, is phallus, virility and offspring. Indeed, in Hosea 2.5, as previously discussed, the root יבש, when understood to refer to dryness, presents the reader with the image of the desiccated mother (compare Hos. 9.14), and again in Hosea 9.16, יבש describes an arid Ephraim unable to give birth. The monument (יד), a functional phallic simulacrum, therefore opposes everything that יבש denotes: dryness, desiccation and death.

The resurrection of Israel's bones is quite simply a re-erection: the phallic word that impregnates the prophet in Ezekiel 3 is here the impetus for life within the dry bones. Just as the spirit sets Ezekiel upon his feet in Ezekiel 2.2 (ותעמדני על-רגלי), so too are the bones, by Ezekiel's prophetic agency, set upon their feet in Ezekiel 37.10 (ויעמדו) (על-רגליהם). This re-erection presages the return to the land of Israel (37.11-14) that they might then know (ידע) Yahweh, a concept used in other prophetic books, most notably Hosea, in the context of an imagined sexual relationship between Israel and the deity. The latter half of Ezekiel 37 (vv. 15-28) reflects what ought to be the positive outcomes of the legitimate enactment of this relationship: ancestral land (v. 25a), progeny to keep and secure the land for generations (v. 25b), peace (v. 26a), multiplication (v. 26b) and the knowledge (ידע) that God dwells among Israel (vv. 27-28).

This focus on productive fertility is a repercussion of the remanning of Israel, to distance them from a negative feminine space typified by lack to one encoded as

masculine and life-giving. However, markers of femininity still persist even in the bountiful future vision offered by the prophet to his male readers. The masculinity conferred by land ownership as well as the repudiation of dryness (יבש) nevertheless appears alongside the rhetoric of 'turning', which, as I explain below, is used to mark Israel as female. This feminization occurs in order that Yahweh can sow (זרע) the land (Ezek. 36.9) and increase its produce.

Thus, while the re(s)erected Israelites have been re-membered and have assumed their position within a hegemonic male ideal, as a corporate representation of the land, they must submit to Yahweh, according to biblical gender ideologies, in a typically female way. Though there is clearly a tension here in the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as regards gender, there are horizontal (among the community) and vertical (between God and the people) aspects at work. The men of the community *among themselves* are expected to conform to certain ideals of masculinity that carry social capital among their peers; however, when they interact with Yahweh, they must assume a 'feminized' position so that Yahweh, presumably, is able to retain his position as the pinnacle of masculinity.

This vertical feminization does not negatively impinge upon the social capital gained from the performance of masculinity along the communal horizontal axis. However, transgressions of the vertical (God-community) axis render the permitted feminization illicit in a manner that reflect an arguable virgin/whore dichotomy similar to the juxtaposition between Lady Wisdom and the Strange Woman in the wisdom literature. With this in mind, I turn now to Yahweh's turning in Ezekiel 36 and how Yahweh's gaze resolves to re(in)corporate Israel, to reinscribe their/her bodies/body within the terms of an idealized female form that is beneficial to both the vertical and horizontal aspects of Israel's relationship with Yahweh.

### The Turning of Yahweh

The resurrection of Ezekiel 37.1-4 is less about the resurrection of individuals and more about the corporate restoration of Israel as a people and a land. This land, previously described as 'desolate' (שָׁמָם), a term that carries 'overtones of rape and physical abuse',<sup>568</sup> is to be restored so that the Israelites might intimately know Yahweh (37.14), a relationship that yields both human and animal procreation (36.11) and makes the land ready to be seeded and prepared for רבה, creative multiplication.

In Leviticus 26.9, for example, Yahweh says: 'I will turn to you and make you fruitful (פָּרָה) and multiply you (רָבָה)', words which recall the Genesis narratives and the reproductive benedictions given to humanity (Gen. 1.28). This turning places Israel within Yahweh's sight, and as such contrasts with how justice is meted out to female figures who transgress the bounds of legitimate femininity; that is, to be placed within the often-violent gaze of other men (see Isa. 47.3, Ezek. 16.37, and Nah. 3.5). For Israel to be solely within Yahweh's sight is an act that reinscribes her within the acceptable limits of female existence.

These limits are outlined in Leviticus 19-20, which uses פָּנִי alongside זָנָה ('whoring'). In Leviticus 19.4, 31 and 20.6, Israel is admonished not to turn (פָּנִי) to idols (אֱלִילִים), to 'the knowing ones' (יֹדְעֵינִים) or to the departed ancestors (אֲבוֹת). It is Leviticus 20.6 which uses זָנָה in reference to the divine beings that grant this mantic knowledge, suggesting that the Israelites viewed them as pathways to knowledge proper, and further implies that the author viewed them as subjects whom it was possible to be in relationship with. The appearance of זָנָה to condemn these relationships reveals that

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<sup>568</sup> F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations* (Louisville; Westminster John Knox, 2002), 69.

they were considered a gendered threat to what the author conceives of as authentic Yahwism.

The Levitical author therefore positions פני as an epistemological term; for to whom one turns, to what one looks, discloses the place from which one constructs, and expects to receive, knowledge. Such is the case in Genesis 3, where Eve sees (ראה) that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Bad is beautiful to look at and 'desirable for making one wise' (3.6). In the case of ידענים and אבת, knowledge comes from a displaced other; that is, the dead. As such, in both Genesis 3 and the condemnations of Leviticus 20, the knowledge sought derives from a place foreign to life-giving Yahwism as the writers conceive it.

Deuteronomy employs a similar motif, and 29.18 in particular states that the heart which turns away (פני) from Yahweh is like a root that bears poison (שרש פרה). Failure to adhere to Yahweh and his covenant will bring destruction (vv. 19-28), precisely because the people 'worshipped other gods [...] gods they did not know (ידע)' (v. 26). Here the writer denies that these gods actually have knowledge to impart, writing that relationship with them bear (פרה) poison, rather than the fruitfulness that this פרה ought to be.

Hosea 3.1 uses the verb פני in a more explicit manner, setting it within the context of the marriage between Yahweh and Israel:

Yahweh said to me, 'Go again, love (אבה) a woman who is loved by another and is an adulteress (נאף), even as the Yhwh loves the sons of Israel, though they turn (פני) to other gods and love (אשישה) cakes of raisins (אהב).'

The root אהב ('to love') appears fifteen times in the book of Hosea: five times in Hosea 2 (vv. 7, 9, 12, 14, 15) to describe the lovers of זונה-Israel; once in 3.1 to encode the

Israelites' illegitimate religious practices, and in 4.18 it is found in a pericope (vv. 17-19) depicting Ephraimites as drunken, revelrous idolaters whose leaders 'love shamefully' (אהבבוהו קלון).<sup>569</sup>

The verbs אהב and פני therefore operate in Hosea to describe the religious sexual deviance of the Israelites. ידע, on the other hand, appears in the larger framework of Hosea's epistemology, in which knowledge of Yahweh is not only the telos of the betrothal (ארש) between the deity and Israel (2.22), but is the very thing that inaugurated the salvific actions that led to Yahweh delivering Israel from the land of Egypt (13.5):

I knew you (ידעתִיךָ)<sup>570</sup> in the wilderness,  
in the land of great drought.

Loving (אהב) and turning (פני), as indicators of the place from which one derives knowledge, are intimately bound up with an erotics that is grounded in knowledge of the other's body. After all, according to the biblical texts, Israel and its prophets throughout their history have been granted sight of the divine body, yet their rejection of this body for the bodies of other deities/lovers represents the utmost violation of the Yahwistic covenant, especially when one considers the prophetic juxtaposition between Yahweh's active body and the lifelessness of these other gods. To turn to these gods is literally to know nothing.

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<sup>569</sup> On the reading of אהבבוהו, see Thomas Edward McComiskey, 'Hosea', *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 1-237: 72.

<sup>570</sup> Note, however, that the LXX and Peshitta presuppose a *Vorlage* of רעיתִיךָ ('I fed you'), instead of the Masoretic ידעתִיךָ ('I knew you').

The sexual nature of these relationships is highlighted by the other pericope in which *באה* and *אשישה* appear together as in Hosea 3.1:

Sustain me with *אשישות*,  
refresh me with apples,  
for faint with love (*אהבה*) am I.  
(Song 2.5)

In Song 2.5, *אשישות* ('raisin cakes') are presented as a cure for the pains that attend love, a way for the male beloved of the text to sustain (*סמך*) his female lover. In the Psalms, *סמך* denotes the attitude which God takes toward the righteous and downfallen, those whom he favours (3.5; 37.17, 24; 51.12; 54.5; 71.6; 119.116; 145.14). Thus for Hosea, the Israelites desire to sustain a relationship with these other gods, and given the association of raisin cakes with goddess worship elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Jer. 7.18),<sup>571</sup> issues of demasculinization may be at play insofar as the Israelites have arguably chosen to abandon the masculine father god Yahweh for the mother goddess Asherah.

Consequently, when Yahweh *turns* in Ezekiel 36.9 to face Israel, to be 'for them', it is an act that sexualizes Israel in a licit and appropriate manner; Yahweh's gaze transforms a raped land into one ready to tilled, ploughed and made fruitful (v. 34). This desirous gaze presents itself as a remedy for Israel's barrenness, since formerly the land had 'devoured' (*אכל*) her people. This language is reminiscent of the curses found in Leviticus 26.29 and Deuteronomy 28.53 which state that Israel 'will consume the flesh of her sons and daughters' and 'eat the fruit of her womb' if she

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<sup>571</sup> Francis I. Anderson and David Noel Freeman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), 298; J. Edward Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (New York: Oxford University, 2000), 69-70.

does not obey Yhwh; in 2 Kings 6.24-33, child-eating is bound up with famine, a state contrary to the promises of Yahweh for a faithful Israel in Ezekiel 36.10-11.

Yahweh therefore reveals himself as a deity who deploys his sexuality to allow or impede the fruitfulness of his wife. It is he who can successfully plough and till her, unlike her foreign lovers who can only bring death (Hos. 9.16).

## **Conclusion**

Though Ezekiel 36-37 does not employ the language of marriage to describe the relationship between Yahweh and Israel nor use the verb נהג to talk of Israel's infidelity, Yahweh is still presented in these passages as a sexual deity. Ezekiel 36.9 draws on the motif of Yahweh as Sower ('I shall seed you') and presents the reader with a picture of a seed-filled God (as in Hosea 2.25 and Jeremiah 31.27).

In its relation to Ezekiel 37, the two chapters (ch. 36-37) present a cycle of desolation and restoration for Israel. The disruption of Ezekiel's gendered existence in Ezekiel 37, by which his body is rendered maternal and wombed, mirrors the same theme in other prophet texts where Yahweh rewombs Israel. As a stand-in for the figure of Israel, Ezekiel is penetrated by Yahweh's spirit in language evocative of sexual intercourse and receives Yahweh's phallic scroll (comparable to the phallic word of Ezekiel 16). This penetration allows the dry bones of Israel to resurrect within the valley (Israel's womb); the use of יבש ('dry') in Hosea 2.7 and Isaiah 56.3 to denote phallic and wombed infertility sexually codes the bones of Ezekiel 37, such that when Ezekiel imparts spirit (רוח) to them, and given the fuzzy boundaries between Yahweh's body and Ezekiel's bodies, it represents the necrosexual desire of the deity for his people.

This necrosexuality, the divine desire for the dead, reveals Yahweh's body as a crosser of boundaries between life and death and, as such, stands in contrast to the cultic malpractices of Israel in Isaiah 57.3-13 in which the necrosexual longing of the Israelites for the departed ancestors ('the inheritance destroyers'), requires child sacrifice. Conversely, Yahweh's necrosexuality recognizes the latent personality of the dead Israel and he is able, through erotic engagement with Ezekiel's maternal body, to revive and re(s)erect them.

The association between the womb and the tomb, life and death, is found through the Hebrew Bible. In Job 1.21, Ecclesiastes 5.14, Jeremiah 20.17 and Psalm 139.13-15, the maternal body is compared to the underworld:

עָרָם יִצְתִי מִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי וְעָרָם אֲשׁוּב שָׁמָּה

Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. (Job 1.21)

כַּאֲשֶׁר יִצַר מִבֶּטֶן אִמּוֹ עָרוֹם יָשׁוּב לִלְכֵת כְּשָׁבָא

Like he was formed in his mother's womb, so shall he return, naked as he came (Eccl. 5.15).

לֹא-מָוַתְתַנִּי מִרַחֵם וְתֵהִי-לִי אִמִּי קִבְרִי

He did not kill me in the womb so that my mother would have been my grave. (Jer. 20.17)

Similar comparisons appear in rabbinic literature (*Gen. Rab.* 73.4) where it is said that Yahweh holds three keys: one to raise the dead, another to bring forth rain and the last to open the womb.<sup>572</sup> Biblical literature also attests to the link between precipitation and wombs in Psalm 110.3: 'from the womb of the morning (or, from Rehem and

<sup>572</sup> Gwynn Kessler, "Famous" Fetuses in Rabbinic Narratives', *Imagining the Fetus: The Unborn in Myth, Religion and Culture*, ed. Vanessa R. Sasson and Jane Marie Law (New York: Oxford University, 2009), 185-202: 200.

Šaḥar), yours is the dew of your youth'. In Ugaritic literature, dew (*tl*) is said to originate in the heavens, and the goddess Anat, one of whose epithets is *rhmy* ('womb'), bathes in this precipitation (*KTU* 1.3 II 38-42).<sup>573</sup>

Yahweh as Opener-of-Graves is therefore symbolically akin to his position in the Hebrew Bible as he who opens (and closes) the womb (Gen. 20.18; 29.31; 30.22; 1 Sam. 1.5-6). Yahweh not only tills his wife, the land of Israel, but he is also responsible for its people's emergence from the chthonic womb that is the valley or grave.

The gendered tensions that exist in Ezekiel 36-37, especially regarding the prophet's body, hint at the figure of the *נזר* behind the text. This gendered disruption is echoed in Ezekiel 36-37 when the male Israelites are compared to menstruating women, an arguably monstrous 'gender-bending' image, to borrow Feinstein's expression.

This liminality provides an opportunity for Yahweh to demonstrate his masculinity and bring order and stability to chaos and ambiguity. It is through his sexuality that this order is achieved, for the phallic word of Ezekiel 2-3 that equips the prophet to beget his ministry is the same word that in Ezekiel 37 is begotten as the re(s)erection of the Israelite people. Furthermore, Yahweh's desire to turn to Israel and plough the land in Ezekiel 36, motifs that are overtly sexualized in ancient West Asian literature, places him in an active and phallic position in relation to Israel. In Ezekiel 37.1-14, these sexual actions result in the dry bones becoming living beings whose offspring, whose seed, will forever possess the land (37.25b).

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<sup>573</sup> Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 204.

From Ezekiel 1.26-28, the reader is already aware that Yahweh has a body (however far removed from the earthly realm it might be) and that the prophet is reluctant to gaze at this divine body's 'loins'; yet it is precisely this visual avoidance that brings it to the forefront of the text. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes, 'ignorance is as potent and as multiple a thing [...] as is knowledge',<sup>574</sup> and in Ezekiel 1.26-28 it is exactly the reader's curiosity (or ignorance perhaps) about what lies behind Yahweh's fire-enshrouded waist that permits these speculations about Yahweh's body, and what this could potentially mean in the context of language about Yahweh's tilling or sowing Israel and the knowledge which is its telos.

In an early chapter I wrote that in Egyptian mythologies, the divine phallus often operates to bring stability to disorder and stabilize the relationship between heaven and earth; in Ezekiel 36-37, it functions in a similar manner: the dead/undead tension in Ezekiel 37.10-11, where the enlivened bodies of the Israelites still refer to themselves as 'dried up' bones, provides the space for a phallic Yahweh to act. In this case, Yahweh's sexual desire transports the flaccid bone(r)s into a space of fertility, characteristic of that which the phallus embodies, and ultimately the insecure position of Israel is rectified by Yahweh's phallic, re(s)erecting word.

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<sup>574</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California, 1990), 4.

## I SAW HIS שׁוֹל FILLING THE TEMPLE

### *Seraphs, Šūls and Sexuality in Isaiah 6.1-7*

<sup>1</sup>In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe (שׁוֹל) filled the temple. <sup>2</sup>Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. <sup>3</sup>And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

<sup>4</sup>The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup>And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’

<sup>6</sup>Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. <sup>7</sup>The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ (Isaiah 6.1-7, NRSV).

### Introduction

The highly visionary nature of Isaiah 6.1-7, in which the prophet sees his deity enthroned in the temple surrounded by the seraphic host, has been identified by Margaret Barker the ‘earliest dateable evidence of temple mysticism’,<sup>575</sup> while Christopher R. Seitz writes that this vision ‘explodes the limitations’<sup>576</sup> of the temple space; that it to say, there is a sense that here in Isaiah the transcendent becomes perceivable, if only for a moment. In fact, Leclerc argues that it is in this passage that one finds ‘perhaps the Bible’s most transcendent vision of YHWH’,<sup>577</sup> a statement of

<sup>575</sup> Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2011), 1.

<sup>576</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 54.

<sup>577</sup> T. L. Leclerc, *Yahweh is Exalted in Justice: Solidarity and Conflict in Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 171.

the total alterity of Yahweh and his unfathomable distance from the earthly realm. Caution must be taken, however, not to conclude that Yahweh's otherness implies his nonmateriality or incorporeality; these ideas of transcendence are grounded in a Cartesianism that sees a stark separation between mind and body, spirit and flesh.

If Isaiah 6.1-8 is read in such a way, Yahweh becomes wholly identified with spirit and thus divorced from the heavily materialistic worldview suggested by the passage: the deity sits on a throne (v. 1), the seraphs have bodies, faces, wings, voices (vv. 2-3), while the door posts, smoke, coal and other cultic paraphernalia imply a material space (vv. 4, 6). Given this materiality, how should one understand the transcendence connoted by phrases such as 'high and lofty' (v. 1), 'filling the temple' (v. 1) and 'full of his glory' (v. 3)? As the convergence of the celestial and the terrestrial, the temple space represents the whole cosmos, and therefore these phrases entail a deity of colossal proportions.<sup>578</sup> Thus in opposition to transcendence as the complete other of materiality, the transcendence offered to us by Isaiah is better understood as an overflow of the material, an explosion, to use Seitz's terminology. It is this excess that Isaiah sees directly and which renders him דמה, 'undone' (v. 5), a word used elsewhere to denote destruction, dormancy and silence (Isa. 15.1; Hos. 4.5).<sup>579</sup> That Isaiah paradoxically speaks his silence in v. 5 is an example of how the passage brings perceived stable categories into question; in the case of Isaiah himself, the presence of this, I argue, masculine, cosmic-sized deity forces Isaiah into a socially feminine position; as Eilberg-Schwartz writes, '[w]hen a man confronts a male God, he is put into the female position so as to be intimate with God.'<sup>580</sup> That Isaiah is able to see

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<sup>578</sup> Mark Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism*, 84-85.

<sup>579</sup> Torsten Uhlig, *The Theme of Hardening in the Book of Isaiah: An Analysis of Communicative Action* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 93 n. 96.

<sup>580</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 137.

Yahweh, an event often regarded as deadly and impermissible (Ex. 33.20; cf. Gen. 32.30; Judg. 6.22, 13.22), stresses this intimacy.

### The Masculine Yahweh

If Isaiah is 'put into the female position', where in the text does one find signs of the deity's masculinity? Isaiah's avowal that he is an 'unclean man' among 'unclean people' (v. 5) stands in stark contrast to the thrice-called שׁוֹדֵק ('holy') of the seraphs (v. 3) which serves to emphasize the 'set-apartness' of Yahweh. Isaiah is what Yahweh is not, that is, unclean, and this uncleanness may reveal his inability to live up to ideals of masculinity by a god whose dimensions are colossal and whose seraphic attendants are gigantic, fiery winged serpents,<sup>581</sup> ostensibly figures of fertility.<sup>582</sup> The description of these seraphs in Isaiah 6, according to Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, has its roots in the Egyptian uraei—winged black-necked cobras.<sup>583</sup> The wings of uraei denote their powers of protection and their depiction on eighth-century Judahite seals is testament to their apotropaic function as guardians of 'the name of the seal owner'.<sup>584</sup> However, in Isaiah 6.2, the seraphs' wings appear not to protect others but themselves, and Keel and Uehlinger suppose this to be protection against 'the rays of holiness that were coming from their lord'.<sup>585</sup>

If Egyptian iconographic motifs were known in ancient Judah, it is conceivable that Isaiah's vision reflects the image of the solar disk flanked by twin uraei. The sun bordered by two cobras appears on pharaonic headdresses and, from the time of the Middle Kingdom, cobras appear on the king's diadem (sometimes accompanied by a vulture) to signify the king's lordship over Lower (the cobra) and Upper Egypt (the

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<sup>581</sup> *DDD*, 742-43.

<sup>582</sup> *DDD*, 744.

<sup>583</sup> Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 273.

<sup>584</sup> Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses*, 273.

<sup>585</sup> Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses*, 274.

vulture).<sup>586</sup> As Yahweh is known as king (מֶלֶךְ) in v. 5, the seraphs who are part of his cortège might share in the royal overtones of the Egyptian uraei. Moreover, וְקָרָא זֶה אֱלֹהֵי הַזֶּה in Isaiah 6.3 implies there are two seraphs with Yahweh,<sup>587</sup> further reinforcing the idea that this Isaian theophany can trace its genealogy back to the Egyptian symbol of the flanked royal sun disk. As such, these flying serpents uphold Yahweh as king and signal his dominion, and, like the uraei, impart a universality to land claims; in the case of the uraei, the pharaoh is revealed to be the lord of all Egypt, while Yahweh's seraphs declare in Isaiah 6.3 that his glory fills the whole land/earth (כָּל־הָאָרֶץ).

A deity who claims possession of whole lands is certainly masculine, especially given the penchant of ancient West Asian writers to position the land as a feminine object to be ploughed and ordered by the masculine. Curses found in Assyrian texts, curses aimed at vassal kings who do not submit to Assyrian authority, reveal that to lose one's land or to be cut off and expelled from it are signs of emasculation.<sup>588</sup> Yahweh's claim over כָּל־הָאָרֶץ therefore attests to his masculine authority and it is perhaps Isaiah's confrontation with this supramasculinity that destabilizes his identity to such a point that he becomes 'undone', 'silent' (דָּמָה). Moreover, the seraphs who attend Yahweh connote chaos, personified in the Hebrew Bible as a monstrous serpent whom Yahweh eventually defeats (Isa. 27.1; 51.9; Ps. 74.13-14; Job 26.13), yet here in Isaiah 6 these chaos monsters are allies, not enemies. This explains why the temple, a place in which heaven and earth conjoin and which elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible is usually pictured as permanent and unshakeable, is in Isaiah 6.4 rendered unstable

<sup>586</sup> R. H. Wilkinson, *Reading Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1992), 109.

<sup>587</sup> E. Jacob, *Esaïe 1-12*, ed. A. de Pury et al., *Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament VIIIa* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1987), 99.

<sup>588</sup> Susan E. Haddox, '(E)Masculinity in Hosea's Political Rhetoric', *Israel's Prophets and Israel's Past: Essays on the Relationship of Prophetic Texts and Israelite History in Honor of John H. Hayes*, ed. ed. Brad E. Kelle and Megan Bishop Moore (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 174-200: 181.

by the seraphs as agents of disruption, and what is disrupted is not only the physical space in which Isaiah stands but also the identity space he occupies as a male prophet.

The word used for the smoke which fills the temple (עשן) is not the one regularly used for sacrificial fire but one which appears in theophanic contexts: in the Sinaitic revelation (Exod. 19.18), Mount Sinai is 'wrapped in smoke (עשן)' as Yahweh descends on it in fire, while in 2 Samuel 22, David sings a song to Yahweh describing the עשן which comes from Yahweh's nostrils in anger (v. 9). This awesome and wrathful masculinity is complemented by Yahweh's titles in v. 5 where he is 'the king' (המלך) and 'Yahweh of Armies' (יהוה צבאות). This picture of Yahweh as a warrior-king evokes Psalm 24, a hymn describing Yahweh as a glorious king (vv. 7-10) and 'mighty in war' (v. 8). F. M. Cross links Psalm 24 to a liturgical 'reenactment of the victory of Yahweh in the primordial battle and his enthronement in divine council'.<sup>589</sup> For Isaiah 6.1-7, these themes are realized in the figures of the subdued serpentine creatures and Yahweh's position as king and chieftain may, like Psalm 24, draw on the Chaoskampf motif, thus underlining the controlling, active, and thence masculine nature of Isaiah's god.

Given the forceful masculinity of Yahweh in this passage, one wonders how far this masculinity extends. As noted above, Keel and Uehlinger suggest that the seraphs' wings are used to protect themselves against Yahweh's awesomeness, yet perhaps there is another aspect at play. Isaiah notes that the seraphs cover their faces (פנים) and their feet (רגלים), a phrase which T. D. Cochell understands as a merism designating the whole seraph, since the face and feet are the upper and lower

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<sup>589</sup> F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1973), 93.

extremities of the body.<sup>590</sup> However, in the Hebrew Bible, one's feet or foot (רגל) is usually paired with the head (ראש) rather than the face (see Lev. 13.12; Deut. 28.35; 2 Sam. 14.25; Isa. 1.6). Another explanation is that רגל signifies genitalia (see 2 Kgs 18.27 *qere*, Isa. 36.12 *qere*, Ezek. 16.25, Ruth 3.4); if so, why do the seraphs cover their faces and genitals? As arguable markers of gendered and sexual identity, the hidden faces and genitals of the seraphs divert attention from their identities and bolster Yahweh's masculine or maybe sexual presence in the text. Not only this, but that the seraphs have genitals reveals that Israelite conceptions of the divine realm are not devoid of sexuality, opening up the possibility that the seraphs conceal their own פנים and רגלים precisely to centre Yahweh's own face and 'feet', that is, what one assumes to be his genitals.

### God's שול

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe (שוליו) filled (מלאים) the temple. (Isaiah 6.1, NRSV).

If the seraphs' actions are meant to centre Yahweh's genitals, where exactly does one find this them in Isaiah 6? Lyle Eslinger notes G. R. Driver's proposition to translate Isaiah 6.1 in a way which sees שול, traditionally rendered 'hem (of his robe)', as a reference to Yahweh's genitals,<sup>591</sup> though Driver himself shies away from his own conclusion because it implies an over anthropomorphism. Such an interpretive move is like those discussed in the introduction of this chapter which frame the Isaian vision in terms of a certain kind of transcendence so that a reading which bodies Yahweh in such an irreversible manner is sure to be discounted.

<sup>590</sup> T. D. Cochell, 'An Interpretation of Isaiah 6:1-5 in Response to the Art and Ideology of the Achaemenid Empire' (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2008), 118 n. 14.

<sup>591</sup> Lyle Eslinger, 'The Infinite in a Finite Organical Perception (Isaiah VI 1-5)', *Vetus Testamentum* 45 (1995), 145-173: 145-6.

However, in Exodus 28.33-34 and 39.24-26, the term שול is invested in materiality and designates some particular feature on the lower half of priestly clothing. In these passages, the term always appears in construct with המעיל, 'the robe'.<sup>592</sup> Isaiah 6.1, on the other hand, follows the use of שול as found in Jeremiah 13.22, 26, Lamentations 1.9 and Nahum 3.5:

And if you say in your heart, 'Why have these things come upon me', it is for the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are lifted up (נגלו שולירך), and you are violated. (Jer. 13.22, NRSV)

I will lift up your skirts over your face (חשפתי שולירך על-פניך), and your shame will be seen. (Jer. 13.26, NRSV)

Her uncleanness was in her skirts (טמאתה בשוליה); she took no thought of her future; her downfall was appalling, with none to comfort her. (Lam. 1.9, NRSV)

I am against you, says the LORD of hosts, and will lift up your skirts over your face (וגליתי שולירך על-פניך); and I will let the nations look on your nakedness and kingdoms on your shame. (Nah. 3.5, NRSV)

In each of these instances, שול appears in the context of public nakedness and voyeurism, though for Eslinger a more appropriate translation of 'your skirts are lifted up' (so NRSV) is 'your pudenda will be exposed (נגלו)';<sup>593</sup> more specifically, he argues, the dual form of שול in these passages denotes the labia, 'a natural anatomical dual'.<sup>594</sup> Another possibility is that this apparent dual form is actually an abstract noun formed with the plural, as is common in Biblical Hebrew.<sup>595</sup> On this reading שולים signifies nakedness generally and is perhaps cognate with שולל, 'naked, barefoot', and שלל, 'plunder, strip'.

<sup>592</sup> Exodus 28.33 reads שוליו ('its hem'), though the referent המעיל is found in 28.31.

<sup>593</sup> Eslinger, 'The Infinite', 152.

<sup>594</sup> Eslinger, 'The Infinite', 152 n. 20; see also p. 153.

<sup>595</sup> Joel S. Burnett, *A Reassessment of Biblical Elohim* (Atlanta: SBL, 2001), 22.

It is in this manner which Eslinger wishes us to read the vision found in Isaiah 6,<sup>596</sup> as an account that exposes the reader to God's penis. Yet there is a certain jarring feature of the text that Eslinger glosses over: the word שול in Jeremiah, Lamentations and Nahum all refer to women's bodies. While Eslinger notes that שול appears in 'coarse' contexts, and that this itself is intentionally part of the prophetic desire to shock and displace Isaiah's audience,<sup>597</sup> he does not consider the possibility that there is an alternative gendered dimension to what Isaiah sees. Is Yahweh a man with a penis, or might he (also) be a man with labia, that which is coded as female and is considered proper to women's bodies? Or perhaps what transpires in the temple confuses the boundaries of gender such that what Isaiah observes is a queerly bodied Yahweh. To ask which set of genitals Yahweh has, or indeed to presume what his sexual anatomy is, is to place strictures where this text seemingly does not.

### **The Temple**

In this passage, the temple has emerged as a queer space: order and chaos meet, the prophet's stable identity is vitiated and ambiguity surrounds Yahweh, his body and its gendered dimensions. I am tempted to describe the temple as a Foucauldian heterotopia, as a counter-site in which society's other sites are 'simultaneously represented, contested and inverted'.<sup>598</sup> These heterotopias are generally inaccessible to the public and often require rites of purification to enter—qualities which certainly characterize the Holy of Holies where Isaiah appears to be. Our text opens *in media res*, leaving the reader unaware of what has come before and so Isaiah's 'state' at the beginning of the text is unknowable. This unknowability contributes to the queerness of the scene, and does indeed, like this passage's other

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<sup>596</sup> Eslinger, 'The Infinite', 147.

<sup>597</sup> Eslinger, 'The Infinite', 158.

<sup>598</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. J. Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986), 22-27: 24.

previously discussed attributes, ‘contest and invert’ sites of gender, body and perhaps even sexuality.

With reference to Jerusalem as it is pictured in Ezekiel 23, Julie Galambush writes, ‘if the city is a woman, then the temple is her vagina’.<sup>599</sup> Lynn R. Huber also describes how, in ancient West Asia, the anatomy of a city’s goddess could sometimes be ‘mapped onto parts of the city’ itself; thus for Huber a corollary of the metaphorical equation between the city and the goddess is that the temple functions as a (sign of the) womb.<sup>600</sup> If the temple does function as a womblike structure, then might Yahweh’s ‘filling’ (מלא) of the temple with his שול be taken as a sexual act, akin to (but not equivalent with) the sexually coded relationship Yahweh has with Israel? After all, both the book’s preface (Isa. 1.2) and chapter seven (vv. 9-13) use terminology (בנים and זרע respectively) indicative of children in some sense belonging to or taken care of by Yahweh. However, note the use of קנה in Isaiah 1.3, a root that also designates procreation (Gen. 4.1; Deut. 32.6; Ps. 74.2; 139.13), to describe an ox who knows its owner (קנהו), in parallel with the statement that, unlike the ox, Israel ‘does not know’ (לא ידע). In view of the reference to Yahweh’s בנים in the preceding verse, the sense here is that unlike the ox who knows its owner, the Israelites do not know the one who begets (קנה) them; that is, Yahweh.

Earlier I argued that Isaiah’s undoing may be a response to the hypermasculine presence of the deity, yet in light of the text as a site of inversion, one also needs to consider that Isaiah’s shock originates in unfulfilled expectation—in this instance, that Isaiah does not see the genitals that, under presumed ideals of masculinity, correspond to Yahweh’s manhood.

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<sup>599</sup> Galambush, *Jerusalem*, 87.

<sup>600</sup> Lynn R. Huber, *Like a Bride Adorned: Reading Metaphor in John’s Apocalypse* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 93.

In his 1922 essay 'Medusa's Head', Freud argues that the myth of Medusa discloses male anxiety around castration. He takes Medusa's head as a symbol of the mother's genitals which, when seen by a young boy, invoke the horror of castration, for the boy, who has hitherto believed that all human beings possess a penis, comes to know that this is not so and begins to fear for his. Similar castration anxiety, according to Mortimer Ostow, also felt in the Talmud (Sanh. 92a) where one reads:

כול המסתכל בערבה קשתו ננערת

'Whoever gazes at genitalia [=female?], his bow [=penis] is impaired'.<sup>601</sup>

Angst connected to the sighting of the vagina/labia is not an uncommon experience; Phillips Stevens, writing about the phenomenon in West Africa, notes: '[i]t has been realized since antiquity that exposure of the genitals will allow the emanation of power',<sup>602</sup> and relates incidents where West African women have used 'genital power' against men to their political advantage.<sup>603</sup> Stevens also identifies the concept of 'genital power' in the Levitical proscriptions regarding menstruating women.<sup>604</sup> This may be extended to the prohibitions in Leviticus 18 and 20 which regulate appropriate sexual activity and condemn 'uncovering the nakedness' of one's kin (see also Gen. 9.20-27 in which Ham is cursed for looking at his father's genitals).

There is a sense in which, in Isaiah 6.1-7, the prophet too has looked at his father's genitals, though has not seen clearly delineated genitalia. This experience visibly 'undoes' Isaiah, and we may say that, à la Freud, he becomes viscerally aware

<sup>601</sup> Mortimer Ostow, 'The Psychodynamics of *Merkavah* Mysticism', *Ultimate Intimacy: The Psychodynamics of Jewish Mysticism*, ed. Mortimer Ostow (London: Karnac Books, 1995), 152-180: 160.

<sup>602</sup> Phillips Stevens, Jr., 'Women's Aggressive Use of Genital Power in Africa', *Transcultural Psychiatry* 43.4 (2006), 592-599: 594.

<sup>603</sup> Phillips Stevens, Jr., 'Genital Power', 595-598.

<sup>604</sup> Phillips Stevens, Jr., 'Genital Power', 593.

of his own genitalia. This awareness manifests in Isaiah as knowledge of his 'uncleanness', which is quickly remedied by seraphic intervention (vv. 6-7). Concepts of uncleanness, sin and impurity are, in the Hebrew Bible, connected with notions of covering and uncovering (see Lev. 4.8; Neh. 4.5; Psa. 32:5, 85.2; Hos. 10.8), such that to be uncovered is to have one's sins exposed. For Isaiah, Yahweh's nakedness similarly makes the prophet aware that he and his people are uncovered as to their sin (v. 5).

In verse 6, a seraph cleanses Isaiah with a live coal from the altar and Isaiah's sin is 'taken away' (סור) and 'atoned for' (כפר). In this way, Isaiah becomes (re)covered like his sins, and it is his recovering that allows him to receive Yahweh's word. There is a resemblance here to the way in which clothes function in the Eden narrative in Genesis 2-3; Adam and Eve, though not forgiven their trespasses, are nevertheless clothed by Yahweh in garments described as כתנת, the same word used of priestly garments in Exodus (28.4, 39, 40, 29.5, 8).

The function of the כתנת is firstly to beautify and glorify the person who wears it (Exod. 28.40) and secondly to allow its wearer to function as a priest, to approach Yahweh and mediate between Yahweh and the people. Isaiah's covering, that is to say, the expiation of his sins, also permits him to enter into dialogue with Yahweh:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." (Isa. 6.8)

Interestingly, the prophet's purification does not occur until after he has seen Yahweh (v. 7), such that the reader questions whether this space is as set apart, as holy (שקדש), as priestly regulations would wish to maintain. The hierarchies and divisions of the temple space are ostensibly abrogated as whatever Yahweh's שול is fills (מלא) and

occupies the entirety of the temple in the same way Yahweh's glory, which I have elsewhere argued can be a sign of his masculinity,<sup>605</sup> fills (מלא) the earth. This filling is a spontaneous overflow of materiality, an intrusion of the divine 'Other' into plain sight. If, as Niehr suggests,<sup>606</sup> Israelite Yahwism was iconic and the Jerusalem temple contained a cult statue of Yahweh in consonance with other ancient West Asian religious practices, then Isaiah's vision represents the animation of the material.

Judith Butler describes materiality as 'constituted in and through iterability';<sup>607</sup> in other words, the materiality of bodies is only realized and considered legitimate if it actualizes in accordance with prior legitimized social scripts. In this way, there is a rituality that attends the materiality engendered by it, and this rituality is a citational practice that calls upon what has come before as a means to establish legitimacy. In the context of Isaiah 6.1-7, these Butlerian conceptualizations of materiality allow us to recognize what about the vision is so grating: there is no citation for the scene, that is, there is no other place in the biblical literature where a Yahwistic revelation of such explicitness occurs. True, there are instances of Yahweh's spontaneous theophanies but none so lurid; even in the case of Moses who peeks at Yahweh's 'behind' (Exod. 33.19-23), he is not permitted to gaze at the divine face. In addition to this lack of citation, there is no ritual explicitly mentioned in the text that has called or allowed Yahweh into this space, no ritual that has prepared it for the invasion of material divinity. It is thus not surprising that initially Isaiah is left dumbfounded, unable to articulate anything about himself other than his own dumbfoundedness.

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<sup>605</sup> Alan Hooker, "Show Me Your Glory": The Kabod of Yhwh as Phallic Manifestation?, Hebrew Bible Monographs 62, *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014): 17-34.

<sup>606</sup> Niehr, 'YHWH's Cult Statue', 73-95.

<sup>607</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 70.

Is it Isaiah's vision of Yahweh's genitals, his labia/lips (?), that make him realize the uncleanness of his own lips? Indeed, the mouth (פה) that speaks is also a symbol of the vulva in many ancient West Asian languages: Ugaritic *p* (mouth),<sup>608</sup> Akkadian *šapatu* (lips) and *pû* (mouth), and Sumerian *ka* (mouth) all refer not only to the organ of speech, but to the vagina as well.<sup>609</sup> In the Hebrew Bible itself, eating (אכל) may denote the sexual activity of women (see Prov. 30.20),<sup>610</sup> evoking the Ugaritic death-god Mot, whose own mouth is voracious, whose lips encompass the cosmos (*KTU* 1.5 II 2-4), and whose gullet goes down to the underworld. Here in Isaiah 6.1-7, it is Yahweh's 'lips' that fill the cosmic space, his genitals which suffuse the temple and are all encompassing. The Mot-like allness of the vision may contribute to the anxiety and horror Isaiah feels at the vision as being and nonbeing are elided, as the distinction between presence and absence, between here and there, disappears when Yahweh's שול becomes the ever present, for what becomes all becomes nothing, for it precipitates a lack in the distinctions that effect meaning.

Yahweh's שול then is an object, a thing, part of an equation that cannot be accounted for. These are genitals whose nature is ambiguous, although Yahweh himself is certainly coded as a masculine deity using conventional referents such as the language of size, kingship, military strength and land ownership. What however is the function of Yahweh's genitals in this passage? How do they fit within the larger prophetic discourse in and around Isaiah 6?

Following Isaiah's vision, Yahweh commissions the prophet to go and preach to the people (vv. 8-9) and the message he is told to deliver (vv. 8-13) evokes the vision of

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<sup>608</sup> *DUL*, 657.

<sup>609</sup> *OEBGS*, 281.

<sup>610</sup> Étan Levine, *Heaven and Earth, Law and Love: Studies in Biblical Thought* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 113.

vv. 1-7 since one finds in the latter half the same type of concerns around bodied sense as one does in the first half: Isaiah sees what he ought not to see (for not only is he self-professedly unclean, but gazing upon Yahweh is an event in the Hebrew Bible often regarded as deadly), and moreover, Isaiah speaks, communes and hears the divine realm where he should not be able to, for he stands in sacred space as a man yet to undergo the appropriate purification rites.

Isaiah 6.9-10 contrasts the sensory Isaiah with the senseless people; these are people whose heart will be dulled (השמן), whose ears will be stopped (הכבד) and whose eyes will be shut (השע). Like Isaiah who spoke his own speechlessness, the three verbs used in Isaiah 6.10 exist in tension with themselves: השמן evokes joy and richness (שמן), הכבוד the glory (כבוד) of Yahweh, and השע delight (שעע). When Yahweh confronts Isaiah, the positive attributes associated with the divine become to him a sign of horror and undoing, and so it is here: joy becomes dullness, glory becomes deafness and delight blindness. Yahweh requires that this remain the case until 'cities lie waste without inhabitant' (v. 11) and until there is 'vast [...] emptiness in the midst of the land' (v. 12).

This chapter opens with God's genitals and closes with wasteland. Rhetorically, the prophet signals to his listeners that it is God who is the source of life antithetical to the emptiness in vv. 11-12; the good things they expect to receive from or to give to Yahweh (שמן, כבוד, שעע) have become a curse. Similarly, the ambiguity that characterizes Yahweh and his body, which places him in an unknowable, liminal, and thus divine position, is turned on Isaiah's audience when the linguistic ambiguity he employs means to render them senseless and cut them off from that which enables them to be social creatures. Yet there remains a glimmer of hope at the very end of Isaiah 6 with the declaration that there will persist a 'holy seed' (זרע קדש); this seed

will be the beginning of the restored nation, a symbol of fertility and growth in juxtaposition with the waste emptiness described in vv. 11-12.

The term זרע refers to a group of Israelite descendants who will inherit the land as a remnant, yet I am compelled by the very nature of the discussion here to ask about the provenance of this seed (זרע): to whom does it belong, or from whom does it come? Holiness in Isaiah 1-5 is an attribute of Yahweh (1.4; 5.16, 19, 24) and also of those who remain after Yahweh has enacted his judgment on Israel and Judah (4.3). Since fatherhood is ascribed to Yahweh in Isaiah 1.2, where the people of Israel are described as children Yahweh has 'reared and brought up' (גדלתי ורוממתי), the זרע in 6.13 is the remnant offspring of the deity himself, represented by the firm and persisting 'stump' (מצבת). This מצבת evokes the מצבה, a stele erected to commemorate royal figures or family members that their memory, and thus influence, might endure even after death. Absalom, for example, set up a מצבה for he had 'no son to keep [his] name in remembrance' (2 Sam. 18.18); thus, there is a functional equivalence between the מצבת and one's descendants. In effect, therefore, the מצבת is a phallic simulacrum, a sign of the progenic memory that passes from one generation to another.

Samuel Iwry's translates Isaiah 6.13 as such:

And though a tenth should remain in it,  
It will be burned again,  
Like a terebinth, or an oak, or an Asherah,  
When flung down from the sacred column of a high place.<sup>611</sup>

His translation relies on the Qumran document 1Q Isa<sup>a</sup>, which, in the case of Isaiah 6.13, diverges at three main points: (1) 1Q Isa<sup>a</sup> reads משלכת instead of the MT's בשלכת;

<sup>611</sup> Samuel Iwry, 'Maṣṣēbāh and Bāmāh in 1Q Isaiah<sup>A</sup> 6:13', *JBL* 76 (1957), 225-232: 232.

(2) זרע קדוש instead of זרע קדוש; and (3) במה instead of בם. The reading of אשר ('that') as אשרה ('Asherah') is justified by Iwry on the basis of the terms that precede it: 'terebinth' (אלה) and 'oak' (אלון), as they are associated with worship of the goddess Elat/Asherah.<sup>612</sup> This tentative allusion to the goddess Asherah, if not to goddess/tree worship, lends support to reading fertility as one of the loci of meaning in Isaiah 6. To disparage Asherah, a mother goddess, is to stress Yahweh's singular, paternal sexuality; the only divine parent Israel has is Yahweh (Isa. 1.2, 4). The holy seed which persists, though it is burnt like an Asherah or terebinth, attests to Yahweh's superiority over female-centred fertility or sexuality. That Yahweh's seed endures what otherwise destroys is a sign of his virile masculinity.

## Conclusion

What began as a search to uncover God's penis in Isaiah 6.1-7 turned out to unveil something else entirely: the unknowability of the divine genitals. While it is true that masculine-encoded language persists in descriptions of Yahweh, this masculinity does not of necessity manifest as a penis, and this, I argued, is the source of Isaiah's anxiety in the queer temple space. Not only is Isaiah undone, but so in this queer heterotopia is the assumed link between the divine male and the divine penis. If the penis is the site at which sexual difference between men and women is inaugurated, then what Isaiah sees in the temple is a negation of this difference—that is to say, the writer's use of שוליים, connected as it is to the veiled bodies of priests but also to the exposure of women, deliberately obfuscates the boundary that the penis seeks to establish via its presence (assumed in men) or its absence (assumed in women).

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<sup>612</sup> Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 108.

In the texts where שול is applied to women's bodies, there is a specific focus on the viewability of the women's genitals to a male audience. In the texts above (Jer. 13.22, 26; Lam. 1.9; Nah. 3.5), the woman pictured in each of them has acted in a sexually deviant way, and the exposure of her genitals is the prerogative of the male deity; in particular, the language of Nahum 3.5 ('I will lift up your שול over your face', על-פניך) denies personhood to the woman for the face, through which personhood and identity is in part mediated, is covered and unknowable; she is equated solely with her visible genitalia. In this way, she becomes known only through the phallic lack she is assumed to embody. The message is twofold: firstly, that because of this lack she is not a man, and so should not be acting in an arguably sexually aggressive, that is, masculine way,<sup>613</sup> and secondly, she seeks the phallus in the wrong place—instead of Yahweh's divine phallus that orders the relationship between the deity and Israel in the correct manner (active male/passive female), she commits זנה (Jer. 13.27; Nah. 3.4) in going after the phalluses of her 'lovers' instead (Lam. 1.2). The sexually active way Israel acts implies a masculinization on her part,<sup>614</sup> a way to usurp the phallus and become, in the words of Athalya Brenner, the 'carrier of memory',<sup>615</sup> rather than remain defined solely by her genitals and their biological function (under patriarchal ideals).

Here in Isaiah 6.1-7, however, Yahweh, the father (or ancestor)<sup>616</sup> of the Israelites (Isa. 1.2), and accordingly the carrier of social memory (as well as the one

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<sup>613</sup> Cheryl B. Anderson, *Women, Ideology, and Violence: Critical Theory and the Construction of Gender in the Book of the Covenant and the Deuteronomical Law* (New York; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 90-91.

<sup>614</sup> In the chapter on the prophetic phallus, I argued that זנה forced Israel out of the male/female binary and degendered her. The same applies here, for although her seeking after phalluses is described as 'masculinization', it is entirely only so in the imagination of Israel herself. The prophetic response to her actions shows that they do not focus on her masculinization but rather make a concerted effort to deny her femininity instead.

<sup>615</sup> Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 12.

<sup>616</sup> Stavrakopoulou, *Land of Our Fathers*, 43-44.

who remembers the covenant), is seen by Isaiah filling the temple, yet what the temple is filled with does not accord what one expects for a deity who upholds and propagates memory. Isaiah does not see Yahweh's זכר or even his יד, though Eslinger does argue that the רגל and פנים the seraphs shield are in fact Yahweh's and not theirs. Eslinger's argument on this point however loses its force if Yahweh's face and genitals are hidden when they are the very sights that are meant to have provoked Isaiah to abject silence, especially if the genitals gazed upon by the prophet were so other that he deliberately employed a 'coarse' word to shock his audience.

Though שול does not negatively infringe on Yahweh's masculinity, the privilege not to have one's genitals circumscribe and constrain one's gender is not one afforded to female bodies, regardless of whether those bodies are imagined with vaginas/labia/uteruses on the one hand or penises (or even phallicized parts) on the other. In the former case, the female body becomes wholly identified with their reproductive functions (the ideal mother/woman/wife), and in the latter, at least in the prophetic texts, a phallicized woman is not a considered a positive body since it crosses over the boundaries set for her.

A male Yahweh is therefore able to exist beyond his body, as we would imagine bodies to be constituted. Women, on the other hand, are relegated to their bodies in their capacity as vehicles for the propagation of men and, unlike Yahweh in the temple of Isaiah 6.1-7, cannot be materially excessive, 'explosive'. It is perhaps this aspect of male materiality—its ability to encompass, contain and fill—that permits Israelite men to identify with a female Israel in her ideal capacity as God's wife and not have this negatively impact on their materiality which manifests in their lives as an active, ploughing and inseminating force. However, as soon as the male Israelites waver in their religious fidelity to Yahweh, they feel the full brunt of what it means to be

constrained in their materiality and wholly identified with it to the exclusion of participation in inter-bodied sociality. This exclusion separates them from the phallic Yahweh from whom the affirmation of their own phallic(ized) bodies comes.

## OF OTHER PHALLIC SPACES

### *Urination, Circumcision and Loins*

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapters, the phallicism analyzed focused mainly on its overt connection to sexuality. Eilberg-Schwartz argues that in Israelite religion, divine genitals are unimaginable and incoherent because Yahweh apparently has no consort, yet deities' genitals need not be foremostly concerned with this as their primary significance since the penis bears other cultural and social significations that represent more than the deployment of sexuality even if those significations are bound up with each other. Until puberty, for example, one of the main functions of the penis for the child in possession of one is urination, only later developing into the organ of insemination. Moreover, the penis appears in other contexts in the Hebrew Bible, such as in the practice of circumcision and the Pentateuchal regulations concerning who is able to enter Yahweh's assembly.<sup>617</sup> In this vein, I will explore other phallic spaces in the biblical texts, to examine other ways in which the penis is constructed and observe how the constrictions, meanings and symbolism surrounding human Israelite penises reflect on Yahweh's body.

As the previous chapters demonstrate, the penis is important for worshippers of Yahweh as it connotes the continuation of the Israelite community and manifests itself in its ideal state as a symbol of power, such that power aggregates around those assumed to be in possession of the penis, that is, Israelite men. If the erect and sexualized penis denotes generation, propagation, power, strength (and so on), what

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<sup>617</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, 'The Nakedness of a Woman's Voice, The Pleasure in a Man's Mouth: An Oral History of Ancient Judaism', *Off With Her Head!: The Denial of Women's Identity in Myth, Religion, and Culture*, ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz and Wendy Doniger (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California, 1995): 165-84: 179.

do, for example, the circumcised and urinated penises designate? Indeed, to borrow a question from Amy Hollywood, '[i]s a penis that doesn't urinate still a penis?',<sup>618</sup> and, to paraphrase, is an uncut penis still one as well?

The questions concern the performativity of the penis, of the conditions that the penis must fulfil to be recognized as an ideal phallus. Jeremiah 6.10, for instance, invokes circumcision to describe the inability of Israel to hear Yahweh's message: 'Behold, uncircumcised (ערלה) are their ears, they cannot listen'. In this passage, ערלה portrays the ear that does not function as it ought to; an *uncircumcised* penis, therefore, would appear to be one that is also not able to function as intended.<sup>619</sup>

There is an implication here of the distinction between phallus and penis and the possibility that the latter, the biological organ *qua* organ, may be transformed into the former, a potent, virile symbol, by means of ritual activities and performances. The phallus is thus the morphological ideal of the penis, the culturally contingent epitome of what the penis ought to be and do. In this chapter, I intend to query other facets of the penis that are able to render it phallic, to observe how penises that fail to conform are treated and how this cultural morphology affects/effects perceptions of Yahweh's body.

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<sup>618</sup> Amy Hollywood, 'Saint Paul and the New Man', *Critical Inquiry* 35.4 (2009), 865-76: 873.

<sup>619</sup> Nina E. Livesey, *Circumcision as a Malleable Symbol* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 52.

## Urination

Like semen, urine carries a host of cultural significations. Camille Paglia writes that male urination, by which she means penile urination, is 'a kind of accomplishment, an arc of transcendence'.<sup>620</sup> By this statement, Paglia links urination to gendered sexual difference, noting that men (here, those with penises) are able to direct, control and concentrate their urinary flow, while women (here, those who lack penises) are 'like female dogs [...] earthbound squatters'.<sup>621</sup> She goes on to describe male urination as 'a form of commentary', with the power to claim and criticize, a power that women do not have: 'one genre of self-expression women will never master'.<sup>622</sup> One questions whether the ways in which men and women urinate is entirely down to (assumed) anatomical differences between these two categories; that is, are the ways individuals pee simply about the positions they must necessarily assume because of their anatomy? If men are afforded more voice within society, it is not wonder that their bodied activities are the ones able to perform social commentary. Moreover, the society which gives men voice acts to ensure the continued logic of the male body; to propagate logic which privileges and comes to equate men and the phallus.

Sheila L. Cavanagh discusses some of the architectural features of male public bathrooms, arguing that their design is an instance of 'phallic production'.<sup>623</sup> In her work, Cavanagh notes that some transgender men express anxiety in their use of male bathrooms; one of her interviewees, Isaac, says, 'There's always a slight nervousness... if I'm peeing in the stall, will someone think that I don't have a penis'.<sup>624</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (Yale: Yale University, 1990), 21.

<sup>621</sup> Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 21.

<sup>622</sup> Paglia, *Sexual Personae*, 21.

<sup>623</sup> Sheila L. Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2010), ch. 2.

<sup>624</sup> Cavanagh, *Queering Bathrooms*, ch. 2.

Isaac's statement discloses the manner in which the urinals or troughs of the male bathroom almost expect or at least subtly impel penile exposure, to prove that those who use it fit the prescribed notions of manhood. These spaces are not only places *for* men but *makers of men* as well, inscribing how people must act and behave to be/come men.

It can be no coincidence, therefore, that women's bathrooms in the United States and the United Kingdom are more often than not individual cubicles, concealed from the sight of each other. In this way, the public sphere is given over to men, while the private is constrained upon women; one can thus see how the space of the toilet, how one is taught to urinate, both replicate social expectations regarding gender and in turn produces and communicates them as well.

It appears that in some part of the Hebrew Bible, urination too is a gender marker. In 1 Samuel (25.22, 34), 1 Kings (14.10; 16.11; 21.21) and 2 Kings 9.8, one finds the phrase משתין בקיר, translated by the KJV as 'he that pisseth against the wall'. Robert Alter describes the phrase as a 'rough and vivid epithet for "male"',<sup>625</sup> while Peter J. Leithart contends that the use of this language is a deliberate prophetic technique, describing '[v]ulgarity and scatology' as weapons in the prophet's 'rhetorical arsenal'.<sup>626</sup> 1 Kings 14.9-10, the text which Leithart is commenting upon, falls within a prophecy (14.1-18) condemning the house of Jeroboam, describing it as גלל—dung—which Yahweh will burn (v. 10).

It is not difficult to understand why commentators have analyzed this phrase as a negative pronouncement, noting its apparent coarse and indecent language.

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<sup>625</sup> Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2000), 156.

<sup>626</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *1 & 2 Kings*, Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 105.

However, Shemaryahu Talmon and Weston Fields argue, on the contrary, that the phrase *משתין בקיר* is one 'considered a most positive asset' on the basis that the eradication of the *משתין בקיר* has a 'negative implication'.<sup>627</sup> Talmon and Fields further that *קיר* does not refer to walls but rather should be translated as 'upper room', concluding that 'the *משתין בקיר*, thus, was a person, predominantly of royal status, who had the privilege of using, and of relieving himself in, a private upper chamber'.<sup>628</sup> If Talmon and Fields are correct in their suppositions, one should ask why urinating as an action hold such power to become a cypher for social standing? Why should royalty be designated by where they can urinate?

Archaeology informs us that indoor household toilets were not a common occurrence in ancient Israel except perhaps in a few choice homes.<sup>629</sup> Most excrement was left outside in public, whereas inside toilets 'characterize[d] palaces from the middle of the second millennium'.<sup>630</sup> Consequently, Lynn Tatum takes these facilities as 'evidence of a rising elite class'.<sup>631</sup> Urination and the places assigned to it are thus socially important in making distinctions within various classes of persons. In Yahwistic contexts, I consider how urination appears and what these biblical passages mean for the deity and his cult, especially as other ancient West Asian texts contain references to urinating and defecating deities. The Ugaritic high god El, for example, ends up

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<sup>627</sup> Shemaryahu Talmon and Weston W. Fields, 'The Collocation *משתין בקיר* ועצור ועזוב and its Meaning', *ZAW* 101 (1989), 85-112: 93.

<sup>628</sup> Talmon and Fields, 'Collocation', 100.

<sup>629</sup> Larry G. Herr, 'Archaeological Sources for the History of Palestine: The Iron Age II Period: Emerging Nations', *Biblical Archaeologist* 60.3 (1997), 114-51, 154-83: 120; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 70; William G. Dever, *The Lives of Ordinary People in Ancient Israel: Where Archaeology and the Bible Intersect* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2012), 185.

<sup>630</sup> Baruch Halperin, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1996), 58.

<sup>631</sup> Lynn Tatum, 'Jerusalem in Conflict: The Evidence for Seventh-Century BCE Religious Struggle over Jerusalem', *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period*, ed. Andrew G. Vaughn and Ann E. Killebrew (Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 291-306: 301.

'flounder[ing] in his [own] excrement and urine' after participating in his *marzeah*,<sup>632</sup> though it is possible to read KTU 1.114:19-21 not as a scene in which EI falls into his own waste, but where he is in fact defecated/urinated upon by the god Habayu.<sup>633</sup>

The Greek gods similarly participate in these very human activities. Ovid, narrating the aetiology of the Orion constellation, tells of how the three gods Jupiter (Zeus), Neptune (Poseidon) and Mercury (Hermes) journeyed together and came across an old man called Hyrieus who invited them into his cottage, unaware of their true identities (*Fasti* 5.493-544). After Hyrieus learns who they are, Jupiter offers the man anything he wants, and Hyrieus asks for a son, since his wife has died and he wishes to take no other spouse. The gods urinate onto the hide of a slaughtered bullock and bury it (5.533-534). Ten months later a child is born and his name, according to Ovid, is taken from the manner of his birth: Urion/Orion, from the Greek *οὐρον* ('to urinate').

### **Anal Baal verses Phallic Yahweh**

קראו בקול-גדול כי-אלהים הוא כי שיח וכי-שיג לו

Call out with a loud voice, for he [Baal] is divine—though perhaps he's pissing/taking a shit.<sup>634</sup> (1 Kgs. 18.27)

In the prophetic altercation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, Elijah mocks the nonresponsiveness of Baal to the pleas of the god's followers by suggesting the deity is 'occupied'. In the NRSV, the verse is translated: 'Cry aloud! Surely he is a god; either

<sup>632</sup> Marvin H. Pope, 'The Cult of the Dead at Ugarit', *Ugarit in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic*, ed. Gordon B. Young (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 159-80: 177.

<sup>633</sup> P. Xella, 'Studi sulla religione della Siria Antica I. El e il vino (RS 24.258)', *Studi Storico Religiosi* 1 (1997), 229-261: 240.

<sup>634</sup> Gary A. Rendsburg, 'The Mock of Baal in 1 Kings 18:27', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50.3 (1998), 414-417.

he is meditating (שיח), or he has wandered away (שיג)', presumably assumed to be related to ש ('thought') or שיחה ('musing, meditation'). Sigmund Mowinckel describes the verb as to be 'inwardly, mentally concerned with a matter, muse and ponder upon it', and furthers that it has no material signification whatsoever.<sup>635</sup> Thus, for Mowinckel, שיח cannot denote urination or defecation, but leaves שיג to bear the weight of materiality, that is, to signify these bodily functions, where the verb denotes stepping aside to defecate. However, as Rendsburg notes, the accusation that Baal is urinating or defecating carries much more antagonism than the charge that he is deep in thought and, furthermore, he argues, the use of שיח and שיג parallel each other in a significant way, and can be traced to other West Asian verbs, to represent 'bodily discharge' on the part of Baal.<sup>636</sup>

Yet what is it about bodily discharge that negates Baal and his power? After all, urination and defecation are not an entirely unexpected part of divine activity in other ancient West Asian texts. Alice Bach suggests that KTU 1.114 (discussed above) discloses a link between impotency and urine, based on the fact that urine and semen often connote one another culturally; in this instance, El's urination is supposedly similar to 'a leaking of semen', and in that sense the text demonstrates his impotence.<sup>637</sup> Though if 1.114 refers to Habayu's urination/defecation on El, then perhaps it refers not to El's impotence but to Habayu's degradation of El, and hence the power, rather than impotence, of urination. In Ovid's *Fasti*, one observes not the ineffectiveness, but the virility, of the urine of Zeus, Poseidon and Hermes; here the

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<sup>635</sup> Sigmund Mowinckel, 'The verb śiah and the nouns śiah, śihā', *Studia Theologica* 15.1 (1961), 1-8: 8.

<sup>636</sup> Rendsburg, 'The Mock of Baal', 415-416.

<sup>637</sup> Alice Bach, 'What Ever Happened to Dionysus?' *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and Stephen D. Moore (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 1998), 91-116: 112-13 n. 53.

cultural equation between urine and semen works positively, such that these gods are able to impregnate the earth by urination.

In 1 Kings 18.16-40, Yahweh is the deity who displays virility, bringing rain to a parched land (vv. 41-46). In this capacity of rain bringer, Yahweh usurps the role of storm god from Baal; yet interestingly, the text leaves Baal with the apparent semen-connoting urine disassociated from its powers of fertility, which are aggregated to Yahweh instead.<sup>638</sup>

In this text, urination and defecation (אִשָּׁה) are used by the author to mock and belittle Baal's inaction during the challenges the prophet Elijah set to determine which of the deities may truly be called God. It would appear, therefore, that given the juxtaposition between Yahweh and Baal in this text, urination/defecation are not part of Yahweh's bodied existence, but belong exclusively to those 'other' gods. Rabbinic tradition continues this association and in BT *Abodah Zarah* 44b, R. Hama b. Joseph is quoted, saying: 'People evacuate [i.e. defecate/urinate] in its presence [Baal Peor's cult statue] every day [...] such was the mode of its worship'.<sup>639</sup>

If it is true that the 'central issue of the battle [between Yahweh and Baal] is the ability to produce rain [...] and to grant fertility to the fields',<sup>640</sup> it is reasonable to conclude that the author does not view urination or defecation as potent or fertile actions; rather they are seen to impede it. The reason for this, I suggest, lies in the directional valency of the anus versus that of the penis; in other words, the boundary

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<sup>638</sup> DDD, 137.

<sup>639</sup> Though, note Marvin H. Pope who comments: 'It is difficult to assay how much of this story may derive from direct knowledge of the pagan cult and how much from play on one of the meanings of the word *p'r*', 'A Divine Banquet at Ugarit', *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring*, ed. James M. Efrid (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1972), 171-203: 197.

<sup>640</sup> DDD, 137.

of the anus can be breached from two directions (inwardly and outwardly). The penis, on the other hand, is generally understood to be unidirectional, only expelling, not receiving.

The bi-directionality of the anus allows ancient curses that invoke the penis to work in the assertion of its owner's primacy, strength and masculinity (qualities of the ideal phallus). Kathleen W. Slane and M. W. Dickie note that the erect penis in ancient Greece was an aggressive symbol to combat the Evil Eye, threatening those who possess such evil with 'being buggered' or anally raped.<sup>641</sup> Slane and Dickie also describe a Roman amulet engraved with a 'leonine phallic monster' bearing the inscription, 'a drill for the rectum of the envious',<sup>642</sup> where envy is characteristic of those with the Evil Eye.

The bi-directionality of the anus applies its liminality and ability to be penetrated, 'to seize another body', as Sarah B. Graff writes.<sup>643</sup> In this way, the defecatory and wasteful nature imputed to Baal on one level suggests his own bodied liminality, the ability to be penetrated by one superior to himself. Moreover, that his urine seems to be equated with his defecation, rather than the potent power it embodies in other ancient West Asian mythologies, reveals a further degradation of Baal's powers of fertility. In 1 Kings 18.20-46, Baal is impotent, as are his followers, the ones who 'limp' (noṯ) around the altar (v. 26). The proscription against Aaron's descendants who have ambulatory disabilities (noṯ) presenting offerings before Yahweh is found in Leviticus

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<sup>641</sup> Kathleen W. Slane and M. W. Dickie, 'A Knidian Phallic Vase from Corinth', *Hesperia* 62.4 (1993), 483-507: 488.

<sup>642</sup> Slane and Dickie, 'A Knidian Phallic Vase from Corinth', 489.

<sup>643</sup> Sarah B. Graff, 'Sexuality, Reproduction and Gender in Terracotta Plaques from the Late Third-Early Second Millennium BCE', *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art*, ed. Brian A. Brown and Marian H. Feldman (Boston; Berlin: 2014), 372-390: 386.

21 along with a list of other 'blemishes' (מאום) including blindness, mutilation and crushed testicles (מרוח אשר) (vv. 16-20). The people are as limp as their god, unable to offer him anything and he them.

To arouse Baal from his limp/flaccid state, his prophets ritually cut themselves until they bleed (v. 28). It is something of an irony in the text that the word describing the 'gushing out' of the blood (שפר) is like that used for 'penis' (שפכה) in Deuteronomy 23.1, a prohibition against those with crushed testicles entering Yahweh's assembly. Tryggve Mettinger argues that the Ugaritic Baal was a 'dying and reviving' god,<sup>644</sup> and as such is in parts of his myth cycle associated with the underworld; are his adherents therefore attempting to wake him from his slumber in the netherworld,<sup>645</sup> aiming to re(s)erect him, as it were?

However, Baal remains limp; he has been exposed in the bathroom space as one without the phallus. Yahweh, however, as noted, is bringer of the fertile 'rushing (המון) rain' (1 Kgs 18.41). המון is not only used to describe rain in the Hebrew Bible, but also highlights the reproductive promises Yahweh makes to the people of Israel. The first instance of המון in the Hebrew Bible, in fact, is in Yahweh's covenant with Abraham when Yahweh tells him that he shall be 'an ancestor to a multitude (המון) of nations' (Gen. 17.4).

The 'multitude' of rain that Yahweh sends occurs in response to Elijah's actions atop Mt. Carmel: 'Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel and he bowed (גהר) himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees' (1 Kgs 18.42). גהר is only used

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<sup>644</sup> Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Riddle of Resurrection: 'Dying and Rising Gods' in the Ancient Near East* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiskell International, 2001), 55-81.

<sup>645</sup> Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 219; Marvin A. Sweeney, *I & II Kings*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 226.

two other times in the Hebrew Bible and appears in the context of Elisha raising the Shunamite's son from the dead. Elisha 'stretches himself' (גהר) upon the child twice to bring him back to life, 'to make his flesh warm' (2 Kgs 4.34-35). Jesse C. Long suggests that the writer 'perhaps [...] wants to connect Elisha's actions with Elijah's prayer for rain',<sup>646</sup> and indeed there are many similarities in vocabulary: Elijah goes up (עלה) to Mt. Carmel, Elisha goes up (עלה) to the child; Elijah stretches himself (גהר) to the earth, Elisha stretches himself upon the child (גהר); the child sneezes seven times (שבע פעמים) before reviving, Elisha commands his servant to go down to the sea seven times (שבע פעמים) before rain clouds begin to rise from the ocean.

Just as Elisha raises the child to life, Elijah's actions bring life-giving rain that puts an end to the drought instituted by Yahweh in 1 Kings 17.1-7. It is not a surprise that the drought ends after the confrontation between Yahweh and Baal where Yahweh reveals himself to be the truly phallic deity.

### **Circumcised and Un/veiled Penises**

Yahweh's position as phallic deity *par excellence* is reflected in the biblical attitudes towards circumcision where it holds a central place in male Israelite identity. It is part of the covenant Yahweh gives to Abra(ha)m in Genesis 17 and the change of Abram's name parallels the change in identity the male Israelites are also to receive in this ritual; it is an 'eternal covenant' necessary for inclusion in the people of Israel.

For Yahweh and his cult, the presentation of the penis, what it looks like, reveals an aesthetic concern with the genitals. Eric Kline Silverman asks, '[o]f all the bodily locations where God could have marked a covenant [...] why the penis?'<sup>647</sup> For

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<sup>646</sup> Jesse C. Long, *1 & 2 Kings*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin: College Press, 2002), 314.

<sup>647</sup> Eric Kline Silverman, *From Abraham to America: A History of Jewish Circumcision* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), xv.

Eilberg-Schwartz, it is the potential homoerotic tension between a male Yahweh and his male followers that gives rise to circumcision and explains the need to focus on the genitals. In order that an overt heterosexism in religious and cultic desire be maintained, circumcision must act as a 'castration' ritual intended to feminize the male Israelites.<sup>648</sup> Yet, paradoxically, Israelite men must also embody fertile masculinity: Eilberg-Schwartz writes, 'the removal of the foreskin symbolizes the fertility of the organ',<sup>649</sup> in the same way that pruning trees in Leviticus 19.23-25 is said to increase its yield.<sup>650</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz also argues that the incision acts to bond Israelite men together:

[T]he cut also suggests that this lineage, represented by the penis, is set apart from all others. In this way, circumcision symbolizes and helps create intergenerational continuity between men. It graphically represents patrilineal descent by giving men of this line a distinctive mark that binds them together.<sup>651</sup>

Indeed, in many biblical passages circumcision differentiates the Israelites from other groups in ancient West Asia, yet anxiety exists around uncircumcision (ערל) to such an extent that Saul would rather take his own life than be killed by a man with intact foreskin (1 Sam. 31.4; 1 Chr. 10.4). James E. Smith goes as far as to say that for these biblical writers 'uncircumcised' functions as an 'ethnic slur'.<sup>652</sup> In Isaiah 52.2, to be uncircumcised (ערל) is to be unclean (טמא); a similar rhetoric is present in Ezekiel 44.7-8:

<sup>648</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 138.

<sup>649</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *Savage*, 171.

<sup>650</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 153 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 125-126.

<sup>651</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *Savage*, 171.

<sup>652</sup> James E. Smith, *1 & 2 Samuel*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin: College Press, 2000), 185.

[I]n admitting foreigners (בני־נכר), uncircumcised (ערל) in heart and flesh, to be in my sanctuary (מקדש), profaning (חלל) my temple when you offer me food. You have broken (פרר) my covenant with all your abominations (תועבה) [...] you have appointed foreigners to act for you in keeping charge in my sanctuary [...] No foreigner (בן־נכר), uncircumcised in heart and flesh, of all the foreigners who are who are among the people of Israel, shall enter my sanctuary (מקדש).

In these instances, the repulsion at uncircumcision cannot simply be explained by recourse to the idea that circumcision connotes Israelite fertility. In the case of Saul, who expresses horror at the thought of uncircumcised men killing him, fertility does not seem to be a chief concern; rather what is inflicted upon Saul after his death by the uncircumcised Philistines reveals what he fears:

The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off (כרת) his head, stripped off (פשט) his armour, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to the houses of their idols and to the people. They put his armour in the temple of Astarte; and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan (1 Sam. 31.8-10).

The stripping of Saul's armour signifies a loss of his position, as in Ezekiel 16 and 23 where Yahweh gives over an adulterous Israel to her lovers and they strip her (פשט) of her clothes and jewellery to leave her naked (16.39; 23.26). Jewellery in Ezekiel 16 and 23 is a sign of Jerusalem's status and rank, as it is for the Tyrean princes in Ezekiel 26 who will 'strip off' (פשט) their garments and step down from their thrones (v. 16).

For priests, פשט signifies a material change in their identity, for he removes his linen clothes and undergarments that he might take the ashes from the burnt offering outside the Israelite camp (6.11). In the text that describes the Day of Atonement ritual (Lev. 16), פשט likewise designates a transition in status for Aaron, for he must derobe to exit the Holy Place, leaving his clothes behind (v. 23).

In 1 Samuel 31.8-10, the Philistine removal of Saul's armour is intended to take away his military power, especially after death when one's earthly achievements can affect one's post-mortem existence. The beheading of Saul is another instance where the Philistines attempt to assert their superiority over Saul, as Yahweh shows his over Dagan when Dagan is beheaded, falling prostrate before Yahweh's cult symbol, the ark of the covenant (1 Sam. 5.4).

If the actions of the Philistines in 1 Samuel 31.8-10 are representative of the dangers imputed to uncircumcision, then foreskin represents the threat of identity loss.

Eilberg-Schwartz has written about the feminizing nature of circumcision, about its relation to castration anxiety in psychoanalytic discourse, and about how this feminization allows the now-feminized subject to be intimate with a male God.<sup>653</sup> However, considering Saul's fear of the Philistine 'sword', might one argue that circumcision's purpose is wholly masculinizing? Eilberg-Schwartz does impute a masculinizing effect to circumcision, yet whether feminization is also an aspect of the rite remains questionable.

Saul evidently dreads the thought of a Philistine 'thrusting' (דקר) his sword through him and 'abusing' (עלל) him. The word for abuse (עלל) in 1 Samuel 31.8-10 is the same as used in Judges 19 in the account of the Levite and his concubine, where the men of Gibeah demand that the old man looking after the Levite give him over to them that they might 'know' him (v. 22). Instead, the man, the master of the house, offers the men his 'virgin daughter' (בתי בתולה) and the Levite's concubine (פיגלש) to rape (ענה) (v. 24), yet the men would not listen to him, so the Levite grabs his

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<sup>653</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 137-74.

concubine and throws her outside where the men 'abuse' (עלל) her all night long (v. 25), so much so that she dies.

Is there a degree of comparability in Saul's fears? He fears death at the hands of the penetrating Philistine 'sword', asking his armour-bearer to pierce him instead. The anxiety expressed by Saul seems not to be the *manner* of death itself, but instead *who* is the agent of his death. For Saul, it is better to be killed by his fellow circumcised Israelite, than to let an uncircumcised non-Israelite abrogate his male identity in the act of penetration.

If the Israelites must retain their male identities, it is possibly that foreskin itself is coded with femininity, such that the Philistine sword penetrating the Israelite body calls to mind the horror of foreign nations who use cultic sex toys to penetrate Israel in Ezekiel 16.

In many cultures which practise penile circumcision, the rite is undergone around the time of puberty, so that it becomes a rite of initiation in which the boys become part of the male community proper. Margo DeMello notes the example of the Kenyan Okiek who remove themselves from adults and women and are 'kept in isolation with members of their sex and age cohort' and then and then later are 'reintroduced into society as adult men'.<sup>654</sup>

In his work on rites of passage, Arnold van Gennep proposes that rituals can be demarcated into three stages: those of separation, transition and reincorporation.<sup>655</sup> For those who practise circumcision with rituals like those of the Okiek of Kenya, circumcision often parallels these stages insofar as the foreskin is separated in order

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<sup>654</sup> Margo DeMello, *Body Studies* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2014), 123-124.

<sup>655</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2004), 10-11.

to allow the incorporation of those circumcised into the community. In the case of the Abrahamic covenant, the ritual permits the person circumcised to enter the people of God.

Though Ishmael's circumcision happens during puberty, Abraham's occurs when he is just shy of a hundred years old, well past the age of virility. However, his circumcision virilizes him to become a father of nations (Gen. 17.2-6; cf. Gen. 12.2-3), revealing the link between circumcision and fertility. This masculinizing effect of circumcision solidifies the ascription of femininity to the foreskin as mentioned earlier. Those with foreskin thus sustain a trait unbecoming of those who will grow up to become men.

The story of David in 1 Samuel 18.17-30 demonstrates this association between foreskins and femininity when, in seeking to marry Michal, one of King Saul's daughters, Saul demands of David the 'bride price' (מָהָר) of one hundred Philistine foreskins (v. 25). The exchangeability of foreskins and women suggests that the foreskin does indeed carry the weight of femininity, and perhaps specifically of wifehood. Silverman notes that various societies make this connection between the foreskin and femininity,<sup>656</sup> while Janice Boddy in her article about male and female circumcision in a rural Northern Sudan village writes that circumcision in girls is associated with 'enhancing their femininity', while for boys, their operation ensures they become 'less like women'.<sup>657</sup>

In this Sudanese village, circumcision performed on girls involves infibulation, that is, the removal of parts of the labia majora and minora (and sometimes clitoris),

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<sup>656</sup> Silverman, *From Abraham to America*, 22.

<sup>657</sup> Janice Boddy, 'Womb as Oasis: The Symbolic Context of Pharaonic Circumcision in Rural Northern Sudan', *American Ethnologist* 9.4 (1982), 682-98: 687.

later binding the girl's legs together so that the wounds on either side of the genitalia will 'heal together by contact'.<sup>658</sup> Boddy quotes Sudanese author Ahmed el-Safi who describes this effect of infibulation in terms of veiling.<sup>659</sup> The fusion of girl's genitals, a veiling, is therefore contrasted with male circumcision, where the removal of the prepuce is to unveil the penis. What is initiated with these circumcisions is the separation of the male and female sexes and what Boddy calls their 'social careers'.<sup>660</sup> These careers are brought to fruition through marriage, by which social positions are achieved, and for which circumcision is the preparatory act.<sup>661</sup>

Genesis 34 is another text where circumcision is connected to marriage and where it functions as a prerequisite act: Shechem rapes Jacob's daughter Dinah and afterwards demands to marry her. Jacob and his sons, although intending to deceive Shechem to exact revenge, agree that he can marry Dinah if, and only if, he circumcises himself and all the men with him (v. 15) since it would be a 'disgrace' (חרפה) to the Israelite brothers to allow Shechem to marry their sister Dinah.

Disgrace is mentioned for the first time in Genesis 30, when Rachel, after having been barren, finally gives birth to a son; she says: 'God has taken away my disgrace' (אָסַף אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חַרְפְּתִי). It is Yahweh's intervention, the opening of Rachel's womb (v. 22), that effectively removes the חרפה she inhabits by dint of her barrenness. In an analogous way, it is Yahweh's action that takes away the חרפה of the Israelites who were born on the way out of Egypt and therefore left uncircumcised (Josh. 5.1-9). The circumcision, like Rachel's giving birth, is what obviates the חרפה; thus, what birth

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<sup>658</sup> Esther K. Hicks, *Infibulation: Female Mutilation in Islamic Northeastern Africa* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996), 13.

<sup>659</sup> Boddy, 'Womb as Oasis' 698.

<sup>660</sup> Boddy, 'Womb as Oasis', 688.

<sup>661</sup> Hicks, *Infibulation*, 84.

is to women, circumcision is to men: the reification of gendered positions in their ideal state.

In the case of Rachel, the author writes that God ‘opened’ (פתח) her womb (Gen. 30.22)—in a sense, one might read this as an unveiling of Rachel’s body to the divine phallus that has allowed her to conceive. Women’s bodies, however, are normatively veiled; the woman who commits זנה is she who becomes unveiled, like Babylon in Isaiah 47.3, ‘[S]trip off your robe, uncover (גלה) your legs [...] Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your shame (חרפה) shall be seen’.

The parallelism in this passage implies that חרפה functions as a synonym for female Babylon’s genitals. The connection between ‘disgrace’ and women’s genitalia is not unexpected in the Hebrew Bible and one finds ‘dishonour’ (קלון) used in Nahum 3.5 and Jeremiah 13.26 in a like manner, both in the context of a sexually transgressive female figure. Is there something inherently shameful about exposed female genitals on the one hand and unexposed (that is, uncircumcised) male genitals on the other? One might counter that there are less than positive portrayals of male uncovering in the Hebrew Bible, such as Noah’s nakedness before his sons (Gen. 9.18-28), or perhaps Michal’s chiding of David for uncovering himself and dancing before Yahweh’s ark (2 Sam. 6.16-23).

In both Genesis 9 and 2 Samuel 6, the uncovered male body falls under the view of certain other parties: in Genesis 9, it is Noah’s son Ham who sees him naked; unlike Shem and Japheth, Ham ‘sees their father’s nakedness’. In David’s case, Michal states that David committed his revelrous actions before the eyes of ‘his servants’ female servants’ as ‘one of the vulgar fellows’ is wont to do (2 Sam. 6.20).

The two scenarios cannot however be understood apart from their respective contexts: in the first, Ham's action represents an instance in which the eroticizing male gaze lays claim to his father's naked and exposed body. Ham's action sexualizes his father: '[i]n a culture in which masculinity is defined by procreation, by the fathering of children, the son's erotic gaze should not be directed at his father'.<sup>662</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz's comment here might explain the punishment meted out to Ham by Noah: that his own son Canaan will be a 'servant of servants' to his brothers (Gen. 9.25), a denigration of the power of Ham's penis. Thus, Noah's unveiled state is not *in and of itself* a problematic in the text; Shem and Japheth show relevant respect for the nakedness of their father, averting their gaze from the paternal penis.

In the case of David, his uncovering (גלה) is also not a problem for the biblical authors; the only person to condemn David in 2 Samuel 6 is his wife Michal (v. 20). It should come as no surprise that Michal as Saul's daughter fails to understand David's action given the anti-Saulide rhetoric in the preceding narratives (1 Sam. 16 – 2 Sam. 5).<sup>663</sup> David corrects Michal, telling her that his dance was 'before Yahweh, who chose me over your father [...] to appoint me as leader in Israel' (2 Sam. 6.21); in other words, he does not intend his dance for women, but rather for Yahweh's gaze.

Theodore Jennings takes David's dancing as a sign of the erotic nature of the relationship that exists between David and Yahweh.<sup>664</sup> David's statement to Michal that Yahweh chose him recalls, in Jennings' view, the reason Yahweh chose David in

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<sup>662</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, 'God's Body: The Divine Cover-up', *Religious Reflections on the Human Body*, ed. Jane Marie Law (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1995), 137-48: 147.

<sup>663</sup> Christophe Nihan, 'The Prophetic Redaction of 1 Sam 10:10-12(13a) in the Context of the Early Persian Era', *Saul in Story and Tradition*, ed. Carl S. Ehrlich (Tübingen; Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 88-118: 113.

<sup>664</sup> Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*, 38-55.

the first instance; that is, on account of his beauty (1 Sam. 16.12).<sup>665</sup> Indeed, though Jennings does not discuss it, I would argue that the vocabulary used by the biblical writer to describe David's 'cavorting' (זרע, שחק) underscores the eroticism that Jennings uncovers in the text of 2 Samuel 6.14-23. זרע, for example, translated by the NRSV as 'leaping', is used only one other time in the Hebrew Bible in Genesis 49.22-26; in this text, Jacob blesses his sons and to Joseph he promises fertility, that he shall be 'a fruitful bough' (NRSV), whose bow (קשת) will remain steadfast (איתן), whose arms (זרוע) will be 'agile' (זרע) and who will receive the blessings of Breasts and Womb (שדים ורחם) (vv. 24-25). As well as the noun קשת having phallic connotations of virility,<sup>666</sup> זרוע may easily connote זרע (semen), in which case Joseph's blessing relates directly to the capabilities of his taut 'bow'<sup>667</sup> and the excited state of his seed.

שחק\צחק, translated mostly as 'to laugh' or 'to play', can also be found bearing sexual connotations. Genesis 26.1-33 narrates the account of Isaac's settlement in Gerar with his wife Rebekah, who was, according to the text, 'pleasant to look at' (טובת מראה). On account of Rebekah's beauty, for which the Gerarite men may kill Isaac (presumably in order to 'acquire' Rebekah for themselves), Isaac tells the men that Rebekah is his sister. Later however, the Philistine king Abimelech sees Isaac 'playing' (צחק) with Rebekah (v. 8) and his reaction (that is, to question Isaac's relationship to Rebekah) lets the reader know that Isaac and Rebekah's צחק is sexual in nature.

The verb צחק also makes an appearance in the story of the molten calf (Exod. 32.1-35) when the Israelites, who are awaiting Moses' return from the mountain,

<sup>665</sup> Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*, 8, 38.

<sup>666</sup> Mark Smith, *Rituals and Myths*, 81; Sandra Jacobs, 'Divine Virility in Priestly Representations: Its Memory and Consummation in Rabbinic Midrash', *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and Beyond*, ed. Ovidiu Creangă, *The Bible in the Modern World* 33 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 146-70: 146-48.

<sup>667</sup> The rhetoric of the taut bow is also found in Ugaritic literature, where *nht* (compare the use of Hebrew נחת in 2 Sam. 22.35 and Ps. 18.35 to describe pulling taut a bow) is used of the high god El's tumescent penis; see Alan Hooker, 'The Ugaritic terms *nht* and *ymn'*, *Nouvelles assyriologiques brèves et utilitaires* 2014/1, 34-35.

engage in revelrous behaviour before the cult statue: ‘the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel (קנח)’ (v. 6). Étan Levine argues that, coupled with the use of ענה (‘sing’), which (along with its homonyms) is also employed in sexual contexts (as I noted in the chapter on the prophetic phallus), the קנח that Moses hears is the sound of an orgy (v. 18).<sup>668</sup>

If David’s dance before Yahweh bears the marks of a homoeroticism, à la Jennings, then the vocabulary used by the writer of 2 Samuel 6 furthers this meaning. Before Yahweh, David plays (with himself?) and displays his virile ‘agility’ while in an uncovered state (גלה); read alongside the declaration that Yahweh chose David for his beauty (1 Sam. 16.12), these texts reveal Yahweh’s interest in the aesthetics of the male body; after all, the deity does not object to David’s half-clothed display of athleticism.

To bring us back once more to circumcision, what light can the above texts shed onto this practice and its meaning(s)? Fertility has already been highlighted as one of the key functions of circumcision, a ritual intended to promote the identities and fecundity of Israelite men. The fear Saul has of an uncircumcised Philistine penetrating (דקר) him, killing him and divesting him of his identity as an Israelite man, resonates with a similar episode concerned with the downfall of the Israelite judge Abimelech in Judges 9.22-57. ‘A certain woman’, writes the biblical author, ‘threw an upper millstone on Abimelech’s head, and crushed his skull’ (v. 53); fearing that this woman would be able to claim the status of his killer, Abimelech begs his armour bearer to kill him instead: ‘so people will not say of me, “A woman killed him”’ (v. 54)—the armour bearer dutifully does as asked, piercing (דקר) Abimelech with a sword (v. 54). The

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<sup>668</sup> Levine, *Heaven and Earth*, 116.

uncircumcised Philistine of 1 Samuel 31 is the narrative equivalent of the woman in Judges 9: both are figures that threaten to emasculate. Foreskin, then, is a sign of the feminine, by which circumcision becomes a male-making ritual.

Considering what Ahmed el-Safi has said about the dichotomy between veiling and unveiling in reference to infibulation and circumcision, the foreskin may be regarded as a veil of the penis; from the above analyses, one sees that for some writers of the Hebrew Bible, גלה (to be uncovered) is not inherently a problem for male persons; for women, however, גלה can signify shame (חרפה) and sexual infidelity to Yhwh (Isa. 47.3, 57.8; Ezek. 16.57).

Moreover, since circumcision appears in Genesis 34.14 and Joshua 5.9 to remove the self-same חרפה attributed to female-coded figures (as a synonym for their genitalia), the threat of the *uncircumcised* penis is precisely the threat of emasculation that some are wont to see in the act of *circumcision*. For Yahweh, circumcision ensures that the object of his divine gaze is truly male; in Genesis 17.14, the uncircumcised man (זכר) is to be cut off (כרת) from the Israelites for 'frustrating' (פרר) Yahweh's covenant; that זכר is a synonym for the penis implies that the uncircumcised man is like a penis that has itself been cut off (cf. Lev. 22.24), which instead of being fruitful (פרה), frustrates (פרר).

Uncircumcision (ערל) appears consistently throughout Ezekiel 28-32 in a series of laments against foreign rulers. In these cases, uncircumcision is contrasted with terms denoting beauty and splendour:

I will bring strangers against you, the most terrible of the nations; they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom (יפי חכמתך) and defile your splendour (יפעתך) [...] You shall die the death of the uncircumcised (ערלים) by the hand of foreigners; for I have spoken, says the Lord Yahweh (Ezek. 28.7, 10).

Which among the trees of Eden was like you in glory (כבוד) and in greatness (גדל)? Now you shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the world below; you shall lie among the uncircumcised (ערלים), with those who are killed by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his horde, says the Lord Yahweh (Ezek. 31.18).

'Whom do you surpass in beauty (ממי נעמת)? Go down! Be laid to rest with the uncircumcised (ערלים)!' (Ezek. 32.19).

Furthermore, in chapter 32, Ezekiel juxtaposes shame (כלמה) with the uncircumcised (v. 24-25, 30), a word that elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible is paralleled with the term (חרפה) discussed above (Ps. 35.26; 69.8, 20; 71.13; Jer. 51.51). The discontinuity between beauty and uncircumcision highlights the interest that Yahweh has in the aesthetics of the male body, while the shame (כלמה\חרפה) of the uncircumcised hints at their femininity, especially in Ezekiel 32.24-25, in which the prophet states a bed (משכב) is made for Elam among the slain with 'all her hordes around her grave' (בכלי-המונה סביבותיו קברתה). Indeed, along with משכב in 32.24-25, the constant use of 'surround' (סביב) in reference to the foreign armies with their hordes about them smacks of Ezekiel's invective against Jerusalem and Samaria in Ezekiel 16 and 23 where Yahweh declares that he will gather their illegitimate lovers round about (סביב) them that they might be punished for their religious infidelity (16.33, 37, 57; 23.22, 24).

If the circumcised male body is an aesthetic focal point for Yahweh, one must still contend with Eilberg-Schwartz's claim, among others, that circumcision is a feminization or 'unmanning' of (presumably) an already existing male body. This unmanning, goes Eilberg-Schwartz's logic, is necessary to sustain the

heterosexualism that structures the relationship between Yahweh, a male deity, and his people, who though male, are corporealized as female.

While this may be the case with the Rabbinic texts and the exegeses Eilberg-Schwartz examines, Kristeva seems closer to the mark in relation to texts from the Hebrew Bible. For her, circumcision symbolizes the separation of son from mother, the emergence of the male from the abject figure of the impure mother at birth.<sup>669</sup> If this is so, if the cut 'males' the infant body away from the materiality of the mother, highlighting the penis through exposure of the glans,<sup>670</sup> then circumcision forces female materiality to bear the weight of sex; in other words, circumcision reveals the implicit equation of sex/gender with femaleness or perhaps the not-male. Here one recalls Brenner's comment on gender within the biblical texts: women as נקבה ('pierced') are associated wholly with their body as it exists for male consumption, while men as זכר ('to remember', 'penis') are entrusted with cultural memory and its propagation. In this way, women who are not marked with the cut, and hence not separated from the maternal body, become that body, and, since the womb functions as a sign for the earth/underworld in the Hebrew Bible, are equated with the land, the 'natural', a common understanding of women within ancient West Asian texts.

It is perhaps this parallelism that drives the prophetic condemnation of 'adorned' women (Isa. 3.16-23) who augment their body, a condemnation employed to bring the reader's attention to 'problem' women within the text (see Jezebel in 2 Kgs 9.30). Where adornment appears positively in Ezekiel 16 (vv. 9-14), it is so only under Yahweh's gaze; as a male figure, Yahweh holds the power to make for himself what pleases him and to beautify what exists for him.

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<sup>669</sup> Diane Jonty-Pace, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Religion, Misogyny, and the Uncanny Mother in Freud's Cultural Texts* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California, 2001), 112.

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Circumcision is the cut that works to inaugurate gendered life, one which makes men, essentially, 'not-women'. Using the metaphor of veiling, circumcision becomes the unveiling of the male body and its genitalia to Yahweh, an unveiling by which, perhaps, the penis may be sublated into the figure of the phallus *qua* its use as a symbol of power, masculinity and virility. By contrast, those who are uncircumcised are like those who have no penises, relegated to a female-coded subject position.

There are, to be sure, texts in which the penis needs to be veiled to approach Yahweh (though these do not appear in the context of circumcision); in the strictures of Exodus 20.26 and Exodus 28.42-43, for example, Yahweh forbids the construction of altar steps, lest those who ascend to the altar 'expose their nakedness' (לא-תגלה) (ערוֹתְךָ עליו); to Aaron and his descendants, Yahweh commands they wear linen undergarments (מכנסי-יִבֵד) 'to cover the flesh of nakedness' (לכסות בשר ערוה).

In this instance, Eilberg-Schwartz's insights into the relationship between Yahweh and Israelite men proves fruitful for the analysis of Aaron and the priests. What characterizes the priesthood is their intimacy in approaching (נגש) Yahweh (see Exod. 19.22), an intimacy Moses displays when he enters (נגש) the 'thick darkness' where God is (Exod. 20.21) while the people stand afar off. What does this mean for Aaron and the other priests? In Exodus 28, Yahweh requires a quite detailed dress code for those who approach (נגש) him. Of interest in both Exodus 20 and 28 is the concealment of the priests' genitalia; the biblical writer uses the term גלה discussed above to describe the threat of nakedness in Yahweh's presence (Exod. 20.26). In Exodus 28.43, exposure of the priests' genitals incurs 'guilt' (עוון); the only other

passages in which עון appears as the direct consequence of גלה are the sexual prohibitions of Leviticus 20 (vv. 17, 19).

Per Exodus 28.42-43, therefore, a priest who approaches Yahweh with exposed genitalia commits a transgression akin to a sexual infraction. Again, the exposure (גלה) of the male-encoded body does not seem inherently problematic, but in the case of intimate contact with Yahweh, the site of the genitals may indeed be prone to the problematics of גלה, which in the prophetic texts work to mark out female transgression (Isa. 47.2-3; 57.8; Jer. 13.22; Ezek. 16.36-37; 22.10; 23.10, 18, 29; Hos. 2.10; Nah. 2.7; 3.5).

There are two interpretations of the injunction which present themselves here: firstly, גלה of the genitals would render female the male priestly body; to expose one's genitals before Yahweh would therefore be viewed as problematic precisely because genital exposure is so often linked to female-coded figures in the Hebrew Bible. If this is the case, these injunctions function to ensure that the intimacy embodied by these priestly rituals remains a male/male affair, which is possibly the very reason Moses instructs the Israelites not to 'approach' (נגש) a woman before Yahweh descends from Sinai before them (Exod. 19.15). On the other hand, the veiling of the genitals might act to guarantee the exact opposite: namely, that the priest exemplifies femininity in concealing the penis that is read as male in order to uphold what Eilberg-Schwartz calls the 'male' and 'heterosexual' 'desire of heaven'.

In this case, the genital veiling of Aaron and the other priests is a method to exemplify their femininity or androgyny. Elsewhere I have asked whether one may be able to use

Susan Sontag's insights about Camp to read Aaron's body<sup>671</sup>; in her *Notes on Camp*, she writes:

Camp is the triumph of the epicene style. (The convertibility of "man" and "woman," "person" and "thing.")<sup>672</sup>

If the two interpretations put forward above do not have to be an either/or dichotomy, but might in fact be both/and, then these boundaries effect the gender liminality of the priestly body: in the very act of clothing their bodies to approach (נגש) Yahweh, the priest throws himself into gendered ambiguity. As noted elsewhere in this thesis, Yahweh's body as presented in Isaiah 6.1-7 and Ezekiel 1.26-28 is itself ambiguous; in the former passage, Yahweh is written as masculine, though the word used for his genitals (שול) is associated with women's bodies, and in the latter, Yahweh has מתנים ('loins, testicles') yet they are explicitly covered, in this case with bright light. In other words, the writers are *aware* of Yahweh's body, but do not know *how* that body is constituted with respect to its genitalia. Another possibility is that the gendered liminality of the priest recalls the multigendered deity of Genesis 1.26-28, in which case the priest's body becomes divinized precisely to approach deity. As the priest undergoes this gendered transformation to approach Yahweh, he exposes the fantasy of gender itself and exemplifies what Sontag calls 'Being-as-Playing-a-Role',<sup>673</sup> disclosing the artificial nature of the 'natural', since what Aaron is, what role he plays, including his gender, is a product of the relationship he has to Yahweh.

Roland Boer captures the Camp sensibility of texts concerned with the intimacy between Yahweh and his priests/prophets through an analysis of Moses' meeting with

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<sup>671</sup> Hooker, 'Kabod as Phallic Manifestation?', 22.

<sup>672</sup> Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', *Art Theory and Criticism: An Anthology of Formalist, Avant-Garde, Contextualist and Post-Modern Thought*, ed. Sally Everett (Jefferson: McFarland, 1991), 96-109: 100.

<sup>673</sup> Sontag, 'Notes on Camp', 100.

Yahweh on Mt. Sinai.<sup>674</sup> Boer stresses the importance Yahweh lays upon artifice, drawing one's attention to the 'ornate' furniture, such as the acacia table 'overlaid "with pure gold" (Exod. 25.24), with a rim of gold around its edge, bearing traces of pomegranates, desert roses and scarabs'. He also mentions the pavement of sapphire, the 'plates and dishes' and 'flagons and bowls' 'which crowd upon it'.<sup>675</sup> Like the biblical writers, Boer also opens with an acknowledgement of the presence of the divine figure, yet does not immediately focus his readers' attention on the figure's body, but on the regalia and accoutrements, the aestheticism characteristic of Campness. In a way, one may say that the concentration on paraphernalia foreshadows the artificiality of gender needed for the intimacy between Yahweh and prophet/priest.

Indeed, the priest must even aestheticize his body to come near to Yahweh:

You shall make sacred vestments for the glorious adornment of your brother Aaron [...] For Aaron's sons you shall make tunic, sashes and head-dresses; you shall make them for their glorious adornment (Exod. 28:2, 40).

'Glorious adornment' (לכבוד ולתפארת), literally 'for glory and beauty', is often assumed to refer to the beautification of Aaron and his descendants; that is to say, their vestments are for (ל) *their* outward beauty. However, it is possible that Aaron and his descendants must dress not for themselves but for God, in which case כבוד and תפארה are not references to priestly beauty, but to God's, since both function as signs of God's presence in the Hebrew Bible; תפארה in particular is used in the Psalms as a

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<sup>674</sup> Roland Boer, 'Yahweh as Top: A Lost Targum', *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Ken Stone (London; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 75-105.

<sup>675</sup> Boer, 'Yahweh as Top', 75.

reference to the Ark of the Covenant and/or God's dwelling among Israel (Ps. 78.61; 96.6).

If the prepositional ל lends itself to this interpretation, then it reveals that the priestly clothing is in fact an integral part of the relationship envisioned between God and priest. Aaron's vestments are not principally 'for' him, but for Yahweh, who is both כבוד and תפארה; while noncompliance with the statutes of approaching Yahweh is dangerous to the priest in the view of the writer (Exod. 28.35, 43), *priestly* nakedness is in some sense threatening to Yahweh as well. Elsewhere I have argued that כבוד indexes divine masculinity, especially in the book of Exodus and Ezekiel,<sup>676</sup> because of its association with fertility, strength and land ownership. Aaron and the priests dress for Yahweh's masculinity, to uphold that which so often defines him, and yet at the same time, the relationship between Yahweh and the priest is ambiguously gendered; what does this mean for Yahweh's phallus; that is, for the strength, fertility, power and virility Yahweh often exhibits and embodies—qualities which are encoded into the figure of the ideal penis for the male Israelites?

גלה ('to uncover'), discussed above, while used to denote female transgression, is also used to describe Yahweh's self-revelation, mainly in the books of Samuel and Isaiah (1 Sam. 2.7; 3.7, 21; 9.15; 2 Sam. 7.27; Isa. 22.14; 40.5; 53.1). The prohibition of genital exposure, therefore, in the regulations governing the Tent of Meeting, may rest on the fact that Yahweh is *already* revealing, that is, exposing, himself. If Yahweh exposes himself in the intimacy between him and the priest (betokened by the word נגש), then the restriction on priestly genital exposure may be in force to ensure Yahweh's body is not challenged or compromised. As with Baal who was exposed as

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<sup>676</sup> Alan Hooker, "'Show Me Your Glory': The Kabod of Yhwh as Phallic Manifestation?', Hebrew Bible Monographs 62. Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded, edited by Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit, (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014): 17-34.

the less-endowed deity, the proscriptions in Exodus 20 and 28 ensure Yahweh and his body remain the focal point of Israelite worship. That the Israelite priests cover their *genitals* to safeguard Yahweh's masculinity and the aforementioned intimacy implies that Yahweh's body, though often hidden with respect to its genitals, is nonetheless understood with reference to genitalia. In a way, Yahweh's genitals become sublated into the figure of his body, such that to talk of one is in these instances to talk of the other.

Circumcision is a male-making ritual and decouples femininity from bodies in order to achieve this 'manning'. Yahweh's concern with his followers' genitalia speaks to his phallic nature in that his followers are to follow him and be like him in the masculinity he displays. Stephen Moore notes that this 'mirroring' of deity is carried through into rabbinic teachings, such that there are even suggestions that Yahweh himself is circumcised.<sup>677</sup> In reference to priests and prophets, their special position in relation to Yahweh means they occupy a space that exemplifies this divine masculinity in their ability to embody a gendered plenitude, a plenitude that is in fact needed to liminalize them and grant them access to divine prerogatives. For priests, this is achieved in their reveiling when they cover themselves once again to mirror their state before circumcision; their circumcision however is not negated, but their imagined bodily morphology may be said to expand in their augmentation of their bodies to encompass the wholeness observed in the figure of the earthling made in God's image.

In other words, they are encoded with male and female traits and language which is the quintessence of divine masculinity: the occupation of multiple sites of gendered identity. This is not available to female persons for to uncover themselves, equivalent to male circumcision, is precisely to remove that which makes them female.

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<sup>677</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, 89 n. 63.

For the priest, on the other hand, veiling cannot take away the permanent cut of circumcision which inaugurates him into the male Israelite community; as such, it remains possible for him to veil himself without vitiating the meaning of his circumcision. Like the prophet Ezekiel, the priest may have his body rendered otherwise without negatively impacting on his masculinity. In fact, if instances of Yahweh's gendered ambiguity or plurality are a model to go by, they may enhance this masculinity, equated with wholeness, and solidify the male/male bonding characteristic of being a man. What this veiling does achieve is that it ensures Yahweh is only one making himself known (גלה) in the holy place.

### **Israel's Loins**

Abraham, as the one to whom the covenant of circumcision was first given, is the archetype of the Israelite man: cut and fruitful. From him comes forth Isaac and from Isaac, Jacob, the ancestor of the twelve Israelite tribes. His position therefore cannot be understated: the cut which made Abraham fruitful gives rise to one from whose own body a multitude of nations and kings emerges and whose loins are the site of Israelite identity.

From Ezekiel 1.26-28, one learns that Yahweh too has מתנים, 'loins'. Boer treats this dual word as a reference to testicles, leaving the reader with the distinct picture of Yahweh as a sexual deity. Yet, as with other instances of Yahweh's self-revelation in the Hebrew Bible, this sexuality is hidden or obscured, perhaps because it is threatening, as in the case of Isaiah, who is dumbfounded by his sighting of Yahweh's sexual body, or because Yahweh must protect and safeguard his own body, as in Ezekiel's vision where Yahweh's body has become 'transcendental' and a move has occurred to translate Yahweh's body from a cult statue, open to capture by foreign enemies, to one secured in the heavenly realm.

This section will examine loins, 'the seat of strength',<sup>678</sup> in its application to Jacob/Israel, one of the key divine ancestors in the Yahwistic cult to discover what it reveals about Yahweh's own body and the degree of comparability between the sexual deity and the loined ancestor, given that Yahweh too is imagined as the divine father to his people.

חלצים (Aram. חרצים), 'loins', appears eleven times in the Hebrew Bible; it first occurs in the biblical text when Jacob leaves Paddan-aram and God (אלהים) appears to him and blesses (ברך) him and makes himself known to Jacob as El Shaddai (Gen. 35.11), saying:

Be fruitful and multiply (פרה ורבה); a nation, even an assembly of nations, shall come from you, and kings will come forth from your חלצים.

With its evocation of Genesis 1.28, there can be no doubt that God's appearance to Jacob concerns fertility, and moreover, the name with which God discloses himself to Jacob (אל שדי) occurs in other narratives bound up with matters of progeny and fecundity (Gen. 17.1; 28.3; 49.25). It is no wonder therefore that David Beale, among others, offers 'God of/with Breasts (שדים)' as a translation for this epithet.<sup>679</sup> Concurrent with this apparently breasted god's revelation to Jacob is Jacob's change of name to Israel. This name change is the second instance where a divine figure appears and offers him a change of identity; in the first, found in Genesis 32.22-32, Jacob wrestles with God/a man (איש) (or divine messenger, מלאך, as per Hos. 12.4)

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<sup>678</sup> David Dunn Bauer, 'Man-Boy and Daddy-God: A Sacred S/M Reading', *Queer Religion: Homosexuality in Modern Religious History*, ed. Donald L. Boisvert and Jay Emerson Johnson (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), 81-92: 86.

<sup>679</sup> David Biale, 'The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible', *History of Religions* 21.3 (1982): 240-256; Harriet Lutzky, 'Shaddai as a Goddess Epithet', *Vetus Testamentum* 48.1 (1998): 15-36.

and is granted a name change after 'prevailing' against the figure (v. 28). In common with the account of Genesis 35 is the mention of Jacob's loins (ירך in ch. 32).

In this chapter, the איש strikes Jacob's חלצים because the איש cannot overpower (יכל) him. Here חלצים refers to the loins as the seat of strength, a meaning that is not restricted solely to male persons (see the use of מתנים || ענ in Prov. 31.17 in reference to the 'woman of valour'); in Genesis 32, therefore, the איש momentarily overpowers Jacob, yet the implication is that Jacob, who will become the ancestor of Yahweh's people,<sup>680</sup> possesses, at least before the incapacitation inflicted by the night-time being, a strength equal to that of divinity,<sup>681</sup> a strength for which the loins are the locus.

Eilberg-Schwartz argues that Jacob's incapacitation in Genesis 32 is a sign of his submission to Yahweh, a necessary mark he must carry upon his genitals.<sup>682</sup> He comments further that 'the entity "Israel" only comes into being at the moment of emasculation'.<sup>683</sup> I question whether 'emasculation' is the most appropriate word for this scenario; true, Jacob has sustained what appears to be a genital injury, yet Jacob's masculinity, his ability to be a man, is not otherwise impeded. Indeed, the reader is told that the איש 'could not prevail (יכל)' against Jacob (v. 25), and that Jacob, *seemingly in spite of his injury*, overcame (יכל) in his struggles against both divinity and men (v. 28).

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<sup>680</sup> Here not in the sense of earthly paternity, since, as Eilberg-Schwartz notes (2009: 175), by the time of this scene, Jacob has already fathered eleven of his twelve children; rather, my choice of the word 'ancestor' is meant to evoke the divine name 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' to suggest that the strength of Jacob's penis/loins ensures that he is postmortemly divinized within the Yahwistic cult.

<sup>681</sup> Some scholars, such as Westermann (*Genesis 12-36*, 1985: 515-18; see also John T. Willis, *Yahweh and Moses in Conflict*, 2010: 59), do not see the איש as Yhwh or a figure invested with his authority, but rather as a night demon. Even if this is so, demons are still within the אלהים-class of divine beings (Deut. 32.17) and Jacob's actions demonstrate the divinity of his strength.

<sup>682</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 152-58.

<sup>683</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 155.

Moreover, Jacob's victory occurs in a space of multiple thresholds: topographically, he is neither 'here' nor 'there', neither on one side of the Jabbok or the other<sup>684</sup>; temporally, he is neither in day or night at the critical moment of the narrative in which he fights the divine figure as daylight is breaking, suggesting yet a further threshold: the horizon, itself multi-liminal as it demarcates both *space* (the edge of the world) and *time* (the beginning and the end of the day), and thus in the narrative the implication of the horizon connotes a wrestling ground of cosmic significance.

Hein Viljoen notes that liminal spaces are often 'dangerous and polluting' because they are situated 'beyond the boundary between cosmos and chaos'.<sup>685</sup> Jacob therefore overcomes the threatening forces of chaos disclosed by liminality; he passes through Victor Turner's 'betwixt and between', a transitional space, and gains a new identity as Israel. It is at the moment of Jacob's prevailing that this cosmic wrestling ground becomes place proper and gains its own identity, just as the *שׂאֵי* gave Jacob his: 'So Jacob called the name of that place Peniel' (v. 30). Moreover, not only has the liminality of space/place been resolved, but the reader is also told that 'the sun rose upon him (Jacob) as he passed Peniel' (v. 31), which connects the resolution of liminal time with that of liminal space; in other words, what is disclosed by the horizon (the ambiguity of space-time) is resolved by Jacob and as such the patriarch achieves an almost cosmic identity ('Israel') that bespeaks fertility, progeny, and as noted above, eventual divinization into the divine epithet 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob' (Exod. 3.6, 15; 4.5).

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<sup>684</sup> Victor P. Hamilton tries to figure out from the clues in the text on which side of the Jabbok river Jacob meets the *שׂאֵי* (1995: 329); though he argues that a south-side battle seems more likely, ultimately it is ambiguous.

<sup>685</sup> Hein Viljoen, 'Journeys from the Liminal to the Sacred in the Interior of South Africa', *Beyond the Threshold: Explorations of Liminality in Literature*, ed. Hein Viljoen and Chris N. van der Merwe (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 193-208: 195.

John T. Willis argues that the deity in question in Genesis 32.22-32 is Yahweh,<sup>686</sup> though nowhere in the received text is the name Yahweh used. For those for whom Yahweh and God (אלהים) are synonymous, the text of Genesis 32.22-32 is problematic, as far as the writer has Jacob prevailing. In this case, is the implication that Yahweh's loins or his strength are lacking in comparison to Jacob's? After all, how could Yahweh be defeated? Are Jacob's loins stronger than God's?

Paradoxically, the name Israel, if derived from the verbal root שרה, means 'God perseveres/prevails' (or perhaps 'God is prince'), yet in the text one is hard-pressed to argue that this divine figure is the one who is in fact victorious. I would argue that the prevalence of the night-time demon theory is favoured by some because it provides a hermeneutic loophole through which Jacob can be victorious without infringing upon the divine power of the creator deity. Moreover, the argument that this figure is a demon because he appears at night rather than God rests on the idea that 'God does not fear the dawn'.<sup>687</sup> Robert Alter argues that the fear the איש displays in the face of breaking day is reminiscent of 'many folk traditions' in which night spirits are not permitted to roam in daytime, and as such the איש cannot be 'God Himself' (*sic*), presumably Yahweh here.<sup>688</sup>

However, the reader should not forget that in Genesis 28, where Jacob first encounters Yahweh, it is night-time (vv. 10-11), and in common with Genesis 32, there is the focus on *place* (מקום), which appears six times in 28.10-22. Furthermore, Yahweh appears to Jacob's father Isaac by night as well (26.24), though the text does not inform us whether this is a dream-time visit. One must also not forget that Yahweh

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<sup>686</sup> Willis, *Yahweh and Moses in Conflict*, 59.

<sup>687</sup> Camilla Hélena von Heijne, *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis* (Göttingen: De Gruyter, 2010), 81.

<sup>688</sup> Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2004), 180.

dwelt with the Israelite people both at day, as a cloud, and at night, as a pillar of fire (Exod. 40.38).

It is entirely possible on this account that the  $\text{שׂי א}$  could be identified with Yahweh, in which case how does one reconcile the notion of a powerful deity with his defeat at the hands of a mortal in Genesis 32.22-32? Perhaps, however, the intention of the story is not to question Yahweh's (or God's) power, but Jacob's. As Eilberg-Schwartz notes, Jacob displays feminized traits in earlier parts of his narrative (or character arc),<sup>689</sup> and at the point when Jacob displays masculinity, according to Eilberg-Schwartz, God must emasculate him to put him in submission. However, one should ask whether, on the other hand, this scene is actually one which provides the reader with a chance to observe the protagonist's value through struggle, precisely to see him as masculine.

Jacob's name change in the context of fertility (Gen. 32.9, 12; 35.11-12) mirrors Abraham's and Sarah's, whose names were also changed by Yahweh in Genesis 17 (vv. 5, 15) explicitly within a covenantal framework by which they would become father and mother to many descendants, nations and kings (vv. 6, 16). Similarly, the deity who reveals himself to Jacob in Genesis 35 and to Abraham in Genesis 17 does so as El Shaddai (35.11; 17.1), a god of, so Margaret Barker suggests, royal fertility (Abraham, Sarah, and Jacob are all promised that kings shall come forth from them; see Gen. 17.6, 16; 35.11).<sup>690</sup>

For Yahweh to be equated with El Shaddai essentially confers upon Yahweh headship over a nascent royal cult. Indeed, contact with kingship ideologies, as in

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<sup>689</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 154.

<sup>690</sup> Margaret Barker, *Mother of the Lord: Volume 1: The Lady in the Temple* (London; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2012), 133.

Abraham's meeting with Melchizedek (Gen. 14.18-20), king and priest of El Elyon, begin to structure Yahweh's relationship with his people; the biblical writers may have retroactively written kingship into their earlier myths in order to validate its later practice among the Israelites. After all, Saul, the first king of Israel, is from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chr. 8), the last son born to Jacob, whose birth is narrated immediately after Jacob is visited by El Shaddai (Gen. 35.16-20). Pertinently, Benjamin was also subjected to a name change; his mother called him Ben-Oni, 'son of my sorrow', yet Jacob names him Benjamin, 'son of my right hand', a body part associated with strength, favour and glory elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 48.17-18; Exod. 15.6, 12; Deut. 33.2; Ps. 16.8, 11; 17.7; 18.35; 20.6; 21.8; 98.1, *et al*). From Jacob's loins come forth the 'son of his right hand' who will eventually become the ancestor of Israel's first king, thus fulfilling the promise given to Jacob by El Shaddai.

If these name changes (Abraham, Sarah, Israel, Benjamin) do reflect an El Shaddaist royal ideology, then it is significant that only Jacob receives a theophoric name (ישראל). Name changes were not an unusual part of coronation or ascension ceremonies in ancient West Asia,<sup>691</sup> and as such, given the king was inevitably understood as a child of the deity for purposes of royal legitimation, the names granted to Abraham, Jacob and Benjamin reflect an almost monarchical understand of their unique positions within Yahweh's cult. However, it is Jacob who is the central figure in these discourses of fertility in so far as *his* loins, his genitalia, are explicitly mentioned and even subject to divine touch (!).

The fertility associated with the name El Shaddai as well as the divine interest in Jacob's genitals and progeny lead me to ask whether, like Abraham, whose name

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<sup>691</sup> Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (London: University of Chicago, 1978), 245-46.

is indicative of his own fecundity ('ancestor of multitudes'),<sup>692</sup> Jacob's new name Israel might also be related in some way to the fertile blessings bestowed on him earlier in the narrative or whether the fertility context might furnish the reader with other possible meanings or implications for the name Israel.

In the text of Deuteronomy 32.8, for example, one finds a discrepancy between the MT and the LXX reading. In describing the actions of the Most High (עליון), the MT reads:

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,  
when he divided humankind (בני אדם),  
he established the borders of the peoples  
according to the number of the Israelites (בני ישראל).

The LXX of v. 8b reads *κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ* ('according to the number of God's divine messengers'), and with the discovery of the Dead Sea manuscripts, the *Vorlage* presupposed by this reading was found preserved by 4QDt<sup>1</sup> which reads בני אלוהים ('sons of God', 'gods'). This implies the MT's reading (בני ישראל) arose from theological discomfort around the polytheistic framework of Deuteronomy 32.7-9; Jan Joosten, however, believes this is not adequate enough to explain its origin. He argues, on the other hand, that the phrase בני ישראל stems from an original בני שר אל, 'sons of Bull El'.<sup>693</sup>

The title 'Bull El' (*tr.il*) was a well-known epithet of the head deity at Ugarit, denoting to his strength and fertility.<sup>694</sup> In KTU 1.4 IV 38-39, for example, El, talking to the goddess Athirat, asks whether his *yd*, his penis, excites her, whether 'the love of

<sup>692</sup> Another possibility is to read Abram (אברם) not as 'father of heights', but in consonance with an Akkadian *ab rīmu*, 'father of/with womb'; perhaps in Abraham's name (אברהם) there is also an allusion to the womb (רחם).

<sup>693</sup> Jan Joosten, 'A Note on the Text of Deuteronomy xxxii 8', *VT* 57.4 (2007): 548-555.

<sup>694</sup> Aicha Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Alphabetic Texts*, trans. J. N. Ford (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 318-30.

the Bull (*tr*) arouses' her.<sup>695</sup> In the biblical texts, Yahweh is also associated with bull imagery,<sup>696</sup> and most pertinently for this discussion, are the references to the oft-repeated epithet 'Mighty One of Jacob' (אביר יעקב) in Genesis 49.24, Psalm 132.2, 4, Isaiah 1.24, 49.26 and 60.16. Nicolas Wyatt notes that the title אביר יעקב 'probably has the sense of "Bull of Jacob"' (compare Ugaritic *ibr* and Akkadian *bīru*, 'bull calf').<sup>697</sup> Given the strong focus on progeny and fertility within Israelite identity, is this language reminiscent of earlier religious devotion centred on שר אל, Bull El? Indeed, is the name Israel itself meant to evoke this deity?<sup>698</sup>

Some scholars, however, do not agree that this bull imagery indicates fertility; John Day, for example, argues that the title *tr.il* refers more to El's strength than his fertility since, he writes, 'El was not particularly associated with fertility'.<sup>699</sup> Moreover, Victor P. Hamilton maintains that אביר ('mighty one') in the epithet אביר יעקב cannot be translated 'bull (of Jacob)' due to the lack of gemination in the second radical needed to make it אביר, 'bull',<sup>700</sup> even though the consonantal text would remain identical. He also states that even if אביר could be rendered 'bull', it would not signify Yahweh's 'procreative power, i.e., fertility', which he links to Canaanite ideology, but rather the deity's 'protecting power'.<sup>701</sup>

<sup>695</sup> Mark S. Smith and Wayne T. Pitard, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle (vol. 2): Introduction with Text, Translation and Commentary of KTU/CAT 1.3-1.4* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 80.

<sup>696</sup> Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2002), 83-85.

<sup>697</sup> DDD, 181; contra Raymond de Hoop, *Genesis 49 in its Literary and Historical Context* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 195-198.

<sup>698</sup> Wyatt writes, 'It is tempting to interpret the [general] expression בני ישראל in accordance with the views of Tur Sinai and Joosten as 'the sons of Bull El' (בני שר אל), which has the same consonantal structure', *The Rumpelstiltskin Factor* (forthcoming, Jan. 2016), paper to be presented at the Society for Old Testament Study, Durham.

<sup>699</sup> John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (London; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 34.

<sup>700</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 681 n. 14.

<sup>701</sup> Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 681 n. 14.

The rhetorical move to associate fertility with Canaanite religious practices or ideas over and against Israelite ones has a long history in biblical scholarship; A. A. Macintosh, for example, contrasts the love of Yahweh for Israel in the book of Hosea against the ‘Canaanite religion’, the central figure of which, he claims, was the ‘licentious fertility god Baal’.<sup>702</sup> Though Macintosh recognizes the proximity these images have to one another in terms of meaning, writing that Hosea ‘sail[s] close to the wind’, he nonetheless employs loaded language to imply the lesser status of Canaanite religion:

Hosea seeks to redeem the notion of love between man and woman from the murky confusion into which Baalism had dragged it and to exalt it to a representation of the faithful love of the just and true God for the people he had chosen of old [...] Above all it is the grossly and licentiously sexual element [of Baalism] that [Hosea] repudiates.<sup>703</sup>

Hamilton’s rejection of the title ‘Bull of Jacob’ appears fuelled by this type of characterization of Canaanite religions and the desire to keep Yahwistic religious ideologies and practices free from the taint of sexuality. The problem Hamilton faces, however, is that אביר יעקב is found in texts overtly concerned with fertility. Genesis 49.22-26, which records the dying Jacob’s words to his son Joseph, invokes the epithet and parallels it with אבן ישראל, ‘Stone of Israel’, where אבן (*’bn*) is again a divine title found in ancient West Asia.<sup>704</sup> In KTU 1.100, a deity known as the ‘Mother of the Stallion and the Mare’ (*um p̄hl p̄hl̄t*) is described as the ‘daughter of spring/furrow (*’n*), daughter of stone (*’bn*), daughter of sky-and-deep (*šmm-w-thm*)’. While these constructions probably portray the horse as wild, characterized by the locations

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<sup>702</sup> Macintosh, *Hosea*, 79.

<sup>703</sup> Macintosh, *Hosea*, 79.

<sup>704</sup> *DDD*, 818.

mentioned (so Wyatt),<sup>705</sup> there is evidence of deities called *'bn* ('stone') and *šmm-w-rš* (sky-and-earth/underworld) at Ugarit.<sup>706</sup> Moreover, de Moor sees these titles as divine epithets and argues that the text of KTU 1.100 assumes a theogony (apparently not autochthonous to Ugarit but possibly of Hittite-Hurrian origin)<sup>707</sup> in which Shapshu (the sun goddess) is the mother of Sky-and-Deep, who are in turn the parents of Spring-and-Stone.<sup>708</sup> This leaves open the possibility that אבן ישראל might represent a kinship relationship between Yhwh-EI<sup>709</sup> and Israel in light of the potential procreative powers of Stone. Likewise, if the titles אבן ישראל and צור ישראל ('Rock of Israel') share a common origin in theologies of divine stones in ancient Israel (cf. Jer. 2.27) then the reference to the 'Rock who bore [Israel]' (אל מחלך || צור ילדך) in Deuteronomy 32.18 strengthens the link between stone and procreativity.

In addition, Jacob not only invokes the Bull of Jacob and the Stone of Israel but also אל אביך (Gen. 49.25), translated 'God of your father' in most English Bibles, but which most likely should be understood as 'El, your father', another common title for El at Ugarit,<sup>710</sup> and one which reveals the divine paternity of Jacob's family.

In Genesis 49.22-26, Jacob invokes a parental/ancestral deity who has the ability to bestow the blessings of 'deep' (תהום) and 'breasts and womb' (שדים ורחם) upon his son Joseph. Jacob's blessing, similarly to KTU 1.100, has invoked both Stone and Deep, and, as we shall see below, Spring (עין) as well.

The patriarch opens his benediction to Joseph by calling him,

<sup>705</sup> RTU, 378.

<sup>706</sup> de Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 199; *DDD*, 388.

<sup>707</sup> *DDD*, 388.

<sup>708</sup> ARTU, 146.

<sup>709</sup> Though the divine name יהוה is absent from Genesis 40-50 (save one scribal insertion in 49.18), other passages in Genesis make the link between Jacob and the deity Yahweh (28.16, 31.3, 32.9).

<sup>710</sup> Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets*, 324-26.

a fruitful bough by a spring,  
his branches run over the wall (Gen. 49.22, NRSV).

בן פרת עלי-עין  
בנות צעדה עלי-שור

The text translated 'fruitful bough' can also be read 'son of fruitfulness (פרה)' or even 'son of (a) cow(s)' (פרות, with *waw* defective, as in Gen. 41.26).<sup>711</sup> The reference to the Bull (אביר) in 49.24 as well as the potential reading פרות in 49.22 allows us to consider revocalizing שור ('wall') in v. 22 as שור, 'bull' (cf. Ugaritic *tr'iu*). Indeed, Philippe Guillaume argues that בנות צעדה עלי-שור should be literally rendered, 'on me the source of daughters climbed, on me a bull', a reference to the imagery of a bull mounting a cow<sup>712</sup> that can be compared to that of Baal's mounting a cow (possibly Anat in bovine form) in KTU 1.10.<sup>713</sup> The offspring of their coupling is described as an *ibr*,<sup>714</sup> a term one may compare to the Hebrew אביר of the title Bull/Mighty One of Jacob.

In light of the confluence of these fertility images associated with Jacob in Genesis 32, 35 and 49 (in his capacity of patriarch), can one see in the name Israel other hints at his divine fecundity? One name in the Hebrew Bible used for Israel that has resulted in reconsidering the biblically given etymology of Israel is Jeshurun (ישרון). Used four times in the Hebrew Bible (Deut. 32.15; 33.5, 26; Isa. 44.2), Jeshurun appears as another name for Jacob.

In Deuteronomy 32, the reader is told of Israel/Jacob's divine election by Yahweh (vv. 9-12) and their later fall into idolatry (vv. 15-18) where Jeshurun forgets

<sup>711</sup> Gershon Hepner, *Legal Friction*, 482; Stefan Paas, *Creation and Judgement: Creation Texts in Some Eighth-Century Prophets* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 67 n. 50; *DDD*, 476.

<sup>712</sup> Philippe Guillaume, 'Bull-Leaping in Psalm 18', *Metaphors in the Psalms*, ed. Pierre van Hecke and Antje Labahn (Leuven; Paris; Walpole: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2010), 35-46: 35.

<sup>713</sup> *RTU*, 155-60.

<sup>714</sup> Neal H. Walls, *The Goddess Anat in Ugaritic Myth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 130.

the Rock who bore them. Deuteronomy 33 likewise associates Jacob and Jeshurun and describes the Israelites as the 'community of Jacob' and Moses, the law-giver and prophet, as 'king in Jeshurun'. In Isaiah 44.1-2, the only text unambiguously to parallel Jacob with Jeshurun, Yahweh states his election of Jeshurun and his position as their creator, the one who formed them in/from the womb (ויצרך מבטן). As with Jacob, therefore, the name Jeshurun is associated with a fertile God: one who bore (ילד) and gave birth (חיל) to his people (Deut. 32.18), and one who formed them מבון, in the womb or perhaps from his womb (Isa. 44.1-2).

Etymologically, Sachsse suggests the name Jeshurun ('upright one') provides the ground to reconsider the meaning of Israel, arguing that ישראל originally read ישראל, in accordance with the pronunciation of ישרון.<sup>715</sup> On this account, ישראל would mean 'God is upright' or perhaps 'upright one of God'. Could one thus see in this name hints of the 'upright', dare one say erect, nature of the deity?

In Akkadian, the same root is present: *išaru(m)* and *eš(e)ru* denote straightness, correctness, orderliness and normality.<sup>716</sup> Yet *išaru/mušaru* also signifies the penis,<sup>717</sup> probably through recourse to the idea of straightness; with this in mind, one might say the name ישראל, first attested in Genesis 32 in Jacob's fight with the divine figure in which his genitals are a narrative focus, signifies precisely the divine phallus which this thesis set out to find. The significance of this name is in its positioning Jacob (and later the Israelites) as God's phallus. Eilberg-Schwartz frequently writes about the hiddenness of God's genitals in the biblical texts which, he claims, is promoted by the male-male relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites, but also by the partnerless

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<sup>715</sup> E. Sacchse, 'Die Etymologie und älteste Aussprache des Namens ישראל', *ZAW* 34.1 (1914): 1-15.

<sup>716</sup> *CDA*, 132-33.

<sup>717</sup> *OEBGS*, 281.

status of Yahweh, for if Yahweh has no goddess consort, that is, if monotheism is operational in the Hebrew Bible, then what use are Yahweh's genitals? If the divine genitals were visible, would not this lack of parda only work to show the limpness of Yahweh's member?

If one understands Israel as a reference to the divine genitals, then Yahweh's phallus is hidden in plain sight: in the person of Jacob. When the angel/man touches Jacob's genitals, Eilberg-Schwartz, as noted, reads it as emasculation, the submission of Jacob to God. Conversely, I argued that it is important to notice that only Jacob is said to prevail and therefore his injury is in fact a facet of his perseverance, strength and masculinity.

What then is the significance of the dislocation (יקע) of Jacob's 'thigh' (Gen. 32.25)? The second time God/El Shaddai meets Jacob in Genesis 35.9-15, he invokes the creative commandment of Genesis 1.26-28, 'Be fruitful and multiply' (פרה ורבה), which is not present in the first blessing. Jacob's father Isaac however *does* use this blessing to his son in Genesis 28.3, asking that El Shaddai make Jacob fruitful, a paternal desire realized in Genesis 35.11.

The dislocation, the turning away, of Jacob's ירך in Genesis 32 makes space for the transformation of his loins by divinity. Significantly, Jacob's blessing by El Shaddai that he shall become the ancestor of many nations and kings is not bestowed until *after* he wrestles with the divinity who touches his genitals. The divine touch is powerful, yet dangerous, but Jacob survives and is given his new name bespeaking God's fulfilment of his promise: ישראל, or the uprightness, the erection, of El.

When one considers the possible fertile and phallic connotations of the name Israel, Jeremiah 13.11, which compares the intimacy between Yahweh and the houses of

Israel and Judah to the nearness of a man's loincloth (אזור) to his מתנים ('loins, hips, testicles'), one sees just how important the penis is for Yahweh and his cult. I do not doubt the homoerotic undercurrent Eilberg-Schwartz detects in Jeremiah 13.11,<sup>718</sup> but wish to draw attention to v. 11b, which states the outcome of the clinging of Israel and Judah to Yahweh:

להיות לי לעם ולשם ולתהלה ולתפארת

that for me (Yahweh) they might be a people, a name, a song of praise and an ornament of beauty.

In this verse, the expectation upon the Israelites, that is, to cling to God's loins, is the very thing that makes them a people, a nation, in the first place. They are a people who adorn the deity's loins and it is for this reason that their transgressions are met with a denunciation of Israelite fertility: 'I will dash them to pieces, every man against his brother, even fathers against their sons [...] I will not spare them, I will not pity them, and I will have no compassion (רחם) when I destroy them' (Jer. 13.14). Israel has forgotten (שכח) Yahweh and as a result must be punished, and in this case the punishment is described in terms of the exposure of a woman's body (vv. 26-27).

The promised destruction of fathers and sons should not be taken lightly; as signifiers for the propagation of Israelite men, Yahweh's threat has tremendous consequences for the existence of Israel as a people. They have failed to be faithful to one God (v. 10), have committed זנה, and, as a result, Yahweh will have no compassion (רחם) on them; just as Israel's זנה displaces them from female-coded space, which as God's wife they ought to occupy, so too does Yahweh withhold compassion, the blessings of womb (רִחֻם), from them.

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<sup>718</sup> Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, 102.

In their forgetfulness, Israel departs from Yahweh's remembrance, his phallus (זכר), an act that is counted as adultery, and in the recognition of this act as adultery, the author implies that Israel has gone after other phalluses (cf. Ezek. 16.17; 23.14), and, as such, can no longer have access to God's phallus and thus essentially cannot be ישראל.

## Conclusion

In exploring these other phallic spaces within the Hebrew Bible, spaces which are not overtly structured by the 'marriage metaphor', it is apparent that the concerns of the phallus (progeny, remembrance, fertility) are still marked upon Yahweh and affect his presentation. In his tête-à-tête with Baal, for instance, the biblical writer intentionally deprives Baal of phallic connotations in his association of this deity with urination and defecation. Not only does this connect him with wastefulness, but also to passive penetration.<sup>719</sup> For Yahweh, this rhetorical move means that he can be associated with overcoming and the masculinizing act of penetration and the phallicism which comes with it. Ultimately, Yahweh is understood to be the bringer of fertility and one who can give sustenance to the earth. So, while it seems that a divine penis which urinates cannot be phallicized, the language used of Baal does speak to certain qualities about Yahweh. In the narrative itself, when Elijah builds the altar, the writer invokes Jacob, 'to whom Yahweh said, "Israel shall be your name"' (1 Kgs. 18.31). This allusion to Genesis 32 and 35, the focus of the final section of this chapter, calls to mind the fertile blessing given to Jacob as well as the potential phallic nature of the name Israel itself; Elijah even alters the traditional 'God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' formula in his

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<sup>719</sup> See Zsolnay, *Being a Man*, 94, who cites a Hittite ritual in which men who desire to be penetrated as called upon to stop being 'men of piss and shit'.

substitution of Israel for Jacob (v. 36). It is thus apposite that after this episode, the drought should end with the coming of 'heavy rain' and that the hand of Yahweh should come upon Elijah such that he 'girds his loins' (מתנים) and runs to the entrance of Jezreel (יזרעאל, lit. 'God will seed') (vv. 45-46).

With circumcision, one comes to know Yahweh as a deity concerned with the genitalia of his followers and the aesthetic qualities of their bodies. As a rite which installs gendered division, circumcision also sets a model for the relationship between genders and the genders to Yahweh. Women, those who do not undergo penile circumcision, become equated with a veiled body, while it is men, those who have their penises unveiled (circumcised), who are granted the prerogative of exposure. However, while male exposure is not inherently problematic, there are some circumstances in which covering is necessary: principally in the priestly approach before Yahweh. Not to cover one's self in this instance is comparable to a sexual transgression, the violation of one's own or another's body. Instead, the priest must veil from his מתנים to ירך, and in doing so, the priest becomes like the deity in Ezekiel 1.26-28, who, though clearly possessing מתנים, covers his midsection in effulgent light, thus obscuring full knowledge of what resides under the 'rainbow' (קשת)<sup>720</sup> he is engulfed in.

In the act of veiling, the priest performs an action constitutive of femaleness and therefore adds to his body a sign of femininity, and better resembles the deity he stands before. Moreover, the special clothing required, the covering and the suggestion of gendered ambiguity or plurality recall similar themes in Genesis 1-3. The special garments the priest must wear to make him קדש ('holy') recollect the deity's

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<sup>720</sup> On the use of קשת as a euphemism for the (divine) penis in rabbinic texts and Jewish mysticism, see Michael Fishbane, 'The Book of Zohar and Exegetical Spirituality', *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000), 101-117: 116 n. 41; Daniel C. Matt (ed. and trans.), *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 4 (Stanford: Stanford University, 2007), 364-365.

clothing of Adam such that he becomes 'one like the gods'; not only this, but the states of Yahweh and the priest mirror the plurality of אלהים and אדם.

Ultimately, these other spaces in the Hebrew Bible reveal Yahweh to be phallic, as opposed to anal, penetrating, as opposed to submissive, fertile, as opposed to otiose and manifest sexually in the figure and people of Israel, just as he is with/in Adam.

## FINAL CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION

This thesis began with a question about what one would see were Yahweh to offer a glimpse under ‘the hem of his robe’. Given the strongly masculine language used for Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, and the fact that other West Asian male deities are presented as sexually active and penised, one might have assumed Yahweh possesses similar genitalia. However, the answer does not happen to be so simple.

In some of the texts examined, Yahweh is distanced in certain respects from overt sexuality. For instance, in Genesis 3, Yahweh is clothed and thus offers no hint as to his bodily anatomy, while in prophetic passages such as Ezekiel 1.26-28, where Ezekiel sees Yahweh in the form of a human (אדם), there *are* hints to a genitaled deity, but, crucially, Yahweh’s waist (מתנים) is enshrouded and hidden, even with the intimation of genitalia that מתנים suggests. In other texts, Yahweh’s detachment is not from overt sexuality but from sexual definability: in Isaiah 6.1-3, the deity reveals himself to Isaiah, such that Isaiah is dumbfounded by what he sees. Eslinger claims that the שול which fills the temple space is Yahweh’s penis, though he does not consider the alternative gendered aspects of the word שול and what it suggests about Yahweh’s body since שול is used throughout the Hebrew Bible in reference to women’s bodies in negative contexts. All that it is possible to surmise therefore is that whatever שול represents, it blurs the distinctions made between what male and female bodies ought to look like.

This indefinability is further exemplified by passages which imply a Yahwistic womb (Deut. 32.18; Ps. 90.2; Isa. 46.3) and hence a birthing male. Alongside the use of the epithet אל שדי (‘God of the Steppe/God with Breasts’), scholars such as Moore resort to calling God a ‘hermaphrodite’ and, like Løland, switch the divine pronouns in these contexts, changing ‘he’ to ‘she’ or even using ‘s/he’ to describe the deity. Using

a body-building framework, Moore sees the possibility of divine breasts as a 'prodigious estrogen reaction' to the 'steroid-induced flood of testosterone' emanating from the anger-fueled, wrathful god.<sup>721</sup> Though Yahweh's body may be ambiguous or plural as to its anatomical configurations, it is clear that his gender is not; he is consistently written as male. Moore and Løland's commentary and linguistic decisions thus reflect a system in which one's gender is established by genitalia. Moore also links this apparent 'estrogenizing' of the divine body with detrimental effects on masculinity, such as testicular shrinking in bodybuilders who use steroids.<sup>722</sup> Yet, the ambiguity/plurality of Yahweh's body may in fact have the opposite effect.

In the blessings of 'Breasts and Womb' given to Joseph by Jacob/Israel, phallic language is used concomitantly to masculinize him, while in Deuteronomy 32, the God who gives birth challenges a faithless Israel and promises to remove their name (שם) and remembrance (זכר) from the earth (v. 26). He will bring foreign armies against them whose 'grapes are filled with poison and clusters (אשכול, cf. אשך, 'testicle') with bitterness' (v. 32). The God-with-Breasts thus exercises control over שם and זכר, two concepts explicitly associated with masculine concerns such as the propagation of one's family and the strength and presence of one's fertility.

Yahweh's gendered plurality ensures that, as per the reflection on the language of 'male and female' in Genesis 1.26-28, that he has access to dominion without limitation, just like the אדם creature whom he creates. For some, gendered liminality (as in the maternally rendered Ezekiel, the submissive Isaiah, the covered priest and male Israelites conceptualized as Yahweh's wife) is that which allows and encourages divine-human interaction and bolsters Yahweh's own phallic masculinity. Though it

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<sup>721</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, 97.

<sup>722</sup> Moore, *God's Gym*, 97.

should be noted that all these individual figures are written as male and that women do not enjoy the same prerogatives that come from gendered bodily augmentation. On the contrary, female phallicization problematizes their bodies because in doing so they are misplacing and replacing Yahweh's body for their own and those of other gods and therefore exposing themselves, a privilege usually reserved for men.

Though there are clues signalling a penis deity in the Hebrew Bible, mainly in the prophets, they ultimately constitute the minority of biblical texts. What is apparent, on the other hand, is that Yahweh is nonetheless a phallic(ized) deity. He is an eminently masculine god and throughout the texts his body and his actions are marked by the associations the penis carries, not only in ancient West Asia but in the biblical texts as well. Frymer-Kensky's assertion that such divine phallicism or sexuality is 'pagan' must be rejected, since it forms a significant part of divine interactions with male Israelites, as well as Smith's claim that Yahweh 'transcends' these 'metaphors'. Smith's attitude fails to take into account the very real effects that the idea of a sexual Yahweh has in the lives, rituals and worship of the Israelites, itself configured around the relationship between a fertile deity, a fertile land and a fertile people.

As to why Yahweh's genitalia should be relatively hidden but his sexuality apparent, especially when exposure is a privilege he has every right to exercise and when other West Asian texts have no problem in depicting this facet of their deities, I suggest that it partly revolves around the ideas of holiness and being set apart, especially in the prophetic texts. This is not to say that non-Yahwistic religious practices are 'pagan' and as a consequence more open in this regard, but that the biblical writers, who increasingly find certain modes of materialism suspect where there is a risk of being material without materiality, do not wish to concretize the aspect of their deity that represents life and fertility. This is particularly apparent in Ezekiel 16

and Yahweh's condemnation of Jerusalem's construction of cultic phalluses to enact *נזר* with. The 'transcendent' sexuality of Yahweh therefore also functions to expose the aberrant sexual practices of others, underscore the deviant materiality of Israel's female body in her unfaithfulness and make sure the divine genitals are associated with the heavenly realm against the at-times threatening space of the earthly sphere.

Moreover, in texts such as Genesis 1-3 and those concerning circumcision and Israel's loins, it is human penises (and male wombs in Ezekiel 36-37) which are the vehicle for the outworking of Yahweh's sexuality. In this respect, Yahweh need not display his genitalia if the ones whom he created after his image and likeness are essentially the means by which divine sexuality is manifest. Again, anxiety around specific types of materiality are apparent here in that humanity is essentially formed as living cult statues, unlike the nothingnesses threatened by foreign cultic statuary.

Previous research I have produced in this area did not take account of the plurality that divine and male gender and sexuality can embody,<sup>723</sup> and as such did not consider the possibility that female-coded language or imagery applied to men in certain contexts can in fact enhance masculinity and their likeness to deity. What this thesis therefore may have an impact on is a reevaluation of the models of gender that are used to reconstruct images of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible. In following Butler's attempt to free the phallus from a hard equation with the penis, one can consider alternative images of Yahweh that are not asexual and genderless on the one hand or simply penis on the other. In addition, one may also be able to reassess the paradigm in which female-coded attributes of Yahweh are merely viewed as a male

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<sup>723</sup> Alan Hooker, "Show Me Your Glory": The Kabod of Yhwh as Phallic Manifestation? Hebrew Bible Monographs 62, *Biblical Masculinities Foregrounded*, edited by Ovidiu Creangă and Peter-Ben Smit (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), 17-34.

usurpation of the features of an original Israelite goddess. In doing so, one can reevaluate the meanings of divine masculinity and think through bodily configurations that do not necessarily reflect conceptions of bodies that are grounded in our societal understandings of how bodies ought to be constituted.

As regards the limitations of this thesis, I decided not to include a thorough analysis of divine female gender and sexuality as it relates to goddess figures in the Hebrew Bible since my primary concern around femininity and femaleness, notwithstanding the paucity of references to sexualized goddesses, was with Israel and their presentation since they are overtly sexualized, corporately feminized and, when acting in accordance with Yahwistic expectations, divine. Israel's presentation not only revealed the sexualized methods Yahweh employs to regulate her deviancy, but also showed that divine femaleness is just as restricted as earthly femaleness. Where an analysis of goddesses might have aided, therefore, is in determining whether their femaleness as residents of the heavenly realm (as opposed to Israel) is as open to gendered liminality as Yahweh is and as other ancient West Asian goddesses are.

A further area that was not a component of this study was that of extra-biblical reception of the sexualized motifs uncovered in the texts. Though I did engage Eilberg-Schwartz and briefly Stephen Moore, a main feature of their work involves looking forward to later interpretations of the biblical texts (for example, in rabbinic texts), whereas my scope was the biblical texts and the textual traditions that preceded them. Consistent with my methodology, I intended to set an appropriate boundary for what I was attempting to achieve. In this case, part of the impetus for this research were the comments made by Frymer-Kensky regarding divine sexuality as a form of 'paganism'. In restricting my emphasis as I did, I have been able to dispel the notion that Yahweh does not engage in activities comparable to other West Asian male deities and

demonstrate that Yahweh is deeply invested in his sexualized actions for both himself and his people.

That said, in terms of where this research might lead, I am struck by how similar motifs and themes identified in this thesis can be read against later New Testament texts and traditions, particularly against the divine figure of Jesus, whose image is often built up around citations from the Hebrew Bible and his fulfilment of its symbolism. Not only this, but certain descriptions of him may even be linked back to Sumerian texts previously discussed; for instance, Jesus calls himself the one who 'sows the good seed' (Mt. 13.37-38), while Enki also 'engenders good seed' and is himself the 'good semen' (*EWO* 68, 70). Though this is most likely a common thread that runs through various West Asian traditions, that Yahweh and Jesus are both traditionally partnerless may allow one to compare Yahweh's (sexualized) relationship with Israel to Jesus' with his own followers and later community of believers and observe how this plays out for a person who is the Word of God (cf. Ezekiel 16), a sower of seed, the material extension or incarnation of deity (cf. דָּא and Israel) and one who is himself raised from the dead and offers this chance of re(s)urrection to faithful believers (cf. Ezekiel 37). In terms of divine plurality or liminality, both Susannah Cornwall's and Dale Martin's work have already picked up on the potential gendered and sexual ambiguities of Jesus and his body,<sup>724</sup> though whether this enhances or diminishes his masculinity comparable to Hebrew Bible portrayals of Yahweh warrants further exploration, especially as Jesus could be read quite effectively as the phallus of God.

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<sup>724</sup> Susannah Cornwall, 'Sex Otherwise: Intersex, Christology and the Maleness of Jesus', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 30.2 (2014), 23-39; Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Saviour* (Westminster: John Knox, 2006).

Moreover, the methodology employed in which I stated my own body would be used as a reference point so that I could ask questions of the divine body that I have of my own, was successful inasmuch as it allowed me to imagine different possibilities for the constitution of Yahweh's body and genitals, possibilities which have historical consonance with the texts. However, I was forced to reflect on the fact that though I do not identify with the male gender assigned to me by others, in the world of the biblical text, it would be this very feature of my existence that would have allowed me to embrace a form of gendered liminality or plenitude in the first place, and then only to have it masculinize where I would find masculinization undesirable. In the texts I have examined, the phallus (whether Yahwistic or otherwise) is unambiguously desirable, for male and female characters alike, and seemingly unquestionably so. Taking this research further, I would question the desirability of the phallus, to see whether there are texts in the Hebrew Bible that are resistant to what the phallus has to offer. In this way, it becomes possible to account for a wider variety of bodies, ones different from mine, and their relationship to dominant modes of masculinity in the biblical texts.

Overall, this thesis has given insights into the gender and sexuality of Yahweh and argued that in the imaginary of the ancient Israelites, Yahweh exists as a sexual deity of ambiguous or plural gender. To achieve this, it has questioned the nonliterality of metaphor (or perhaps the usefulness of the terms 'literal' and 'metaphorical'), contending that sexual language applied to the deity is unquestioned precisely because divine sexuality is a forceful given in the biblical text. It has also queried the idea that male and female bodies are stable entities with pre-given bodies and interrogated the causal relationship between penises and maleness (at least in a divine context). This interrogation necessitated a distinction between penis-as-

biological-organ and the idealized penis which symbolizes masculinity and the qualities and characteristics believed proper to men. From these steps, the deity who emerges from the biblical texts is certainly a phallic man, but one with a bodily morphology not easily defined. Human men who replicate or signify this indefinability on their bodies, or have it marked upon them, are thus set apart, holy, and have access to the knowledge of God, predicated on the male embodiment of divine plurality in their subsumption into the female figure of Israel, from which phallic blessings flow.

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