

REFRACTIONS FROM
THE BOOK OF AMOS:
A STUDY OF A LITERATURE OF VIOLENCE
FROM MARXIST AND FREUDIAN
PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

This study of the biblical Book of Amos from Marxist and Freudian perspectives demonstrates that the critical approaches so designated complement one another well enough to be adapted and employed constructively in the study of literature and literary production. From the Marxist perspective, the method employed assumes that the literary Amos the text embodies (Amos^L) has been derived from an incarnate original (Amos^I) reshaped in the process of literary production to serve certain sociopolitical interests. Following Marx's thesis that humans must be comprehended materially in "the ensemble of the social relations," the social location of Amos^I is theorized according to the claim that he is not a *prophet* but a *shepherd* or, as Norman Gottwald states it sociologically, a *transhumant pastoral nomad*. Louis Althusser's concept of the idealizing function of ideology is used to argue that Amos the *prophet* as opposed to Amos the *shepherd* is a literary production of the scribes who compiled the Bible. *Amos* remains, however, a profound literature of alienation manifesting the high degree of hegemony that the emerging monarchical ruling class in Israel had already achieved by Amos's time.

From the Freudian or psychoanalytic perspective, the text exemplifies a consciousness suffering the traumatic effects of an earthquake—effects reflected in the text's imagery, intensity of voice, incoherence, anxiety, threat of exile, and non-representability. Frank Kermode's treatment of the mythic extends the concept of the compulsion to repeat characteristic of trauma to suggest that Amos is regressively fixated upon the myth of a tribal, premonarchical Israel as a sort of golden age along the lines developed by Raymond Williams in *The Country and The City*. Georges Bataille's concept of sacred violence in its turn underscores the potential of *Amos* itself to fuel fantasies and acts of violence and raises disturbing questions about the ongoing effects of the sacred canonization of violent literature.

Acknowledgements

To an unusual degree, I suspect, this study is the product of my individual and solitary reflection upon the issues addressed. This absolves anyone other than myself from any shortcomings and idiosyncrasies it may contain. Particularly, however, I thank my supervisor, Hilary Clark, for her perceptive comments and assiduous editing, and the Cancer and Aging Research Group at the University of Saskatchewan, which, for the last two years, has provided me my principal forum for the expression of my ideas.

Dedication

This study was undertaken to gain some insight into the nature and sources of violence. It is dedicated to Jeanne Taylor and to the communities to which I belong that promote living in peace, principally the Saskatoon Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Saskatoon Ch'an Community.

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

John Lennon

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the spring and summer of 1999, I went in search of the historical Amos.¹ Such a search was a new departure for me. Typically, I have not pursued historical criticism, but something about Amos intrigued me. At first, I was convinced I could see through the text that bears his name to a person who lived in ancient Israel.² Not that I could see him physically in a way that would allow me to recognize him a crowd. But I thought I understood his life and his world view well enough that he became for me a coherent type.

Over the ensuing years I have become more interested in Amos as a literary rather than as an historical character. The present study reflects that shift in interest. If there were a living, breathing Amos of whom the book of *Amos* preserves a trace, I have come to doubt that those among whom he lived and breathed would have said to one another when they saw him on the road, “O, look, here comes the prophet Amos!” I have come to suspect, rather, that the designation *prophet* was applied to Amos only in his literary afterlife. Much of this study focuses upon that afterlife. Nevertheless, I have not altogether abandoned my search for the living, breathing man. Indeed, I cannot. I have not because, to some extent, I continue to be governed by the historical imperative that motivates much biblical study. I cannot because this dissertation is undertaken as a Marxist as well as a psychoanalytic study of *Amos*.³ As I go on to elaborate,

¹ To distinguish *Amos* the text from Amos the man, I have adopted what in biblical studies is the unconventional expedient of italicizing the former.

² In this study *Israel* refers to the ancient northern kingdom that disappeared in 722 BCE. The issue is complicated by the practice of using the name to refer to the larger area in which the god worshipped in Israel was also worshipped, e.g., the ancient southern kingdom of *Judah*. When possible, I use the names proper to each. When speaking of them collectively, I use the term *greater Israel*. Henceforth, unless otherwise noted, all biblical dates are understood to be BCE.

³ I use the adjective *Marxist* in keeping with Umberto Eco’s distinction between *Marxian* and *Marxist*: “If Marx is alive and well around the world, it is not due so much to those who have studied him historically (the ‘Marxians’) as to those who have reformulated his thought according to new situations (the ‘Marxists’)” (“Peirce’s” 1460). *Marxian* applies to the historical body of Marx’s work, *Marxist* to its extension by those who followed. In this study *Marxist* refers primarily to Marx’s thought as distilled, interpreted, and extended by the French philosopher Louis Althusser, whose work on ideology has particularly stimulated my thinking about literary production. At appropriate points I identify other Marxists who have also stimulated my thinking.

Marxism is a theory of production. It seeks to understand the specific conditions that permit whatever a society produces at a given time and place to be produced. In line with this broad conception, the Marxist aspect of this study focuses more specifically upon the function of ideology in the production of literary art.⁴ As will be seen, the analytic method I employ assumes that the literary Amos the text embodies has been shaped to serve certain sociopolitical interests. To illuminate the forces at play in this shaping process, the method requires that an incarnate⁵ original (Amos^I) be theorized from which the literary Amos (Amos^L) derives.⁶ I intend to reveal that a *dialectic* tension exists between the two. In Marxist theory, dialectic tension is the main-spring, as it were, in the production of the historical consciousness necessary to the creation and maintenance of our sense of the society in which we live and to which we belong. More specifically, I go on to argue that—occupationally—Amos^I was not anything but the shepherd he claims to be (7.14), and I demonstrate the remarkable extent to which the complaint in *Amos* can be read as that of a shepherd. But I speculate that it served the sociopolitical—and, perhaps, psychological—needs of the scribes who eventually produced the biblical literature centuries later to enhance their status as subjects of the Persian empire by glorifying their history. In the process, the shepherd Amos (Amos^I) came to be ennobled as the prophet Amos (Amos^L). To use Benedict Anderson’s concept, this literary recasting of Amos was part and parcel of the extraordinary scribal project of imagining a community—the biblical Israel from which the scribes involved had descended—as one that had lived in a uniquely meaningful relationship to the divine. They imagined this community in so compelling a manner that the idea of such a place has continued to grip the western psyche ever since.

No less than Marxism, psychoanalysis is also a theory of production—the production of subjectivity more generally conceived, which I designate psychic consciousness to distinguish it from historical consciousness. Like Marxism, it assumes that its object of study has been shaped to meet certain ends, and it seeks to illuminate the concealed forces at play in this process. In the

⁴ As I acknowledge in detail in Chapter 2, this focus reveals my indebtedness to Louis Althusser. It is not the only way that Marxist theory can be and has been applied to literary analysis. For instance, David Jobling points out that for Ernst Bloch the principal object of Marxist criticism is to identify the utopian moments in the works under consideration (““Seduction””).

⁵ Amos as he was in his historical flesh.

⁶ Continuing to call Amos^I the *historical* Amos would be misleading, for, as I go on to argue (11 below), Amos^L is the historical Amos. In the ensuing text, I use the rather ungainly notations Amos^I and Amos^L sparingly. Although a fair deal of what I say is applicable to both, the reader should bear in mind that the name Amos comprehends both possibilities.

ensuing pages, I focus upon Freud's work on trauma to argue that the psychic consciousness manifest in *Amos* is suffering the effects of trauma. Reference to an earthquake in the first verse of *Amos*, in fact, provides the background for just such a reading.

My contention that (a) Amos¹ was not anything but a shepherd and that (b) he was a traumatized shepherd to boot marks a new approach to *Amos*. I use Marxist and Freudian theory respectively to illustrate these points, but I do not utilize them in isolation from one another. I employ them in tandem to argue my thesis that Marxist and psychoanalytic critical approaches complement one another—not perfectly, to be sure, for they focus upon different objects of knowledge—but well enough that they can be adapted and employed constructively to illuminate forces at work in literature and literary production. In particular, this study of *Amos* demonstrates that the regressive fixation underlying the text is overdetermined: it is an effect both of the idealizing function of ideology that Marxist theory highlights and of the traumatic experience that Freudian theory elucidates.

In the remainder of this introduction I provide (1) some background about *Amos*; (2) some general observations upon the aims, challenges, and general tenor of biblical criticism; (3) an argument that the fragmented quality of *Amos* sets it up to be read as literature of madness; (4) reflections upon some of the challenges of utilizing Marxist and Freudian theory in literary criticism; and (5) some concluding remarks about the nature of this study.

1. Amos: The Man and the Text

Amos the text as opposed to Amos the man is a book of the Jewish Bible.⁷ It appears in the second of its three major sections: the *Law* (תורה, *torah*), the *Prophets* (נביאים, *nəvi'im*), and

⁷To avoid needless repetition, unless otherwise noted the word *Bible* in this study henceforth refers to the *Jewish Bible*. Although the practice is not problem free, I use the term *Jewish Bible* rather than *Old Testament* to refer to the collection of texts in which *Amos* appears. The two are not equivalent. To support their version of divine history, early Christians chopped some books up, added others, and rearranged their sequence. Reformation Protestants deleted the books that had been added, thereby creating a slimmed down Protestant Old Testament distinct from the Catholic version. Because the ideological implications of the adjective *Old* are disparaging to many who study the text, the term *Old Testament* has largely disappeared from academia in favour of other terms deemed more neutral theologically. *Hebrew Bible* is the choice of many, its drawback being that parts of the books of Ezra and Daniel are written in Aramaic rather than Hebrew. My use of the term *Jewish* simply refers to the compilation—the books and the sequence—as maintained in Judaism. It does not reflect a belief that the compilation in whatever configuration one studies it is more central to one religion than another. The Bible has been aug-

the *Writings* (כתובים, *kəθuvim*).⁸ Traditionally, the prophetic books were subject to finer distinctions. The *Former Prophets* (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings), texts that contain some stories about prophets, were distinguished from the *Latter Prophets*, texts whose authorship was attributed to the persons whose names they bear. The Latter Prophets were divided further into *Major Prophets* (Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel), texts of considerable length, and *Minor Prophets*, texts so short they originally comprised a single book: the Book of the Twelve. Nine chapters long, *Amos* is the third of these. However that position came to be decided upon, it is, nevertheless, generally considered to be the oldest text among the Latter Prophets, the so-called writing prophets. An introductory superscription declares that it contains “The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Teko’a,⁹ which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzzi’ah king of Judah and in the days of Jerobo’am the son of Jo’ash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake” (דְּבָרֵי עָמוֹס אֲשֶׁר-הִזָּה בְּנִקְדִים מִתְקוֹעַ אֲשֶׁר הִזָּה עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיַמֵּי עֲזַיָּה מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה וּבְיַמֵּי יִרְבָּעָם) (1.1).¹⁰ What he saw concerning Israel, which he interpreted in words of almost unrelieved doom, was its end, which occurred in 722 upon its conquest by

mented and interpreted in various ways in the development of the three major, western, monotheistic religions. The religion(s) practiced in biblical societies have disappeared except in these augmented forms.

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the Hebrew philology in this work is based upon the standard Brown, Driver, Briggs (BDB) edition of the Gesenius Lexicon. Unless necessary to make some distinction, I drop the vowel points from isolated Hebrew words or phrases under discussion. Short, perfunctory translations are italicized. To save space, biblical quotations longer than a line or two are given in English only.

⁹ Teko’a is a place about 14 miles from Jerusalem in the ancient southern kingdom of Judah. Despite the tradition’s connecting Amos to Teko’a, in my earlier paper I conclude that, based on philological and symbolic evidence, *Amos* the text and Amos the man were Israelite rather than Judahite. The issue of their provenance, however, is outside the scope of this study.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted, the English is from the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and the Hebrew from the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS). Occasionally I refer to the 1985 English translation by the Jewish Publication Society—*Tanakh*—that I will designate by JPS. I tend to use the politically incorrect RSV because (1) I am most familiar with it, and (2), on the whole, it seems to me to be a more accurate translation than the more politically correct New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Despite the newer revisions by apologists who wish to make the text more palatable among progressives to whom it is proclaimed, the Jewish Bible remains a patriarchal text.

and absorption into the Assyrian empire. The information supplied in the superscription has led to a consensus that the man Amos to whom it refers flourished in greater Israel in the mid-eighth century.¹¹ By this date the vexed question of the degree to which biblical characters are historical or legendary begins to recede.

2. The Historical Imperative in Biblical Studies: The Reliability of the Bible as an Historical Witness

It only *begins* to recede, however. Despite my own fascination with Amos¹, it remains an open question whether such a person existed. Every book of the Latter Prophets has a superscription that attributes its words to someone. Although we are not told his father's name, the superscription for *Amos* is quite informative. We are given the subject matter: the book contains "words...which he [Amos] saw concerning Israel." We are told when he saw them, not only generally, in terms of coinciding reigns of kings of Israel and Judah, but specifically: "two years before the earthquake." A vocation is suggested ("shepherd") and a place name provided to which to associate him ("Teko'a"). But it is abundantly clear that the superscription itself cannot be part of the words of Amos. Someone—some scribe—added it. We do not know when; estimates vary. As one example, Hans Walter Wolff concludes that it was prefixed to the original compilation and then amended some 150 years later (108, 117–8). Nor do we know why it was added. It may, indeed, have been the work of an original compiler following some generic convention. But R. P. Carroll seems closer to the mark in suggesting that "what the biblical writers were trying to do with the production of colophons [superscriptions] was a creative act of interpretation that aimed at bringing some order into quite disordered texts" ("Inventing" 34), i.e., the Latter Prophets as a whole. With only a few exceptions, eliminating the superscriptions would render these texts anonymous. *Amos* is one of those exceptions: he is named not only in the superscription (1.1) but again in 7.10, 7.11, 7.13, 7.14, and 8.2. In theory, an editor could have derived his name from the body of the text, but only, as Carroll points out, if it had the form it now has when the superscription was added (27). This is a formidable caveat, for every reoccurrence of the name appears in a dialogue that some editor has also supplied. More important, however, than the question of when and why such a superscription was added is that of the reliability of the information provided. Did the scribe involved possess accurate information? Or was he speculating according to some chain of associations we have no way of recovering?

¹¹ This consensus is based not only upon our current understanding of regal chronologies but also upon archaeological evidence of a great earthquake dated to around 760 (Wolff 124).

Ultimately, we have no way of knowing whether the persons to whom the books of the Latter Prophets are attributed were not simply made up in the editing process. Carroll, at least, suspects they were. “The achievement of these colophons [the superscriptions in the Latter Prophets],” he claims, “is the creation of ‘historical’ figures, better known as the prophets of ancient Israel. In penning these prefaces to the biblical anthologies the writers helped to *invent* the ancient prophets as biographical figures” (25, emphasis original).

I have devoted space to the question of prophetic superscriptions because it typifies a major issue with which many biblical scholars deal: the reliability of the texts as historical evidence. Of course, as artifacts all texts have historical dimensions open to analysis. The Bible is a treasure trove of such artifacts. As we now have it, it is a compendium of thirty-six books¹² comprising up to fifty-nine genres, forms, or types, including prophetic visions, oracles, laws, moral precepts, sermons, prayers, blessings and curses, cultic regulations, historical narratives, myths, fairy tales, legends, novellas, anecdotes, drinking songs, taunts, popular proverbs, and riddles (for a summary, see Table 8 in Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible—A Socio-Literary Introduction* 99–101). As with artifacts generally, many of these texts reflect their time and place of composition and/or compilation, some in remarkable ways. Most biblical scholars devote some attention to such historical dimensions, working, for instance, to specify probable horizons of meaning within the interpretive community for which a text was originally intended or analyzing the socioeconomic conditions under which it was originally produced.¹³ Critical theorists are no less concerned with such historical dimensions. Louis Althusser, for instance, states that what he calls authentic art, i.e., “not works of an average or mediocre level,” while not giving “us a *knowledge* in the strict...modern sense [of] scientific knowledge,” nevertheless “makes us *see*, and therefore gives to us in the form of ‘*seeing*’, ‘*perceiving*’ and ‘*feeling*’ (which is not the form of *knowing*)...the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*” (“A Letter” 204, emphasis original).¹⁴ If Althusser is right, he has pointed out one of the many ways that texts may reflect their time and place of composition.

¹² As per the BHS.

¹³ The Husserlian concept of horizon significantly influenced hermeneutic theory in the 20th century, particularly that of Hans-Georg Gadamer. For a summary, see Hirsch 468–70.

¹⁴ Althusser does not provide criteria for distinguishing authentic from average or mediocre art other than suggesting that the former manifests the ideology “from which it is born” in a way that the latter does not. The extent to which any particular work of art may do this depends upon the judgment of an audience, a judgment that provides the fuel for criticism.

The analysis of texts as historical artifacts does not necessarily involve any verification of truth claims that the texts themselves might make. In many cases, the critical issues revolve more around methodology and interpretive skill. The Psalms, for instance, do not provide a diegetic account of the history of Judah. But much has been inferred about that history by applying form criticism¹⁵ to determine their *Sitzen im Leben* (*situations in life*: the situations in daily life from which the texts in question ultimately derive). Works that are deliberately historiographical, on the other hand, pose additional challenges to critics. The Bible is full of such texts. The Deuteronomistic History, for instance, itself comprises seven of its thirty-six books: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings. In addition to other critical problems they may present, these narrative histories also challenge critics to assess the accuracy of the accounts they provide about the past, i.e., to assess their reliability as historiography. In common with other prophetic books, however, *Amos* is not deliberately historiographical. It does contain some biographical scraps (the superscription (1.1) and Amos's encounter with the priest Amaziah (7.10-17)), but it is generally studied as a commentary on contemporary events, i.e., as a primary rather than a secondary source for the history of the time and place to which it refers. As such, it is generally conceived to be more candidly polemical than texts intended as deliberate historiography, so that the assessment of its historical reliability lies not so much in measuring the accuracy of what it depicts but the typicality of the conditions to which it alludes.

The task of assessing reliability is complicated by a dearth of information from other sources against which biblical accounts might be verified. Very few other contemporary documents pertaining to greater biblical Israel have been uncovered, either from within its territory or from without. There is some archaeological evidence, but it remains surprisingly scant and inconclusive given the influence the area has wielded over the western psyche. For these reasons, the Bible remains the principal source of evidence for the civilization to which it attests. Accordingly, an historical imperative distinguishes much biblical scholarship from textual scholarship in general. The Bible *qua* historical document has been the object of study for many scholars—mainly social scientists—whose interests have not been principally nor strictly literary. By necessity, it has focussed the attention of anyone interested in constructing some aspect of the history of its time and place of composition: historians, economists, anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, biologists, and so on.

¹⁵ Criticism that aims “to isolate characteristic smaller units of tradition [...] felt to be oral in their origin and highly conventional in their structure and language” (Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible—A Socio-Literary Introduction* 11).

Most doubts concerning the historical reliability of the biblical compendium have arisen from the highly redacted nature of its texts. Since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, a growing number of biblical scholars have come to accept that most if not all the texts they study are products of prolonged and extensive editing, that their material was collected, written down, and revised over a thousand years, and that much of it derives from still older oral sources (songs, sagas, laws, treaties, hymns, laments, aphorisms, numerical sayings, folk tales, poems, mid-rashes, and so forth).¹⁶ The scribes who labored on the Bible for well-nigh a millennium did not do so to preserve their texts in some pristine form. They did not entertain the high notion of their integrity that modern editors have: they reworked them either to make sense of subsequent developments or to serve the polemical purposes of their own times. As for prophecy, Martti Nissinen asserts that scribal recasting of what was originally an oral medium “centuries after the prophets themselves were dead and buried” was viewed as an inspired “literary prolongation of the prophetic process” (160).¹⁷

For any given biblical text there is normally much debate among scholars about how many scribes were involved in the redaction process, who they were, when they edited the texts, and why. The redaction history of *Amos* provides a case in point: it is not only complex but contested. Hans Walter Wolff identifies six stages of redaction ranging over some 250 years (106–13). Robert Coote reduces these to three. Shalom Paul, on the other hand, insists that *Amos* comes from a single source. The dating of many texts is also highly contentious and can vary by centuries, as it does with *Amos*.

The problem of historical reliability is further complicated by other factors. No authorita-

¹⁶ For an excellent summary of one such theory of the Bible’s process of composition, see Chart 3 in Norman Gottwald’s *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction*.

¹⁷ For instance, Isaiah is now commonly agreed to be a conflation of prophetic texts from three eras. Isaiah 1 (Isaiah of Jerusalem, Isa 1-39) dates to Judah in the last half of the eighth century, Isaiah 2 (Isaiah of the Exile or Deutero-Isaiah, Isa 40-55) to Babylon in the mid-sixth century, and Isaiah 3 (Trito-Isaiah, Isa 56-66) to Judah in the last half of the sixth century. The recognition that the Jewish Bible is a composite work helped stimulate the development of the historical biblical criticism that emerged in the eighteenth century and preoccupied many biblical scholars in the nineteenth. The four-source hypothesis for the Pentateuch—the “five scrolls” comprising the first five books of the Jewish Bible—worked out by Julius Wellhausen in the late nineteenth century, although it has been continually refined, has stood the test of time (Wellhausen *passim*). For a succinct history of the emergence of modern biblical source criticism, see Viviano 31–36.

tive texts can be established among the variants, which are corrupt at many points.¹⁸ In most cases, the oldest variants are still centuries younger than the manuscripts from which they ultimately derive. Indeed, even after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest Hebrew texts available are still later than the Septuagint, a Greek translation. Moreover, the grammatical structure of the language in which most of the texts are written, Biblical Hebrew, is now not clearly understood.¹⁹

Faced with these challenges, many of the scholars who analyze biblical texts in search of the history of greater biblical Israel find themselves functioning somewhat like archaeologists, separating various textual strata to which they apply methodological tests to refine the historical reality they are seeking from its literary dross. In doing so, many are attempting, at least in part, to correct for and neutralize the literary dimension of the text, that is, the dimension in which the experience to be expressed is shaped or receives the impress of some pattern by the lexical, syntactical, and tropological choices of some persons—in biblical texts, we assume, anonymous scribes.

Wolff's analysis of the redaction history of *Amos* into six strata exemplifies such archaeological work. Through such analysis, he says, "we are able to distinguish with a high degree of probability three eighth-century literary strata, all of which for the most part derive from Amos himself and his contemporary disciples." "Three additional strata," he goes on to say, "can be recognized as later interpretations by their distinctive language and different intentions. They derive from the following centuries" (107). Several points about Wolff's approach merit particular comment. *First*, although he characterizes the three eighth-century strata as

¹⁸ Those reading translations may be unaware of the extent to which many of the textual problems posed by the Jewish Bible are typically resolved by the interpretive processes that all translation involves. The critical apparatus in the BHS indicating variant readings and interpretations is much more extensive than the glosses in the RSV.

¹⁹ Biblical Hebrew passed from daily use before the beginning of the common era. It was preserved for biblical study and religious observance much like Latin in the Roman Catholic church. Its original speakers obviously conversed among themselves quite naturally, but they left no analysis of their grammatical structures to posterity. The Masoretic scholars, who standardized the biblical text between the 7th and 11th centuries CE, dedicated themselves to regularizing its pronunciation and intonation. But, as Leslie McFall states, "their work shows no traces of grammatical categories" (1). By their time, however, the rationale for the verbal system—how native speakers understood the language to be working when they spoke—had probably been lost. Ever since, as the title of McFall's book, *The Enigma of the Hebrew Verbal System*, suggests, that rationale has been the subject of ongoing conjecture.

“literary,” he conceives the literary dimension of *Amos* as a problem that analysis must resolve. Paradoxically, one of the tests he applies to get to the truth of the matter concealed behind the literary is literary itself: the presence of “distinctive language.” *Second*, despite suspicions such as Carroll’s (6 above), Wolff assumes the existence of Amos^L. *Third*, he further assumes the existence of a group or groups of “contemporary disciples” including an “Old School of Amos” which numbered among its adherents at least one contributor to *Amos* who “must have been an eyewitness [of Amos^L], seeing and hearing what he reported” (108). *Fourth*, and finally, he assumes that Amos^L played the role of a recognizable intermediary,²¹ possibly that of a חֹזֶה (xozeh, *seer*), which an adversary of Amos^L calls him (7.12), or of a נָבִיא (navi’, *prophet*), which Amos^L strenuously denies that he is (7.14).

Although Wolff deals quite competently with *Amos* as an artifact (in *Amos* research, he is well known for arguing that a certain strain of language reflects a village wisdom tradition), on the whole he does not entertain the possibility of an Amos^L worthy to be studied in its own right as a phenomenon distinct and different from the Amos^L in which he so clearly believes. The critical tests he applies to assess the text’s historical reliability are limited to distinguishing authentic from spurious texts, i.e., to distinguishing texts attributable to an Amos^L and his immediate circle from those interpolated by later redactors. Although Wolff can and does deal with these redactions as artifacts by illustrating how they reflect the sociopolitical interests and theological views of various scribal parties of later times, he treats them primarily as accretions to be burnt off in the crucible of analysis. His interest remains squarely focused upon recovering Amos^L, whom he takes to be the book’s historical core. Wolff concentrates upon sifting the text to delineate Amos^L ever more precisely. He applies source and form criticism, for instance, better to understand the provenance of Amos^L’s thought.

Wolff’s approach manifests a belief about history shared by many biblical scholars: the belief that beneath the interpretations the Bible presents of the comings and goings of ancient greater Israelites there lies an objective truth that is the proper goal and object of historical study. Some of the analysis to which biblical literature is subjected arises from the conviction that the deliberately historiographical texts are insufficiently objective and, in consequence, not up to par as history. Some defend the scribes involved by maintaining that they did not intend to produce history as we understand it, nor could they in the light of modern standards of historiography. In

²¹ I adopt Robert A. Wilson’s use of the word *intermediary* as a neutral, general term to refer to *prophets, shamans, witch/sorcerers, mediums, diviners, priests, and mystics*, each of whom, despite specialist functions, mediate in some way between the divine and human spheres (21–28).

recounting their own past, they intended, rather, to “justify the ways of God to men.” Some of these apologies only thinly veil a contempt for these ancient historians. In the hindsight of several millennia, the literary choices many did make to tell their stories do seem clearly interested. Israel Finkelstein comments quite justly upon their lack of detachment. Many biblical texts, he points out, are “highly ideological and adapted to the needs of the community during the time of their compilation.” He goes on to say that these texts “provide us with far more historical information about the society and politics of the writers than about the times described in them” (Finkelstein and Mazar 15).²²

Biblical scholars are quite right to share Finkelstein’s suspicions about the stories these ancient historians tell. As Finkelstein correctly intuitively, they represent ideological writing about the past, writing whose plot lines have been constructed to serve the sociopolitical aims of the factions whose interests the scribes involved served and shared. Nevertheless, they remain the principal artifacts from which the history of greater biblical Israel must be inferred. In Marxist theory, at least, their correct interpretation as historical evidence depends upon a proper understanding of the discipline of history. “History,” Marx asserts in elaborating his materialist conception of it to which I will return, “is not a person [or principle] apart, using man as a means for its own particular aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims” (qtd. in Gotwald, “Hypothesis” 151, emphasis original). Whoever writes ideologically, however deftly that ideology may or may not be concealed, is in that very act making history in Marx’s sense, for that person is pursuing his or her aims. According to Marxist theory, the history that scholars should seek when they analyze biblical texts is not—as in Wolff—to be found solely in the stories they contain but also in the ideological conflicts they reflect.

It follows that scholars searching for the history of biblical Israel and Judah will be put off the scent if they assume some dichotomy exists between history on the one hand and our literary expression of it on the other. That dichotomy is specious. The theory of history based upon such a dichotomy is typically informed by the idealist assumption that there is something more fundamental to human experience than our conception and expression of it. However,

²² The realization and conviction that many biblical texts are ideologically coloured has produced many ingenious arguments about the dating of texts based upon correlating this perceived colouration to the zeitgeists of various eras. For instance, in his study already cited, Coote sorts out three ideological strands that, he argues, exemplify successive stages in Israel’s history. The problem with this approach is that the nature of zeitgeists to which the texts are said to correspond can only be theorized by reading the texts in question, resulting in arguments that are highly circular.

Hayden , in particular, has demonstrated that all historical writing has a literary dimension.²³ Borrowing a page from Northrop Frye, he shows, for instance, how four historians of the French Revolution construe the same set of historical events according to various plots to produce romance (Michelet), tragedy (Tocqueville), comedy (Marx), or irony (Burkhardt) (“Interpretation” 61–62). The literary and the historical are intimately intertwined. The shape that the former gives the latter is ideological, for that shape reflects the historian’s most deeply held yet unexpressed convictions about the nature of the reality he or she is attempting to convey.

No less than their later counterparts in the guild of historical scholarship, the scribes who compiled the biblical narratives gave them a distinctive ideological shape, producing in consequence a distinctive sense of the nature of reality. Analyzing the social purposes served by such ideological practice is a special province of Marxist criticism. In the light of Marxist theory, the approach of scholars such as Wolff, who assume that ideological shaping distorts or conceals the historical truth they seek, is an idealist mistake. Yet such scholars are not mistaken in assuming that ideology distorts. Indeed, as I shall show in Chapter 3, Althusser defines ideology *as* distortion. But they are mistaken in not appreciating the function of such distortions in the acquisition and maintenance of social power—and in not adequately recognizing the struggle for such power as the very stuff and engine of history.

3. The Historical Imperative: The Relevance of the Bible as the Word of God

Another group for whom biblical study is frequently driven by an historical imperative consists of the many exegetes—including but not limited to theologians, homilists, catechists, pastors, and so forth—for whom the Bible is not just any text but a sacred one, one pored over for millennia by the devout seeking to make cosmic sense of human experience and to derive unchanging norms of human behavior. With this group, reliability is less an issue than relevance. Its members aim to relate the historically-contingent world of the text to that of its current readers, principally by drawing analogies. In this, they do not differ markedly from many literary scholars who engage in historical criticism. An historical critic of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, for instance, might summarize nineteenth-century European imperialism to enable its modern readers to draw parallels between the Victorian civilizing mission to Africa and the current west-

²³ All the essays collected in White’s *Tropics of Discourse* deal with the degree to which the writing of history approximates the writing of fiction. Of particular interest are “Interpretation in History” (51-80), “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact” (81-100), “Historicism, History, and the Figurative Imagination” (101-20), and “The Fictions of Factual Representation” (121-34).

ern civilizing mission to the Middle East. In this view, Conrad's text remains relevant because it continues to illuminate contemporary experience, a relevance that each succeeding generation of historical scholars labours to make clear.²⁴

For faith-based critics, the Bible's eternal relevance is an ideological given. The task for each succeeding generation of exegetes who read the texts theologically is to demonstrate this relevance anew in the face of the ever-changing vicissitudes of human experience. Like those interested in the history of biblical times *per se*, they also embark on an archaeological truth project aimed at refining the pure gold they are seeking—in their case, the text's eternally relevant message—from its contextual dross. Their work becomes part and parcel of the larger enterprise of biblical hermeneutics. It identifies the merely contingent to help interpreters correct for whatever influence that contingency has had in shaping the message. To be sure, for some critics the descriptive suffices. But Paul de Man, I believe, correctly observes that whenever a clash occurs between poetics (which he defines as descriptive) and hermeneutics (which he defines as normative), the latter typically wins out.²⁵

Whereas those with a primarily historical interest in the text attempt to neutralize the literary, those with a theological interest attempt to neutralize the historical. In the latter case, the literary is not a problem. The articulation is the outward manifestation of the inspiration: as the Word of God, the words themselves are divine.²⁶ Because of its lofty subject matter, theology has proven to be a particularly effective ideological vehicle. The pre-eminence of the “ways of

²⁴ I am convinced that literary canons cannot be prescribed. When texts cease to reflect current experience, they lose their relevance and most of their readership, a process that cannot be overturned by fiat or legislation. Most books have little relevance even from their date of publication. Over the eight years that I have worked in a theological library, I have come to realize that less than 1% of its books circulate. Many are not read even by specialists or by historians for whom they could now be objects of study. Indeed, I have found books published in the 1880s with uncut pages. I suspect that most library collections are similarly irrelevant.

²⁵ I cannot pinpoint the source of this opinion. De Man distinguishes between “the descriptive discourse of poetics and the normative discourse of hermeneutics” in “Dialogue and Dialogism” (113–4).

²⁶ Although a tradition in the Jewish Bible does identify wisdom as a creative principle (cf. Pr 8.22-31) and God does create by speaking in the first creation account in Genesis (1.3-27), the Word of God as a theological concept is more prominent in the Christian testament than in the Jewish Bible (cf. Jn 1.1-18). Nevertheless, the rabbinic tradition of biblical interpretation does manifest a reverence for the words themselves as divine.

God” being justified in the biblical text tends to mask the alignment of those involved in specifying those ways with the interests of various political and social factions.²⁷

Frequently the historical and the theological enterprises are intertwined. In an essay on the history of *Amos* research, M. Daniel Carroll R. states that from the mid-1880s through the first decades of the twentieth century a principle objective of that research was to isolate the *ipsissima verba* of Amos (9–12). Wolff’s first stratum, “The Words of Amos from Tekoa,” attempts to pinpoint these original words. “We must [...] reckon,” he states, “with the possibility that this collection may go back to Amos himself” (107). Carroll R. points out that during the period in question some of this work was motivated by the conviction that “the chronologically earlier—that is, the original revelations—were inherently superior to the subsequent additions,” both poetically and, it seems, theologically (11–12). Among other things, this opens the theological can of worms of relative degrees of inspiration. If the entire canon is conceived to be the Word of God, we are forced to wonder how the Word given through those identified as prophets can be more inspired than that given through scribal redactors.

4. The General Tenor of Biblical Criticism

The general tenor of much biblical criticism flows from (1) the historical imperative just discussed and (2) is an obvious corollary to the fact that the Bible remains the principal source of evidence for the civilization to which it attests: little in the Bible can be verified by anything outside the text itself. As I have said, there is some archaeological evidence, but that evidence is not only sketchy but subject in its turn to considerable interpretive controversy. Even if it were more ample and less ambiguous, the degree to which such evidence might verify a continually revised literary text is highly questionable. Peter Laslett is doubtlessly correct in claiming, for instance, that “no excavation or analysis will ever authenticate the manner of the election of Saul to the kingship of Israel” (322).²⁸ For those interested in such things, it follows that the validity of most

²⁷ The premise of a course I have taught entitled *The Canonical Formation of the Jewish Bible* is that, theologically informed as it may be, the canon as we have it is clearly the product of political compromise. Its arrangement reveals a dominant faction strong enough to gain pride of place but not to shut off divergent viewpoints.

²⁸ For a current summary of the degree to which archaeology confirms the biblical account, see Finkelstein and Mazar *passim*. Finkelstein states that “biblical archaeology has stalled relative to world archaeology in almost every field.” He surmises that “the great thinkers of modern world archaeology [avoided] the discipline of biblical archaeology” for the ideological reason that it was long relegated to the supportive role of confirming the biblical text (12). My

biblical criticism, at least in its historical assessments, must be largely internal to that criticism itself: it must hinge principally on the number of textual features for which it coherently accounts.

To highlight some general aspects of their work, I have elaborated upon some challenges biblical critics face. *First*, as I have already stated, most biblical criticism attempts historically to elucidate the text in some way. In this, it differs from other textual criticism principally in the degree of value with which many of its practitioners invest their undertakings, travelling, as they see themselves, on the high road to ultimate truth. *Second*, it is highly speculative. Given the lack of confirming evidence, it could hardly be otherwise. *Third*, given its limitations, it is remarkably ingenious. By necessity, sophisticated techniques have been devised to test the probability of its conclusions. The work of Norman Gottwald, a pioneer in the sociological criticism of the Bible upon whom I rely extensively, provides a case in point. In *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250–1050 B.C.*, he constructs plausible accounts not only of the sociology of pre-monarchic Israel but also of the evolution of biblical texts as ideological supports for the civilization he believes was then forming in the highlands of Canaan. Theoretically grounded in Marxist theory though his work may be, the evidence he can adduce from biblical texts to support his argument must seem, to many not familiar with biblical criticism, very slim indeed. Moreover, his deductions about the evolution of the biblical texts depend upon a programmatic reading of the finished texts themselves, a process that must seem highly circular to many not attuned to the speculative nature of this criticism. The sociological work of Gottwald and others has been complemented over the past forty years in equally ingenious and highly suggestive ways by cross-cultural anthropological research. That conducted by Thomas Overholt on shamanism has been particularly fruitful for the study of biblical prophecy by suggesting what the prophetic office during various biblical periods might have entailed.²⁹

The highly speculative nature of biblical criticism can make for some pretty interesting reading—provided that one has developed a tolerance for the tangents to which highly ingenious

own view is that the verifiable history of greater biblical Israel begins with the northern Omride dynasty of the ninth century and that much of the biblical account that precedes it, including a united monarchy under David and Solomon, is largely legendary material elaborated from much humbler historical bases than those suggested in the Jewish Bible.

²⁹ For instance, to shed light on biblical prophecy Overholt's *Prophecy in Cross-Cultural Perspective* provides source texts on shamanism in the Americas, the Arctic, Africa, India, and the Pacific.

solutions can lead. By necessity, theorizing upon the Bible involves a lot of grasping at straws. In the enthusiasm born of an insight, some critics seem to forget what type of structures are likely to be built from the few straws they do grasp. Pet theories come to be strenuously defended, but in elaborating them their proponents seem gradually to lose touch with the text or the realm of probability.

Karl Moller's "'Hear This Word Against You': A Fresh Look at the Arrangement and the Rhetorical Strategy of the Book of Amos" provides an excellent example of this. As the title suggests, Moller mounts an argument concerning the arrangement of *Amos*, the principle of which, he insists, has been a longstanding bone of academic contention despite general agreement that *Amos* "consists of three major sections, i.e. the oracles against the nations in Am. i-ii, the so-called 'words' (Am. iii-vi) and the visions (Am. vii-ix)" (500). In good, scholarly fashion, he reviews the recent literature supporting various points of view. Finding none of these convincing, he quotes James Mays to the effect that "there is no demonstrable scheme to the arrangement, historical, geographical, or thematic" (501). But he cannot rest content with this conclusion. Stating that "many recent redaction-critical studies have stressed that the prophetic books are to be understood as what Zenger calls 'planvolle Kompositionen [*methodical composition*]" (501), he adds a rhetorical log to the fire of speculation.

Moller's argument depends upon an aspect of *Amos* that distinguishes it within the prophetic corpus. While most of those identified as prophets aim to turn their audience back to God, Amos, by and large, unsparingly announces doom. He tells his audience that it is already too late for Israel. Because of its people's breach of their covenant obligations, Yahweh has already pulled the plug on it once and for all. Although the final five verses do promise the restoration of a bountiful Israel,³⁰ these seem to have been added at least 200 years after *Amos* began to evolve, thereby preserving its original pessimism intact.

Quite rightly, I think, Moller points out that the answer lies in determining the implied audience, not the audience whom Amos¹ might have addressed orally but the audience for whom the scrolls were compiled long after Amos¹ was dust. "The book is best understood," Moller claims, "as an attempt to persuade its hearers or readers to learn from the failure of the prophet's audience to respond appropriately to his message. The recipients are induced therefore not to repeat the stubborn attitude and self-assured behaviour of Amos' original addressees" (511). However, with a few exceptions (such as Amos's encounter with the priest Amaziah in 7.10-17), *Amos*, as the superscription states, contains only words attributed to Amos. How, then, can we deduce the recalcitrance—"the stubborn attitude and self-assured behaviour"—of the original

³⁰ Hans Walter Wolff characterizes them as a postexilic eschatology of salvation (113).

hearers that later readers are to avoid? By the text's structure, Moller insists. What might at first appear to be a somewhat disjointed collection of sayings gains coherence if we interpolate naysaying into the joints. *Amos* makes better sense as one half of a debate, the other half of which we ourselves must supply, just as we do, for instance, when listening to Shelley Berman or Bob Newhart comedy routines based on half a telephone conversation.

Moller's interpolations are quite ingenious, and I must admit that they do make the text more coherent. But a key question remains. If the compilers were determined that their readers not repeat the mistakes of Amos's original hearers, why did they not provide an example of those mistakes in the form of dialogue? Why did they choose to convey them in a manner so obscure that it took over two millennia to deduce, this despite the fact that the Bible may well be Western history's most analyzed text? Granted, prophetic genres may have implied certain dynamics taken for granted by their initial readers that have eluded subsequent attempts to reconstruct ancient horizons of meaning, dynamics into which speculations such as Moller's may provide some insight. On the whole, however, I remain unconvinced. Simply put, the principle Moller adduces is insufficiently substantiated in the text to bear the significance he assigns it.

I do not doubt Zenger's contention that the biblical compilers were "planvolle" or methodical in their work. It is difficult to conceive that *Amos* was not organized according to some plan. But many of its critics, Moller included, reject the most obvious one—oracles against the nations followed first by prophetic words and finally by visions—as insufficiently revelatory to satisfy an overarching quest for meaning. The term *revelatory* is suggested to me by *The Revelatory Text*, Sandra Schneiders's study of the Christian testament that explores the implications for interpretation of the theological claim that the Bible—the Jewish no less than the Christian—is the Word of God. In common with the work of many biblical—and literary—scholars, Moller's article is marked by an anxiety for a greater coherence and a deeper meaning than the text itself may support. It demonstrates the *fourth* aspect about biblical criticism to be highlighted: much of it is driven by the widely-held assumption that the text is an inexhaustible treasure trove of eternally-relevant meaning.

Despite this conviction, much of the meaning the text is assumed to have is not and has never been immediately clear. It must be uncovered and brought to light. This necessity leads to the *fifth* aspect of biblical criticism to be highlighted: the Bible is a magnetic pole for hermeneutics. The interpretive enterprise, to use Roland Barthes's terminology from *S/Z*, involves the reduction of a writerly text to a readerly one. At some points, he implies that these are different types of texts. More generally, however, he treats the writerly and the readerly as different aspects of the same text. Kaja Silverman is certainly on the right track in identifying them as different approaches (242), but the term *approach* is too methodologically deliberate precisely to

capture Barthes's meaning. *Aspect* is preferable in that the readerly and writerly refer to different modes of comprehending texts, modes traditionally expressed by tropes of seeing. The readerly is the mode of comprehending or seeing texts as freighted with meaning—meaning derived from the culture into which the reader has been thrown.³¹ The readerly is a way of seeing texts that focuses upon the signified. Readerly texts, Barthes tells us, “make up the enormous mass of our literature.” “The writerly,” on the other hand, “is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure” (5). It focuses upon the signifier, which retains a surplus irreducible to meaning.

The readerly, then, is the text domesticated: the text reduced to meaning and made amenable to what Paul Ricoeur calls “interpretation as a recollection of meaning” (*Freud* 28–32). Since the advent of Christianity, theologians in particular have striven to achieve this reduction. The task has involved harmonizing what Pascal calls the god of the philosophers with the god of the Hebrews. For those who started it, whose minds were informed by Greek thought, *λόγος* (*logos*) not only meant *word* but *speech*, *reason*, and *account*. In studying the words of the text, therefore, they were seeking the reason behind things. The fly in this logocentric ointment has been detected by John Passmore. “The [ancient] Jews,” he points out,

were not philosophers; they were quite devoid of that speculative curiosity which characterized the Greeks, their habit of asking how and why. No Xenophanes arose amongst the Jews to rebuke them for ascribing to Jahweh acts which would be accounted a shame and a disgrace amongst men; no Socrates to ask them to define righteousness, or justice, or to explain why Noah and Job should be accounted perfect; no Parmenides, in particular, to inquire how God stood in relation to the world. The Jews were innocent of systematic theology, of ethical theory, of cosmology. Philo, writing in the first century [CE] in cosmopolitan Alexandria, was their first philosopher...and their last for a thousand years. Philo's influence, certainly, Christianity was to feel. But in the Old Testament writings as they stood, read literally, not allegorically as Philo read them, there were no philosophical theories to be found. (77)

³¹ I use the word *thrown* to indicate what Heidegger meant by *verworfen*, which *thrown* literally translates. In being born we are, as it were, *thrown* into a culture, the characteristics of which soon become entirely natural to us as the only ones we have known.

The scribes who laboured over the texts eventually compiled as the Bible could hardly have been aware that they were fashioning an *ur*-source for systematic theology.³² Given the miscellaneous nature of these texts and their lack of the philosophical articulation characterizing Greek religious thought, the god of the Hebrews they reveal has resisted systematization and harmonization. This god—a jealous, personal god who stands in dramatic tension to the human world he creates *ex nihilo*—was not likely to be conceived by rational processes. For this reason, he has commonly been described as a god of revelation rather than speculation (Passmore 78–83). In consequence, the Bible has proven rocky soil indeed for those who would reduce it to logical consistency. It has challenged not only theological systematizers but, more particularly, theological harmonizers, the biblical theologians *per se*, who, as Mary Callaway states, have attempted “to find the locus of biblical authority in a single, controlling theological construct of the scriptures” (122).³³

Despite these challenges—or, more likely, because of them—the Bible continues to be an object of rationalization, not only for those for whom its relevance and theological consistency are ideological givens but also for those with more secular orientations. It could hardly be otherwise, for what is now called *higher* biblical criticism is a child of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and continues to bear its optimism that there is a reasonable solution to all problems. In pursuit of solutions, every type of critical approach applied to texts in general has also been applied to the Bible.³⁴ Biblical criticism does not differ from other criticism in aiming at

³² In fact, I have read the suggestion that the Jewish Bible first coalesced as the result of Persian imperial policy. The Persians were content to rule subject peoples through client kings according to indigenous laws, but they insisted that these laws be written down in an official form.

³³ At the risk of overgeneralizing, I speculate that one respect in which early Christians distinguished themselves when they emerged from Judaism was in their tendency to focus less on morals and more on ethics. Jews tended to ask what we should *do* given the presence of God, whereas Christians more and more tended to ask what we should *think* given that presence. Early Protestants who rejected scholasticism bucked this trend by positing a God unknowable by virtue of existing *above* rather than *within* the natural law.

³⁴ However, due to time lags, critical approaches that biblical scholars may consider experimental may already be considered *passé* by their counterparts in other fields. At the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Toronto in 2002, I remember the exhilaration of the participants in a panel entitled “Reading the Bible with a Page from Derrida” reading their own experiments in deconstructive criticism. In a plenary session that evening, Derrida, who had attended the panel session in question, remarked that, when he launched deconstructive criticism, he wanted to do something entirely new. His point seemed lost on most of his audience.

and typically achieving greater logical coherence than the texts it addresses. The critical process, be it analytic or synthetic (i.e., logical or dialectic), is motivated by the desire to make sense of its object of knowledge in terms of an some existing explanatory model. The disjunction between the rationality of criticism and the texts it analyzes may seem too obvious to merit comment. But biblical critics, driven as many of them are by the anxiety for coherence already discussed, seem to put an extra premium upon the rationality of their solutions, so much so that their critical results tend to belie the extremely speculative nature of their undertakings.

Frequently, the coherence of texts is assumed rather than demonstrated by critics. Some arguments of Andersen and Freedman about *Amos* provide a case in point. They reject the theory that the text was frequently redacted over centuries, which in itself is one strategy for rationally overcoming the perceived problem of its incoherence. They see “most if not all of the book as possibly, indeed probably (we can never say ‘certainly’) *Amos*’.” To buttress this view, they assert, first, as if by fiat, that there has been a “cumulative demonstration of the *literary coherence* of all [the] diverse ingredients in the whole assemblage, which is more than an assemblage; it is a highly structured unity.” It is difficult, however, to see how this has been demonstrated, for in the very next sentence they speak of the “diverse and divergent (even apparently contradictory, sometimes) points of view” that *Amos* does contain. The literary coherence of *Amos* is, rather, an assumption based upon the faith that its contradictions are more apparent than real. Those contradictions are overcome by a new reading strategy that attributes them to multiple redactions not over centuries but over the lifetime of *Amos*¹ himself: they reflect “successive phases in the prophet’s career, which underwent quite substantial changes in inner perception and declared messages” (143–44, emphasis original). Andersen and Freedman’s argument, quite clearly, is speculation based on the assumption—or faith, rather—that the text is coherent, and that someday the principle of this coherence will be found. To those who hold such faith, the problem to be overcome is the literary practice of the compilers, which remains a problem whether they were many working over centuries or one revising his thoughts over a lifetime. To get to the truth of things, it is believed, we need to sort out the muddle that these compilers have made of the history of greater Israel or the Word of God. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the Marxist faith lies elsewhere: it is in the literary (and political) practice of the compilers themselves that the truth of a text lies.

This rationalizing tendency generally characterizes not only the criticism of *Amos* but that of the Book of the Twelve. Not that its texts are entirely irrational: patterns of meaning can be imposed upon them. But they are highly incoherent, regardless of what various apologists may claim. They are marked by abrupt shifts in theme, setting, and character if not in tone or mood. Many critics have reduced this incoherence to a problem of sources. By employing one or more

sub-disciplines of biblical criticism, they have attempted to identify the (supposedly) coherent sources of the many fragments of which the texts are conceived to be composed. Among others, these sources range from the oral traditions of the people (tradition criticism) to the texture of their daily lives (form criticism) to lexical, stylistic, and generic features (literary criticism).³⁵ But the question of the incoherence of the finished product is hardly answered by identifying its sources, for the texts remain as fragmented as ever. When the problem has been addressed by redaction critics, they have tended to dismiss it by alluding to the confounded intractability of the materials with which the biblical editors had to work. Canonical critics, who deal with collections of texts in their final form, address the problem by locating the key to meaning in the shape of the text finally adopted by a community of faith, a shape that determines the relative significance of its various components. Their work, however, frequently bears the marks of its origins in biblical theology, which accentuates a tendency “to read texts as a unity and therefore to prefer harmonization to dissonance and uncertainty” (Callaway 131–2), thereby reflecting that anxiety for coherence that almost inevitably attends the identification of the Bible with the Word of God.

5. The Disintegration of *Amos* and The Genesis of a Different Approach

When I first read the Book of the Twelve, its incoherence struck me as its most salient feature—so much so, in fact, I became convinced that it is a literature of madness. This conviction has never left me. In so characterizing the compilation, I am not using the term *madness* pejoratively.³⁶ I choose it, rather, to convey my impression that the texts involved, like Humpty

³⁵ Biblical scholars engaged in literary criticism per se proceed much as their secular counterparts do, analyzing texts in terms of diction, character, setting, theme, tone, mood, point of view, and so forth. In doing so, however, most have engaged in the larger historical enterprise of discriminating textual sources. For instance, this is certainly the case of Norman Habel’s *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament*, one of the introductory Guides to Biblical Scholarship published by Fortress Press in the 1970s, which focuses upon the isolation of sources as if this were the literary critic’s principal task. The thorny question of literary form and its effect upon readers is rarely broached. An outstanding exception to this is Gabriel Josipovici’s *The Book of God*, inspired in part by Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis*, which examines the text according to categories such as elements of rhythm, aspects of speech, and configurations of character.

³⁶ Nor do I use it with diagnostic precision. It is not a psychiatric but a literary term, one that I use because of its allusiveness to characters such as Lear. As I elaborate in Chapter 4, I use the term to refer broadly to a consciousness whose capacity to invest experience with systematic meaning has been irreparably fractured. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that the mad can

Dumpty, are fragmented beyond our capacity to put them together again. *Amos* is a writerly text *par excellence*. Although its oracles are grouped into the three major categories identified by Moller (16 above), its compilers did not feel constrained to supplement their collections with transitional interpretive material. The oracles, rather, seem to have been cut out of various contexts and simply strung together. Baldly presenting them to the world in this manner challenges the reader, as if the scribes were saying, “Here are the ‘words of Amos’: figure them out if you can!” This editorial procedure has produced—for me, at least—an image of a rambling, disjointed Amos incapable of synthesizing his thought. Little wonder that commentators such as Moller have seemed anxious for coherence in their struggles to render *Amos* readerly. Given this view of its origins, referring to “The Disintegration of *Amos*” as I have in the section heading above and evoking the image of Humpty Dumpty may seem to miss the mark. After all, that unfortunate Egg was once whole. Better, perhaps, to characterize *Amos* as *unintegrated* and leave it at that. But I have chosen to retain *disintegrated* because I hope to show that, *unintegrated* though the text itself may have been since its inception, *disintegration* is a major theme that the form enacts. *Amos* reflects the fracturing of a society once conceived as whole. Its sense of a world coming apart may well have been the principal stimulus triggering its oracles.

In characterizing *Amos* as a literature of madness, however, I am responding to something other than the “fine madnes” that Drayton believes “rightly should possess a Poets braine” (137, lines 20-21). I am responding to my sense that Amos is possessed by things far more sinister.³⁷ He is possessed, for instance, by a violent hatred for building projects. The disintegration of the social fabric *Amos* records and laments seems matched by Amos’s violent impulse to rain down physical destruction upon the tangible symbols of a new social order in the process of emerging. He puts me in mind of a raggedy character with whom I was once familiar who would invariably interrupt his daily hunt for bottles to yell curses at construction workers, myself included. Although we continually reassured one another that he was harmless, I was never absolutely convinced of this. I wonder if Amos¹ might have been something like this: a man whom an age earlier than ours might have called a lunatic (even though the person I remember seemed only to

never be healed. But I do believe that traumatic neurosis (discussed in Chapter 4 as the source of Amos’s madness) is particularly resistant to any therapy based upon a doctrine of the reality of the self.

³⁷ An early theory of madness attributed it to possession (by demons or others). See Plato’s “Ion” for the notion that *rhapsodes* or singers of Greek poetry performed by virtue of divine possession (501-3).

rave in the light of the sun). My initial impression that *Amos* is a literature of madness, which arose from its incoherent, disintegrated nature, has been augmented as I have come increasingly to hear the voice speaking as one from a spirit possessed.³⁸ Although approaching *Amos* as such literature would not be an entirely new departure in the study of biblical prophecy, it would differ radically from most of the high-minded criticism about *Amos* already produced.³⁹

Cognizant as I am that criticism is a rationalizing exercise, as I puzzled over how to produce a coherent account of a text that might be irresolvably incoherent, it struck me that *Amos*'s incoherence may be functional. It may reflect a deliberate artistic or theological commitment by its compilers to produce a writerly text of unsynthesized fragments better to reflect the times in which they lived. Perhaps, like Allen Ginsberg, they too had "seen the best minds of [their] generation destroyed by madness" and had arranged *Amos*'s words as if they emanated from a disordered mind better to express the consequences of living in an age irreducible to the readerliness of reason. To my mind, this is the most intriguing and satisfying aesthetic resolution to the question of *Amos*'s incoherence. On the other hand, it may have served the interests of the scribes involved to portray anyone complaining about prevailing conditions as demented, a suspicion that provides a more cynical, political resolution to the text's incoherence.⁴⁰ These options for accounting for the incoherence of *Amos* may seem to complicate its criticism as a literature of madness. Does the madness I sense, for instance, reflect the mental state of an original *Amos*? Or can it be referred to an aesthetic or political choice to create a certain literary persona? Of course, it may be objected that the original compilers had none of these issues in mind—that they were merely recording oracles, perhaps none too skillfully. Wolff, however, has no problems attributing theological or political motives to his later redactors. But he seems oblivious to any hidden agenda on the part his original compilers, whom he treats as babes in the woods. He is not alone in this respect. Although this may reflect a reverence for the *ipsissima verba* (see 14 above), it also implies that the earlier the writer, the more primitive or naïve the output. My study of biblical literature has taught me that it is anything but. Any naïveté it may seem to exhibit, I am convinced, is cultivated. Its compilers were sophisticated, a point that many critics,

³⁸ To the criticism that this may be overly subjective, I respond that much criticism *is* highly subjective, and I am comfortable with that conclusion.

³⁹ One full-length psychoanalytic study of a biblical prophet that does exist is David J. Halperin's *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology*. Halperin argues that, at the very least, Ezekiel was a victim of childhood trauma (218).

⁴⁰ At this juncture I am reminded of Solzhenitsyn's accounts of the Soviet police consigning political dissidents to mental institutions.

Wolff included, fail to appreciate. It may well be the early compilers of *Amos* have taken Wolff among others in, an achievement testifying to their skill in literary practice.

As I think about *Amos* as a literature of madness, several things become clear. *First*, the topic would be amenable not only to psychoanalytic but to Marxist criticism because, as I point out in the succeeding section, Freud and Marx are kindred spirits. *Second*, neither of these approaches would require that I adjudicate among the various critical accounts of incoherence discussed above and argue for one in favour of others. These approaches would necessitate, rather, that I analyze such accounts in dialectic tension with one another. *Third*, such a study would highlight the complementary nature of psychoanalytic and Marxist criticism. *Fourth*, although as biblical criticism it would share many of the characteristics of biblical criticism generally, it would not be a standard exercise in such criticism, at least not as that term is understood by most academics involved in the discipline of biblical studies.

By *discipline* I mean more than "a department of learning or knowledge" (OED). I refer, rather, to the training given disciples preparing to enter an academic guild. I refer to the habits of mind thereby ingrained that guide a practice of scrupulous research, research that among biblical scholars frequently focuses on shedding light on some arcane, textual minutiae: historical, literary, sociological, or whatever. This discipline enables each member of the guild to labour upon some aspect of the gigantic puzzle the text is seen to represent—in the unstated hope that someday all that remains uncertain or hidden will be revealed.

Although I have been academically trained in the discipline of biblical studies, it should already be clear that I am something of an infidel as far as its guild is concerned. I lack faith in the eschaton—in the arrival of that day when all things will have become clear. As with many academic establishments, the guild in question seems transfixed by the eighteenth-century notion of gradual progress toward enlightenment. I doubt I ever subscribed much to such a truth project. I have never assumed, as many historically- or theologically-oriented biblical scholars seem to assume, that texts can be transparent windows upon meaning—that all we need to make them so is, by meticulous research, to clear away the “referential and ideological rubble” that otherwise blocks our view (de Man, “Hypogram and Inscription” 31).

I have always sensed that there are dimensions to texts beyond the cognitive, e.g., aesthetic and affective surpluses irreducible by analysis. Moreover, in our post-modern age, the cognitive is not what it used to be. Surface rationality has long since been challenged, most notoriously by that group of thinkers that Paul Ricoeur in *Freud and Philosophy* has identified as exemplars of a hermeneutics of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, to which I would now add Derrida. I do not know enough about Nietzsche’s thought to include it in my own speculations, and Derrida’s would take me too far afield. But the theories of Marx and Freud, I am con-

vinced, provide more than enough insight into the extra-cognitive dimensions of texts to write about *Amos*.

6. Kindred Spirits: Marx, Freud, and The Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Marx and Freud are kindred thinkers. Simply put, both suspect that things are not as they seem. Both seek to account for reality—social or psychic—in terms of dynamic processes that lie concealed. For both, Ricoeur tells us, “the fundamental category of consciousness is the relation of hidden-shown or, if you prefer, simulated-manifested” (*Freud* 33–34). Both write as scientists.⁴¹ In their respective spheres, both seek to develop “a mediate *science* of meaning, irreducible to the immediate *consciousness* of meaning” (34). As opposed to Descartes and the type of speculation to which his name is now commonly attached, they are less interested in the manifest content of consciousness itself than in the latent processes of its formation. Both attempt “in different ways [...] to make their ‘conscious’ methods of deciphering coincide with the ‘unconscious’ *work* of ciphering which they attribute [...] to social being [and] to the unconscious psychism respectively” (34, emphasis original). Their interest in deciphering such hidden processes marks them both as historians: one of social and the other of psychic formations.

As for social being and its effects, Hayden White points out that both Marx and Freud are intellectual heirs of Rousseau. Like Nietzsche, both are secular thinkers who speculate about primitive⁴² humans, demonstrating ambivalence toward the putative advances of civilization, the problems of which they assess in economic terms. Since White writes so cogently about their common vision, I quote him at some length:

[T]hought about the Wild Man has always centered upon the three great and abiding human problems that society and civilization claim to solve: those of sustenance, sex, and salvation. I think it is no accident that the three most revolutionary thinkers of the nineteenth century—Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche,

⁴¹ Scientific aspiration fits Freud better than Marx. Freud always thinks of himself as a scientist and psychoanalysis as a science of mind, although many have disputed this assessment (see, for instance, Crews, *Memory Wars*). Marx’s scientific laurels are presented him by followers, particularly Althusser, who sees him as having pioneered the science of history (see chapter 2).

⁴² In response to the objection that *primitive* is a problematic term, I use it because Marx and Freud use it, as the upcoming quotation from White attests. Both conceive of society as evolving from the primitive to the complex, an attitude, I suspect, that was fairly widespread in the nineteenth century.

respectively—took these themes as their special subject matter. Similarly, the radicalism of each is in part a function of a thoroughgoing atheism and, more specifically, hostility to Judeo-Christian religiosity. For each of these great radicals, that problem of salvation is a human problem, having its solution solely in a reexamination of the creative forms of human vitality. Each is therefore compelled to recur to primitive times as best he can in order to imagine what primal man, precivilized man, the Wild Man who existed before history—i.e., outside the social state—might have been like.

Like Rousseau, each of these thinkers interprets primitive man as the possessor of an enviable freedom, but unlike those followers of Rousseau who misread him and insisted on treating primitive man as an ideal, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche recognized, as Rousseau did, that primitive man's existence must have been inherently flawed. Each of them argues that man's "fall" into society was necessary, the result of a crucial scarcity (in goods, women, or power, as the case may have been). And although each sees the fall as producing a uniquely human form of oppression, they all see it as an ultimately providential contribution to the construction of that whole humanity which it is history's purpose to realize. In short, for them man had to transcend his inherent primitive wildness—which is both a relationship and a state—in order to win his kingdom. Marx's primitive food gatherers, Freud's primal horde, and Nietzsche's barbarians are seen as solving the problem of scarcity in essentially the same way: through the alienation and oppression of other men. And this process and alienation are seen by all of them to result in the creation of a false consciousness, or self-alienation, necessary to the myth that a fragment of mankind might incarnate the essence of all humanity.

All three viewed history as a struggle to liberate men from the oppression of a society originally created as a way of liberating man from nature. It was the oppressed, exploited, alienated, or repressed part of humanity that kept on reappearing in the imagination of Western man—as the Wild Man, as the monster, and as the devil—to haunt or entice him thereafter. Sometimes this oppressed or repressed humanity appeared as a threat and a nightmare, at other times as a goal and a dream; sometimes as an abyss into which mankind might fall, and again as a summit to be scaled; but always as a criticism of whatever security and peace of mind one group of men in society had purchased at the cost of the suffering of another. (“Forms” 179–80)

Both Marx and Freud are dialecticians who see formations—social or psychic—as attempts to resolve conflict, attempts that inevitably involve various forms of oppression or repression because the conflicts in question are ultimately irresolvable, leaving human creatures caught in a never-ending tension or dialectic between individual desire (the pole of freedom) and social demand (the pole of compulsion).

I have now come to write about *Amos* within a Marxist-Freudian framework. Although I address what the text presents as the immediate consciousness of a speaker—to whom I have been referring as Amos—I bear Ricoeur’s observation in mind that Marx and Freud each developed a mediate science of meaning, which I take to mean a science of the *production* of meaning, and I analyze *Amos* for evidence of the latent processes through which its meanings are produced.⁴³ In common with biblical criticism generally, this work is highly speculative. It could hardly be otherwise. Among other things, it speculates upon the history of greater biblical Israel. As Marxist criticism somewhat in the tradition of Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious* or Jean-Paul Sartre’s *What is Literature?*, it speculates upon how the text might reflect the contemporary relations of production that enabled it to be produced. Jameson and Sartre, of course, can go outside the text for concrete information on the relations of production that interest them. To avoid circularity, however, biblical scholars must theorize such relations by studying similar societies and then demonstrate how the text could be read to support such theorization.

Psychologically, my interest centres upon how *Amos* comes to be so violent—and why so few biblical scholars seem to notice it. The oracles against the nations comprising its first two chapters attract a lot of critical interest. Daniel Carroll R. lists sixty-one studies dealing with this section published between 1950 and 2000, a list, he admits, that is not exhaustive (131–34). Among other things, these works deal with the provenance of such oracles (legal, ritual, and so forth), their formulaic patterning, various lexical and referential uncertainties, and their fit with the succeeding chapters. Their authors can become so absorbed in resolving such technical problems of origin, structure, and reference that they pay scant attention to the literary quality and effect of the images. For instance, the condemnation of the Ammonites for ripping up pregnant women in Gilead becomes just another textual detail to be parsed, sourced, and classified. In his exegesis of these oracles, John Barton coolly announces that the one against the Ammonites “requires little comment [...]. The crime denounced is mentioned a number of times in the Old

⁴³ Michel Peteux insists that Marxism has no subject other than the formation of subjects: it is the science of those mediate or latent processes by which subjects, be they in the present case *Amos* as a text or Amos as a persona, assume a particular shape as they emerge into being (Hennesy 76). The same can be said for psychoanalysis.

Testament—e.g. II Kings 15.16, and see below, p. 57” (21).⁴⁴ On the page to which he refers us, he notes that “ripping open pregnant women [falls] into the sphere of war crimes felt to be such only by particular nations” (57). So ends Barton’s treatment of this atrocity. No one seems curious about the type of imagination that would record and preserve such a detail, an imagination that—when all is said and done—is attributed to Amos.⁴⁵ No one seems curious about the cumulative effect such violent images have had upon millennia of hearers and readers who have considered their source sacred. If *Amos* is not also among the *Texts of Terror*, to use Phyllis Tribble’s title for her feminist readings of biblical narratives, I do not know what is.

7. Resistance to Theory

Reading *Amos*, I detect undercurrents of oppression and repression that run beneath much of the biblical text, giving it a distinct tone. Because they *are* undercurrents, they seem fit subjects for Marxist and Freudian analyses. I am aware of the type of issues that such analyses—particularly psychoanalysis—are likely to raise. Some arose in connection with my master’s thesis, a Lacanian reading of the story of Ahab in I Kings. My program required that I participate in a thesis writing seminar, in which I presented a rather perfunctory account of the theoretical basis of my project, viz., Lacan’s theory of the emergence of the imaginary and symbolic psychic registers in early childhood and their function in the resolution of the Oedipus complex.

The issue arose with a philosophy professor conducting the seminar. She had already demonstrated no tolerance (or understanding) for continental philosophy and had made the rather sweeping declaration that Derrida had been debunked.⁴⁶ Her reaction to psychoanalytic theory

⁴⁴ In a note Barton quotes an article by G. R. Driver from 1938 to the effect that “the atrocity against pregnant women... ‘being an incident in all ancient campaigns, [it] was unlikely to be the subject of a special denunciation by the prophet’” (65).

⁴⁵ In reading an early version of this manuscript, Hilary Clark remarks that it might reflect “a *sensitive, moral, & alert* imagination—honest—the sort of imagination that’s needed *now* to record atrocities against women, e.g., in the Congo and elsewhere. (Presumably Amos is not making up this material.) Wouldn’t this be *testimony* rather than terror?” I would like to think this is the sort of imagination that the preservation of the image reflects, and, if it does, I owe the compilers of *Amos* an apology. I suspect, however, that it is recorded—at least in part—because they were sadistically relishing it. As I will go on to show, Amos desires that similar terrors be visited upon the urbanites of Israel.

⁴⁶ Derrida had nothing to do with my project. His name, rather, was a touchstone for the theoretical gibberish I was speaking.

followed suit: it is also bunk that she debunked by announcing that it did not ring true to her experience as a mother of four. Upon leaving the room after my presentation and her denunciation of it, a fellow student remarked to me that he had found both aspects of this process fascinating. How, he wondered, could a theory of unconscious development be refuted by an appeal to experience? How, indeed? Is not the unconscious, by definition, inaccessible to experience, at least to the conscious reflection upon it of the type to which my professor was appealing?⁴⁷

She was manifesting what de Man calls resistance to theory. Although E. P. Thompson does not privilege experience to the same extent, something of this resistance also marks his *Poverty of Theory*, in which he uses an orrery to ridicule Althusser's brand of structural Marxism. According to the OED, an orrery is a "mechanical model, usually clockwork, devised to represent the motions of the earth and moon (and sometimes also the planets) around the sun." To represent Althusser's concept of the mechanics of history, Thompson transforms the orrery into a Rube Goldberg contraption with pulleys and wheels set in action by cranking the handle of theoretical practice. For a more impressive display, Thompson suggests that the handle be hooked up to the motor of history, which, in its turn, demonstrates the mechanics of the class struggle.

Thompson's conceit of Althusser cranking out his texts through a theoretical contraption reflects his conviction that they derive from "some very aetiolated notion of knowledge," one that offers "us less an epistemology which takes into account the actual formative motions of consciousness than a description of certain procedures of academic life" (8). He proceeds to argue that the aetiolation of Althusser's thought could be treated by fleshing it out with a finer feeling for social experience. In doing so, he evinces the pragmatism that has characterized British resistance to much continental philosophy. But his trenchant attack on Althusser begs the same sort of question as that raised by my ill-starred seminar presentation: how can we take "into account the actual formative motions of consciousness," as Thompson would have us do, if those motions are inaccessible to immediate consciousness? Theory of this sort can never be fleshed out by experience, for it is experience itself for which such theory attempts to account—in terms of dynamic processes that lie concealed. Freud seeks the hidden determinants of human consciousness; Marx, of human society. In pursuing these aims, both elaborate rather abstruse bodies of theory upon which their intellectual heirs self-consciously depend. If those bodies of theory seem to reflect an aetiolated "notion of knowledge," it may well be that this impression

⁴⁷ Although the unconscious makes itself known through its conscious effects (symptoms), Freud's theoretical account of life on the unconscious level nevertheless strikes many as highly improbable in terms of their daily experience.

arises from confusing effects with causes. Theorizing produces models of experience stripped down to essential processes, models that, at times, in their non-intuitive hyperreality, can seem surpassing strange.

8. The Work at Hand

By now it should be clear that this is a secular study. It focuses upon *Amos* primarily as a piece of literature—and not at all as a piece of theology. At the very least, any study purporting to be literary, regardless of its theoretical interests and the tangents it develops and pursues, should give some evidence that its author has read the *text*. Much biblical study provides no such evidence. The nub of the matter is that much of it does not purport to be literary study. The text, as I have indicated above, is frequently taken to be an historical artifact, one to be mined with great perspicuity for all sorts of evidence, evidence used to construct and defend all sorts of extra-textual constructions. But few biblical scholars who study biblical texts as artifacts also attend to features such as setting, character, plot, theme, tone and mood that constitute those texts as literature. Too few consider how the texts they study may have been shaped in the process of literary production to serve certain ends.

Robert A. Wilson's *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* exemplifies the study of the biblical text as an artifact. It merits attention here because it takes up issues central to prophetic studies that relate to the question of Amos's occupation—a question to which I devote considerable attention in the ensuing chapters. Wilson discusses ancient Near Eastern prophecy within a theoretical framework he derives from an analysis of prophecy in modern societies, particularly spirit possession cults in 20th-century Africa. On the basis of this analysis he distinguishes between peripheral and central intermediaries in a way that may reflect upon the sociopolitical dynamics of *Amos*.

First, he discusses a type of possession viewed negatively but tolerated. “Many societies,” he tells us,

recognize a type of possession which begins as an unwanted and uncontrollable illness but which develops into a more or less controlled form of possession that is tolerated by the majority of the society. While the deities involved in this type of possession are not demonic, neither are they usually the chief deities of the society. Rather they tend to be minor spirits, perhaps originally foreign to the society, or “old gods” whose cults have been subordinated to the official cults of newer, more powerful deities. Because of the nature of the possessing deities, and also because the people possessed tend to lack status and social power,

anthropologists usually refer to this type of possession as *peripheral possession* and refer to the possessed individuals as *peripheral intermediaries*. (37–38, emphasis original)

Such intermediaries are peripheral in two respects: not only are they themselves peripheral in respect to status and social power, but the gods who possess them are peripheral as well—peripheral within the pantheon of gods. They may be old gods, gods who were powerful in earlier times but have now been demoted or deposed in their dotage.

Moving on to discuss possession viewed positively, Wilson points out that this sometimes occurs as part of a society's established religion. In this case, possession has important functions within the central cult and must occur at the appropriate points in the ritual. Societies carefully control possession within the central cult and have regular mechanisms for assuring an orderly supply of appropriately trained intermediaries. Because this type of possession is an established part of the central social structure, anthropologists usually refer to it as *central possession* and refer to the possessed individuals as *central intermediaries*. (39–40, emphasis original)

Having established the categories of central and peripheral intermediaries, Wilson's discussion of Amos centres upon which of the two he fits. The superscriptural evidence associating Amos with Tekoa in Judah makes sense to Wilson. He tentatively classifies Amos as a peripheral prophet in Israel based upon his being a foreigner outside the power structure there. But he also suspects that Amos is a central prophet in Judah: that he is, in fact, a member of the Judahite establishment.

Insightful though Wilson's theoretical work may be, he gives no evidence of ever having considered whether Amos as represented in the text (Amos^L) could differ in any respect from his assumed prototype outside the text (Amos^I). It would misrepresent Wilson to say that he conflates the two, for he never distinguishes them in the first place, but his speculation that Amos may have been a central prophet in Judah demonstrates that he conceives him in an extra-textual dimension. However, it makes no difference to Wilson's project whether he apprehends those identified as prophets as living, breathing people or as literary characters. His object is to sort them into two predetermined categories, and his criteria for doing so apply equally well to either mode of conceiving them.

Wilson's procedure begs the question of how Amos comes to be identified as a prophet in the first place and, more particularly, a member of a prophetic establishment. He shares Wolff's assumption (10 above) that Amos^I played the role of a recognizable intermediary in greater bibli-

cal Israel, and he takes no more account than Wolff does of Amos^L's strident denial of this claim. As I have already observed, *Amos* is one of the few prophetic texts whose putative author is named outside the superscription. A substantial biographical fragment featuring Amos's heated dispute with the priest Amaziah of Bethel (7.10-17) contains the denial in question:

¹⁰ Then Amazi'ah the priest [כהן] of Bethel sent to Jerobo'am king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹For thus Amos has said,

'Jerobo'am shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'"

¹² And Amazi'ah said to Amos, "O seer [חזה], go, flee away [ברח] to the land of Judah, and eat bread there; ¹³ but never again prophesy [להנבא] at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

¹⁴ Then Amos answered Amazi'ah, "I am no prophet [נביא], nor a prophet's son [בן-נביא]; but I am a herdsman [בוקר], and a dresser of sycamore trees [בולס שקמים], ¹⁵ and the LORD⁴⁸ took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

¹⁶ "Now therefore hear the word of the LORD.

You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and do not preach against the house of Isaac.'

¹⁷ Therefore thus says the LORD:

'Your wife shall be a harlot in the city,
and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
and your land shall be parceled out by line;
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.'"

When I first read these lines, it seemed clear to me that Amos is not a member of any establishment—not, at least, a prophetic one. He seems to deny it. Negatively, he says that he is neither a נביא (*navi'*: *prophet*) nor a בן-נביא (*ben-navi'*) (7.14). Literally, the latter term means *son of a prophet*, but Wolff's translation, *prophet's disciple*, provides the idiomatic meaning (306). Wilson himself says that the "expression 'son of . . .' or 'sons of . . .' is frequently used in Semitic to indicate membership in a group or guild, so there is little doubt that 'sons of the prophets' was a designation applied to members of some sort of prophetic group" (141). Positively,

⁴⁸ By convention the English word Lord translates the Hebrew יהוה (*yahweh*), a proper name for the god at the heart of the Jewish Bible. In my own text I use the word Yahweh.

he says he is something else: a בוקר (boqer: *herdsman*) and a בולס שקמים (boles šiqmim: *dresser of sycamore trees*).

Wilson's suspicion that Amos is a member of the southern Judahite establishment, however, is not entirely groundless. In calling him a חוזה (xozeḥ, *seer*) (12), Amaziah seems to be conceding that he holds the office of an intermediary of some sort. In *The Roles of Israel's Prophets*, David Petersen contends that חוזה, which he renders as hōzeh, is a Judahite title. He introduces this text from *Amos* as part of the evidence for this argument. We may observe, he says, that

Amaziah integrally links Amos' status as hōzeh with Judah, "O hōzeh go, flee to the land of Judah." Amaziah seems to be saying, "Go away to the South, you southern prophet, you do not belong here in the North, especially not at a royal shrine of the northern kingdom, since a hōzeh is to be active in Judah." That is to say, Amaziah quite consciously uses hōzeh as a label to depict Amos as an interloper, a prophet from Judah, a prophet of a sort not acceptable in Israel. Given the prominence of this role label in prophetic books of Judahite origin, such an interpretation is all the more probable. (56)

How, then, does Petersen deal with Amos's apparent denial? He responds to its negative aspect ("I am no prophet [נביא], nor a prophet's son [בן-נביא]") by focussing upon the typically biblical characteristic of its being a *non sequitur*. Having been called a חוזה (hozeḥ), Amos denies that he is a נביא (nabi'). Petersen interprets this as agreement. In his mind, the most likely explanatory construal of 7.14 is the paraphrase "'I am not a nābi' [נביא], i.e., I am indeed a hōzeh as you, Amaziah, recognize" (58).⁴⁹ Ergo, Amos belongs to the southern prophetic establishment.⁵⁰ He does not respond at all to the positive aspect of the denial ("but I am a herdsman [בוקר], and a dresser of sycamore trees [בולס שקמים]"). To his credit, Wilson does deal with this positive denial, but by a roundabout method adopted by many others. Amos is not a simple herdsman, as

⁴⁹ Petersen does not pick up on the possibility that, in denying that he is a prophet [נביא] in 7.14, Amos may not be responding to the noun חוזה in 7.12 but to the infinitive להנבא (lḥnḇā, *to prophesy*) in 7:13 that Amaziah uses to warn him away from Bethel. נביא and להנבא have the same root: the verb derives from the noun.

⁵⁰ Although Stanley Rosenbaum does think that Amos is a member of a prophetic establishment, he adduces other philological evidence from Amos's exchange with Amaziah to contend that he is *not* Judahite. Focussing upon 7.12, he argues that "the verb ברה [here translated "flee away"] almost always means 'to cross a border or boundary in order to escape jurisdiction to which one is normally subject'" (35). If, as the superscription implies, Amos had anything to do with Judah, it was as a place of exile, not as a place of origin.

this passage seems to state, but, as the superscription (1.1) declares, he is among the נקדִים (noqəḏim), which the RSV translates as *shepherds* but which numerous scholars insist connotes a man of substance, possibly with cultic functions within a ruling establishment. I will return to this point later.

My present point is that neither Wilson nor Petersen study *Amos* as literature; thus, neither deal with or even seem aware of the vitriolic nature of Amos's response or what may have provoked it. In a literary study, one must also account for the effect of the dramatic dynamics between characters—which, among other things, are indicated by the tone in which things are said—on the overall meaning. Amos's response to Amaziah is so strident that it seems less than likely that they agree on anything. At any rate, Amos does not seem the least bit mollified by what Petersen characterizes as Amaziah's concession. Is it, however, a concession, as Petersen supposes, or the very thing that sets Amos off? In another work, I observe that "Evidence suggests that, during its history, Israel normally wielded greater political power than the southern kingdom of Judah" ("Ahab" 111), evidence which also led me to surmise that, at times, Judah was Israel's vassal (113). If this be so, in calling Amos a הוֹהֵב, Amaziah may not be expressing a fact as much as his contempt. He may be using הוֹהֵב as a term to ridicule someone seen as a provincial. Consequently, when he says "'O seer [הוֹהֵב], go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there[,] but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom'" (12-13), he may mean something like "Get the hell out of here and go home to where you came from, you second-rate imitator of the Mickey Mouse prophets they have in Judah; you have no business making a nuisance of yourself up here among the sophisticates in the true centre of power." In responding, Amos may himself use the prophetic titles Petersen is so interested in classifying as terms of contempt. If, for instance, there were prophets or sons of prophets (prophetic guilds) in greater biblical Israel, it seems likely that some, at least, would serve as state functionaries (ritual and otherwise) in centres of religio-political power. According to 2 Kgs 2.3, such sons did exist at the temple at Bethel in the time of Elisha. Although Amaziah has called him a seer, Amos's denying that he is neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet may not, indeed, be a *non sequitur*. By using the titles for intermediaries current at Bethel—which would also include Amaziah's title, כֹּהֵן (kohen: *priest*)—Amos may be contemptuously denying that he is an officially constituted intermediary of the sort found there, i.e., a toady whose warrant to practice is certified by the state power. Prophecy as he might, he is a lone ranger: his warrant to do so comes directly from upon high.

Both Wilson and Petersen make interesting contributions to prophetic studies, Wilson theorizing central and peripheral prophecy, Petersen the roles various types of intermediaries play. Wilson's concept of peripheral prophecy, in particular, applies to Amos, if not precisely as

he describes it. But much of the work of both involves fitting the text to the theory rather than the theory to the text. In dealing with Amos, each tries to fit him into one of their preconceived categories. Given the vacuum in which historical critics such as Wilson and Petersen operate, the extent to which they follow any clue or theoretical construct that might illuminate the history of greater biblical Israel is quite understandable. As I have already observed, theorizing about this history can be remarkably ingenious. But if following a theoretical lead tempts a critic to discount or ignore the literary contours of a text, the result may seem too much like an attempt to force a square peg into a round hole. Although theories such as Wilson's may be suggestive, due to the scarcity of data by which to verify them, they can never be anything more than hypotheses. At times, the theoretical rigour with which some biblical scholars approach their work seems to manifest a resistance to acknowledging the highly speculative nature of their undertakings.

No such resistance marks this present study, which I acknowledge to be an eclectic and idiosyncratic reflection upon *Amos*. Because it addresses a biblical text, what I have undertaken is not immune to most of the aspects (and contradictions) of the discipline described above. As a deliberate tactic, however, I have aimed to produce a work less disciplined than most studies of *Amos*. This reflects my enduring conviction that *Amos* cannot be reduced to the coherence that most who study it seek—that it remains irresolvably and perhaps deliberately fragmented. I have chosen to call my reflections *refractions* because whatever light theoretical speculation might supply cannot illuminate the text evenly. Ultimately, it cannot even penetrate it. It bounces off of it in all sorts of unpredictable angles because, as the OED definition of *refraction* states, the medium (or text) that the light traverses is “not of uniform density.”

In such introductions it is customary to review current literature on, for instance, the current state of some aspect of *Amos* research. Although I do utilize research on *Amos*, I have dispensed with the review because, essentially, there is little or nothing in *Amos* research that addresses the questions I put to the text. I am unaware of any biblical study like this one, but, then again, I never conceived it as biblical study, not, at least, according to the avenues of approach and modes of thought in which that study is commonly undertaken. I think much interesting work is yet to be done explicating the sociology and history of greater biblical Israel in terms of *Amos*, but that has not been my principal object here, and I have had continually to resist the temptation to do so at the risk of not supplying sufficient background for this study. Although I am interested in the history of greater biblical Israel, any new insight that I might bring to bearing upon it or its sociology is tangential to my primary concern, which, to modify Nietzsche's dictum slightly, has been to reflect upon “the past only by what is most powerful in the present” (Nietzsche 40). I refer anyone interested in the current state of *Amos* research to a book like Daniel Carroll R.'s *Amos—The Prophet & His Oracles: Research on The Book of*

Amos. Those consulting it, however, would discover a bibliography organized by such categories as “Amos and the Book of the Twelve,” “Use at Qumran and in Rabbinic Literature,” “Covenant and Law,” and “Contemporary Relevance and Pastoral Use.” There is no category remotely close to “The Insanity of Amos” or “Sadistic Phantasy and the Sacral.”

This is not a sequential, close reading of *Amos*. Good commentaries already abound, several of which, such as those by Wolff and Paul, I have already mentioned. It has not been my intent to sift through them to present a comparative study of the exegesis of *Amos* in general or any of its passages in particular. Readers interested in such things should look elsewhere. Ultimately, this work is as much about Marxist and psychoanalytic theory and contemporary issues upon which the Book of *Amos* has been used to reflect as it is about *Amos*.

9. Looking Ahead

In Chapters 2 and 3 I study *Amos* from a Marxist perspective. In Chapter 2, I search for the social location of Amos¹. Relying principally upon Louis Althusser, I distinguish materialism from the idealism Marx rejects and seeks to supplant. Following upon Marx’s thesis that humans must be comprehended materially in “the ensemble of the social relations,” I explore the implications of Amos’s claim that he is not a *prophet* but a *shepherd* by elaborating upon the lives and roles of shepherds in biblical Israel. Pursuant to Marx’s dictum that social being determines consciousness, I conclude by searching *Amos* for evidence reflecting the consciousness of a shepherd or, as Gottwald classifies the Israelite shepherd sociologically, a *transhumant pastoral nomad*.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the production of Amos¹. Using Althusser’s concept of the idealizing function of ideology, I theorize that Amos the *prophet* as opposed to Amos the *shepherd* is a literary production of the scribes who compiled the Bible. Furthermore, I argue that *Amos* is a profound literature of alienation manifesting the high degree of hegemony that the emerging monarchical ruling class had already achieved in the Israel of Amos’s time.

In Chapter 4, I move from theorizing the production of *Amos* from a Marxist perspective to considering the text from a psychoanalytic one—more specifically, as manifesting a consciousness suffering the effects of trauma. After elaborating Freud’s theory of trauma by comparing it to an alternate theory of trauma espoused in the psychology of consciousness of Pierre Janet and his modern descendants, I argue that *Amos* reflects traumatization in terms of imagery, intensity of voice, incoherence of text, production of anxiety, threat of exile, and non-representability.

In Chapter 5, I use Frank Kermode’s concept of the mythic to extend the concept of the compulsion to repeat introduced in the discussion of trauma; I do so in order to argue that Amos

is regressively fixated upon the myth of tribal, premonarchical Israel as having been a golden age along the lines developed by Raymond Williams in *The Country and The City*. Using Georges Bataille's concept of sacred violence, I remark upon the potential of *Amos* to fuel fantasies and acts of violence. I conclude by summing up my assessment of *Amos* and its readers in the light of Richard Taruskin's writing on Russian music during the Stalinist period.

Chapter 2

In Search of the Social Location of Amos¹

As we saw in the previous chapter, the superscription to *Amos* declares that it contains “The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Teko’a, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzzi’ah king of Judah and in the days of Jerobo’am the son of Jo’ash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake” (1.1). Royal chronologies are a bit uncertain, but I subscribe to the general consensus that the information the superscription contains points to a mid-eighth century provenance for Amos, both man and text. Among other things, the text includes scathing indictments of monarchical Israel, the first of which appears among the oracles against the nations:

- ⁶ Thus says the LORD:
“For three transgressions of Israel,
and for four, I will not revoke the
punishment;
because they sell the righteous for
silver,
and the needy for a pair of shoes—
⁷ they that trample the head of the
poor into the dust of the earth,
and turn aside the way of the
afflicted;
a man and his father go in to the
same maiden,
so that my holy name is profaned;
⁸ they lay themselves down beside
every altar
upon garments taken in pledge;
and in the house of their God they
drink
the wine of those who have been
fined.” (2.6-8)

Although there has been much debate about the precise meaning of these allegations, it is generally agreed they involve domestic crimes against the poor. Wolff summarizes them as 1. sale into debt slavery of the innocent and the needy, 2. oppression of the poor, 3. abuse of maidens, and 4. exploitation of debtors (165).

This indictment against whomever *they* are did not emerge during a period of unrelieved economic doom and gloom. In fact, James Mays points out that “under Jeroboam II [to whom the superscription refers], Israel knew her best years of prosperity and peace” (2). However, the fruits of this prosperity appear not to have been evenly distributed. Mays elaborates:

The older homogenous economic structure of Israel gave way to sharp distinctions of wealth and privilege. The excavations at Tirzah (Tell el-Farah) uncovered evidence of the social revolution that had occurred. While the city’s houses in the tenth century had been of uniform size, in the eighth century by contrast there was a quarter of large, expensive houses, and one of small huddled structures. The result was the stark contrast between the luxury of the rich and misery of the poor which Amos repeatedly indicts. (2–3)

I assume that just such a social revolution as Mays describes did occur, one in which socioeconomic classes emerged from an “older homogenous economic structure.” The foregoing allegations not only reflect the existence of such classes but also a conflict between them. But these words are presented as something more than mere allegations. Although the superscription declares they are the words of Amos, the formula that immediately introduces them (“Thus says the LORD” (2.6a)) declares they are the words of Yahweh.

It may well be that Amos¹ did identify his words as messages from Yahweh. If so, he would not have differed much from countless preachers who have succeeded him. Amos^L does declare that Yahweh called him to prophesy (7.15). But in the same breath, he seems to deny that he is either a prophet [נביא] or a member of a prophetic guild [בן-נביא] (7.14). I say *seems* because this apparent denial can be construed in a way that could reverse its meaning. 7.14 is a notorious Amosian crux. Mays declares that its interpretation “is the most controverted problem in the Book of Amos” (137).¹ Since the controversy it has engendered bears directly upon the question of Amos^L’s occupation—a question to which I devote considerable attention in this chapter—I take it up here by way of introduction.

One bone of contention involves an interpretation a translator must make. As in classical Greek, biblical Hebrew does have a verb *to be* (היה hayah). But neither language requires its use in predicate nominative constructions such as Amos^L’s declaration to Amaziah in 7.14, which, in fact, is verb less: לא-נביא אֲנִי וְלֹא בֶן-נְבִיאִים אֲנִי וְיֹדֵעַ אֲנִי וְיֹדֵעַ אֲנִי וְיֹדֵעַ אֲנִי. Translating the passage as literally as I can, it reads: “no prophet I and no son of prophet I for a herding one I and a dressing one of sycomores” (the last two occupational terms are present participles used nominatively). In supplying the cupola that English requires, the RSV translators have put it in the present tense. It

¹ Carroll R. lists forty-two articles concerning it published since 1947 (156–58).

is one of eight translations that Jack Lewis has checked that does so. However, he lists another eight that put it in the past tense (229, n. 2 and 3). This changes the meaning considerably. If Amos is saying “I *was* no prophet nor a prophet’s son,” he may be stressing that, since his call to prophesy, he certainly *is* one now.

The jury is still out on whether this particular verb less nominal construction should be read in the present or the past. In reviewing the arguments thus far advanced, Åke Viberg, while observing that “most frequently, the nominal clause presupposes a present tense,”² points out that “the standard view [in dealing with such cases] is that the various possible tenses are equally probable, but that they can be distinguished on the basis of the context.” He regrets that this “is not a very satisfying solution” (97), a conclusion that the never-ending debate over this particular passage in *Amos* supports.

The debate centres upon whether Amos’s call to prophesy constitutes him as a prophet and, if so, what kind. Cult prophets did exist in greater biblical Israel. I have already noted, for instance, their presence at the temple at Bethel in the time of Elisha (34 above). The titles in 7.14 designate such intermediaries. If we construe the verse in the present, it could mean, as I have suggested, that Amos is setting himself over against cultic intermediaries. If we construe it in the past, it could mean, on the other hand, that he is claiming his rightful place among them. In either case, however, he could also be redefining a term, declaring that he is a new type of prophet or intermediary under the sun.

My own view is that the jury deliberating upon the tense of *Amos* 7.14 will never return a verdict. Amos’s statement is ambiguous. The speaker did have a finite, conjugatable verb *to be* at his disposal that he could have used to indicate the tense. But he chose the less temporally specific expression that appears in the text, an expression that can be read as either present or past. Why he did so is beyond our powers to divine, but, unlike Viberg, I do not see the resulting

² Viberg observes that

An important argument in favour of the present tense is the use of *Amos* 7:14 in *Zechariah* 13:5, where prophets in disguise claim: ... “I am not a prophet, I am a farmer!” Here the present tense is undoubtedly correct, and this would imply that the author of *Zechariah* 13:5 understood a present tense in *Amos* 7:14 as well. Although it is theoretically possible that the author of *Zechariah* 13:5 could have been mistaken about *Amos* 7:14, an ancient Judahite would certainly have been more familiar with the syntax of his own language than modern scholars, despite *Amos* 7:14 being several centuries old at the time of the writing of *Zechariah* 13:5. (102)

ambiguity as a problem to be resolved—not, at least, by deciding about the tense. I see it, rather, as a critical opportunity.

Both Marxist and psychoanalytic criticism promote searching the text for seams, for the fault lines or fissures that mark its points of ambiguity or incoherence. Such fractures open upon contradictions—psychological, social, political, economic—to which the text is a response. On the whole, the Bible is fraught with contradiction: as a compendium reflecting centuries of social experience and change, it could hardly be otherwise. But individual books such as *Amos* were edited not only to keep them relevant but, above all, to achieve some consistent point of view in response to the contradictions informing and powering the social dynamic of the time. As opposed to much modern literature, biblical literature is less interested in mirroring or representing contradiction than in resolving it. I speak here very deliberately of *contradiction* rather than *overt conflict*, for most biblical books are filled with conflicts of the type that have been amenable to the binary analyses of structuralist criticism. As we shall see in the upcoming theoretical discussion, in the Marxist view contradiction is systemic: it is fundamental to the ever-pre-given “structured complex unity” that characterizes social life (Althusser, “On the Materialist Dialectic” 198–99). It may lead to overt conflict, but more typically it leads to repression: social repression (as analyzed by Marxist theory) or psychic repression (as analyzed by psychoanalysis). When one detects cracks in the surface of the text, those cracks need to be explored and exploited as opportunities to penetrate to the latent processes at the heart of textual production.

The ambiguity in *Amos* 7.14-15 involves the thorny question of whether Amos¹ was a prophet and, if so, what type. As the discussion in this and the following chapter demonstrates, this question relates to the further one of whether Amos¹ was, in fact, a shepherd and, if so, what type. The historical treasure hunt for prophets has led most scholars to focus upon the former question rather than the latter. *Amos* has commonly been studied as a source book for prophetic activity during the eighth century. It has seemed likely to many studying *Amos* that, as a prophet, Amos would get involved in a shouting match with another religious functionary such as the priest Amaziah over the prerogatives of prophets. It has occurred to few that he might have gotten into such a shouting match over the prerogatives of shepherds: that the shouting match reflects not professional but class antagonism.

In this chapter I set aside the question of whether Amos¹ was a prophet and focus upon the implications of his claim that he was, at least sometime in his life, a shepherd. Marxist criticism must consider this possibility—and the possibility of regarding *Amos* as a source book for *pastoral* rather than *prophetic* experience. It must do so because in Marxist theory it is axiomatic that “[t]he mode of production of material life conditions the general process of

social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx, “Preface” 211). This is a sweeping statement, but one that is so fundamental to the argument I mount in this and the succeeding chapter—and to what Althusser calls the Marxist science of history—that it justifies a theoretical digression to summarize some key aspects of Marxist theory as Althusser distills them. Following this digression, I turn to the question of the shepherd’s place within the relations of production in the highlands of Canaan. After discussing further ambiguities concerning the precise nature of Amos¹’s occupation, I turn to Gottwald’s concept of *transhumant pastoral nomadism* to suggest a model by which most shepherds of Amos¹’s time and place can be understood. I then examine the images and the tone of *Amos* for traces of a viewpoint that would fit a shepherd of the model just theorized.

1. Aspects of Marxist Theory

1.1. Marx Inaugurates the Science of History

Althusser contends that “Marx founded a new science: the science of history” (“Philosophy” 18). Thinking of the sciences as “a number of *regional* formations” within “great theoretical *continents*,” he declares that, before Marx, they had already been founded in the continents of mathematics and physics by the Greeks and by Galileo and his followers respectively. Subsequently, more specialized sciences had also been developed in these continents, e.g., chemistry and biology in physics and logic in mathematics. Employing a concept from Gaston Bachelard,³ Althusser argues that, by the mid-1840s, Marx’s thought had progressed to the point that it achieved the sustained *epistemological break* necessary to open the continent of history to scientific knowledge (“Lenin and Philosophy” 41–42, emphasis original).⁴

Although Althusser goes to great lengths to defend his claim that Marxism is a science, he writes not as a scientist but as a philosopher.⁵ In his view philosophy and science are inter-

³ Althusser attributes the concept to Bachelard but does not provide a source.

⁴ In what seems to be an aside, Althusser also speculates that “it is probable that Freud’s discovery has opened a new continent, one which we are only just beginning to explore” (“Lenin and Philosophy” 42). Regarding the epistemological break, see also “Philosophy” 18).

⁵ After all, he reminds those who attended his seminar on *Capital* at the École Normale Supérieure in 1965, “[w]e are all philosophers.” This being so, “[w]e did not read *Capital* as economists, as historians or as philologists. We did not pose *Capital* the question of its eco-

twined. “[G]reat scientific revolutions,” he declares, “induce important reorganizations in philosophy” (“Lenin and Philosophy” 54). He contends that the “opening up” of the “new continent” of history to science in its turn also “induced a revolution in philosophy”—all philosophy (“Philosophy” 18). Accordingly, “[t]he new theory of society and history” (“Marxism” 227) that Marx introduced includes both a “*science* (historical materialism) and a *philosophy* (dialectical materialism)” (“Philosophy” 17, emphasis original). Much of Althusser’s writing may deal with the history of Marxian thought, but his focus very consistently is upon its philosophical basis.

1.1.1. The Epistemological Break: History as a Materialist Science Rather Than an Idealist Philosophy

The epistemological break that led to the scientific and philosophical revolutions in question is encapsulated in Marx’s VIth Thesis on Feuerbach:

Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the *human* essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.

Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled:

1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract—*isolated*—human individual.

2. Essence, consequently, can be comprehended only as a “genus”, as an internal, dumb generality which *naturally* unites the many individuals. (Marx, “Concerning Feuerbach” 423, emphasis original)

In dramatizing developments in Marxian thought, Althusser occasionally tends to overstate his case. For instance, in elaborating upon Marx’s epistemological break, he insists: “In 1845, Marx broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man” (“Marxism” 227). But a careful reading of the VIth Thesis reveals that this is not precisely the case. Marx does not deny there is a human essence. He asserts, rather, that this essence is “no abstraction inherent in each single individual.” In doing so, Marx is breaking with the idealism that had previously made the writing of history a philosophical undertaking (“Lenin and Philosophy” 42).

nostic or historical content, nor of its mere internal ‘logic’. We read *Capital* as philosophers, and therefore posed it a different question” (“From *Capital*” 14).

Henceforth, the writing of history need not and should not be based upon some eternally given concept of human nature in which “each single individual” shares. It can and should be based, rather, upon an analysis of the material processes by and through which social groups interact. “In its reality,” Marx’s thesis states, the human essence is to be apprehended scientifically in “the ensemble of the social relations.”

Although Althusser mounts detailed epistemological arguments that historical materialism is a science, in the last instance he bases them upon the simple notion that Marxism takes material processes as its object of knowledge. If it has any claim to be a science of history, this focus upon material process must certainly be at the root of it.⁶ Idealist philosophy can produce no history because, based as it is upon timeless abstractions, it lacks a principle of change. What appears to be movement in such history is illusory: all such movement amounts to no more than the various and sometimes subtle manifestations of some *grande idée*. Marx is constrained by no such preconceived ideal of human nature frozen in time. In his view, human nature, such as it seems to be at any moment, is determined historically by material processes to which it is necessarily subject and responsive.

The idealist focus on the individual that Marx criticizes in Feuerbach characterizes much previous social thought. Hobbes and Rousseau, for instance, in theorizing upon a social contract, proceed from the myth of natural humans living in social vacua. Marx reverses this: he proceeds from the social and never abstracts from it to theorize upon the nature of isolated human beings. Indeed, Marx argues, humans are the only animals to have species consciousness, i.e., consciousness of belonging to a species or having species being (*Gattungswesen*). Such consciousness produces a distinctively human sense of self that extends beyond the purely individual. Any force that derogates from this expanded, social sense of self toward a concentration upon the individual—as, for example, in idealism—is a source of alienation (Mészáros 81).

1.1.2. Marx and the Hegelian Dialectic: The Turn from Ideal Simplicity to Material

Complexity

Marx is convinced that simplicity itself is an abstraction, the product of an idealistic

⁶ As early as the “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts” of 1844 Marx criticizes political economy because “it grasps the actual, *material* process of private property in abstract and general formulae which it then takes as laws. It does not *comprehend* these laws, that is, does not prove them as proceeding from the nature of private property” (287–88, emphasis original). In short, the political economists whom the young Marx was reading simply posited concepts such

theoretical practice applied to raw material that is inherently complex. His adaptation of the concept of the dialectic he derives from Hegel demonstrates his turn from ideal simplicity to material complexity. The study of the dialectic, Althusser tells us, is “the study of contradiction in the very essence of objects” (“On the Materialist Dialectic” 193).⁷ For Hegel, the dialectic is the motor of history. The contradictions that power this motor are internal to a simple, ordinary, spiritual dynamic attempting to realize its potential (or idea) over time. The dialectic process functions as a cosmic heartbeat. Its initial contraction, as it were, produces an internal alienation or contradiction, a contradiction overcome through a labour of supersession (*Aufhebung*) that creates a new state that will in its turn suffer a new alienation or contradiction in an ongoing process. This thinking is teleological: it presupposes development toward some end point, a point toward which each supersession is striving and at which, when reached, the spiritual idea labouring to emerge will be fully realized. The dialectic reflects the idea of progress found in much nineteenth-century thinking, but it does not, for all that, lose contact with origins. It is akin to “the ground swell” that, T. S. Eliot tells us, “is and was from the beginning” (192). In keeping with its nineteenth-century provenance, this thinking is also organic. The dialectic is conceived as if it were alive.

Marx agrees the dialectic is the motor of history. As does Hegel, he pinpoints the moment of historical change in the supersession of contradiction.⁸ But, true to his materialistic approach, he demystifies the dialectic and recasts it as a mechanical principle.⁹ Althusser stresses the unchanging simplicity of the Hegelian dialectic. Marx, he insists, recognizes and resists such simplification and all it implies as distortions introduced by the abstracting process

as private property as abstract ideals without comprehending or explaining them in terms of a developmental process.

⁷ He is probably quoting Marx’s *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* here, but the citation is missing in the source.

⁸ Both Hegel and Marx are monistic thinkers, the one idealist and the other materialist. For each, the principle of supersession mediates between the poles of contradiction, thereby preventing those poles from resolving into a static dualism from which historical change cannot be theorized. For thinking about contradiction to be dialectical, such mediation is always necessary (Mészáros 85–87).

⁹ For an excellent summary of the difference between the two in respect to the dialectic see Kontopoulos (*passim*).

of idealist philosophy. “Instead of the ideological myth of a philosophy of origins and its organic concepts,” he points out,

Marxism establishes in principle the recognition of the givenness of the complex structure which governs both the development of the object and the development of the theoretical practice which produces the knowledge of it. There is no longer any original essence, only an ever-pre-givenness, however far knowledge delves into its past. There is no longer any simple unity (in any form whatsoever), but instead, *the ever-pre-givenness of a structured complex unity*. (“On the Materialist Dialectic” 198–99, emphasis original)

In his demystification of the idealistic abstractions of the Hegelian dialectic, Marx eliminates origins from history. The search for origins is the task of mythology, not science, which focuses solely upon analyzable material processes.

Marx’s rejection of reality as inherently simple underlies the difference between his conception of the dialectic and that of Hegel. For to Marx, Althusser insists, contradiction is not something internal to an irreducible, life-like dynamic. It describes, rather, the relationship among elements in an ever-pre-given “structured complex unity.” Social reality properly understood involves a network of asymmetrical relationships in which certain elements inevitably dominate others, so much so that a social formation should be conceived as a structure in dominance. The materialist science of history, as it was emerging in the 1840s at the time of Marx’s epistemological break, would map the vicissitudes of this asymmetry as manifested in “the ensemble of...social relations,” most particularly, in class struggle.

1.2. Marxism as a Theory of Production

Although Marxism discounts the possibility of a theory of history based upon idealist philosophy, it is, nevertheless, very much concerned with ideas. In the Marxist scheme, however, ideas are material products rather than spiritual forces (Althusser, “Ideology” 159). Although Althusser insists that Marxism is the science of history, it is more illuminating, in fact, to think of it as a theory of production. All social goods—both tangible and intangible—are produced by social practice, which he defines as the process of transforming raw materials into products. The “*determinant* moment (or element)” in such transformation, he tells us, “is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the *labour of transformation* itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men, means and a technical method of utilizing the means” (“On the Materialist Dialectic” 166–67, emphasis original). No less than a chair or a table, an idea is the product of social practice—a practice subject to change—not something eternally and unalterably given and taken.

As a theory of production, Marxism approaches its object of knowledge with a particular interest. It does not concern itself with how things are made technically but with the social conditions that enable them to be made. It does not allow that just anything can be produced but only those things that a current constellation of social conditions permits. Therefore, as Althusser's focus upon identifying the "*determinate* moment" of practice suggests, Marxism is also a theory of determination, a concept that looms large in the history of Marxist thought.

As my discussion of ideology in Chapter 3 reveals, Marxist theory builds upon the insight that the ultimate rationale for social production is typically concealed from people going about their daily activities—veiled, as it were, by a construal of social process enforced in the interests of a dominant class. It accounts for social action theoretically rather than experientially in terms of a hidden scene in which the participants are unaware they are acting (a figure to which I return in Chapter 5). In doing so, it proceeds counter-intuitively in a way that incurs the resistance to theory I discuss in Chapter 1 (28-30 above). A more direct theory of production would be little more than a set of directions that could be reduced to a model or blueprint. Marxism does not concern itself with such directions per se. It concerns itself, rather, with who writes the directions and who follows them. Principally, it concerns itself with what Marx calls the relations of production, that is, how the various groups involved interact to produce what is produced. Such relations of production are the material heart of the human essence as Marx understands it.

To say that Marxism is a theory of production may seem an oversimplification, for it is also a theory of distribution and consumption. Just as it analyzes relations of production, it also analyzes relations of distribution and consumption that determine to whom whatever is produced is distributed and by whom it is consumed. The three are concomitant: there is no point in producing something that is not distributed and consumed.¹⁰ But Marxism is pre-eminently a theory of production because it is based upon Marx's philosophical tenet that the most basic human response to the natural world is productive activity. István Mészáros stresses this in his assessment of Marx's "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" of 1844, which I quote at some length because it makes the implications of this basic tenet so clear:

In this work Marx's ontological starting point is the self-evident fact that man, a specific part of *nature* (i.e. a being with *physical* needs historically prior to all others) must *produce* in order to sustain himself, in order to satisfy these needs.

¹⁰ For critical theory, however, it does matter whether one focuses on consumption or production. Raymond Williams points out that "nearly all forms of contemporary critical theory are theories of consumption" ("Base" 14) that view works of art as objects. With its emphasis upon production, however, Marxism views such works as practices (15).

However, he can only satisfy these primitive needs by *necessarily* creating, in the course of their satisfaction through his productive activity, a complex hierarchy of *non-physical* needs which thus become necessary conditions for the gratification of his original physical needs as well. Human activities and needs of a “spiritual” kind thus have their ultimate ontological foundations in the sphere of material production as specific expressions of human interchange with nature, mediated in complex ways and forms. As Marx puts it: “*the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the begetting of man through human labour, nothing but the coming-to-be [Werden] of nature for man*”. Productive activity is, therefore, the *mediator* in the “subject-object relationship” between man and nature.

(Mészáros 80, emphasis original, quoting Marx’s “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts”)

Productive activity mediates the subject-subject relationships among humans as well. In satisfying our physical needs through productive activity, we also produce the social world in which we live, our position in which, so Marx argues, ultimately determines our viewpoint upon it.

1.2.1. The Production of the Society Effect

On the micro level, Marxism deals with the production of social goods such as knowledge, but, on the macro level, it deals with the production of society itself or, more precisely, what Althusser calls the “society effect.” Writing on *Capital*, Althusser states that it is “absolutely fundamental for an understanding of Marx” to realize that he “regards contemporary society (and every other past form of society) both as a *result* and as a *society*” in a dialectic relation (“From *Capital*” 65, emphasis original). In making this argument, Althusser attributes to Marx the same vision for the study of society that Saussure has for the study of linguistics (Saussure *passim*). Each has a history to be studied diachronically and a structure to be studied synchronically. Althusser elaborates on the task of Marxist diachronic, historical analysis: “The theory of the mechanism of transformation of one mode of production into another [...] has to pose and solve the problem of the *result*, i.e., of the historical production of a given mode of production, of a given social formation” (“From *Capital*” 65, emphasis original). This “transformation of one mode of production into another” is the stuff of historical change as Marxists understand it, and its mechanism—its motor—is dialectic. Such transformation depends upon how the contradictions inherent within any social formation—a structure in dominance—are resolved or superseded in the ongoing struggle among all groups engaged in producing whatever is produced.

One approach to the social tensions at the heart of *Amos* is to analyze them as an effect of the transition then in progress in greater biblical Israel from a tribal society to a monarchical state. This evolution in question was from a “classless primitive society” to a centralized state organized according to the Asiatic (or tributary) mode of production (Gottwald, “Hypothesis” 150–51). The resentment heating to a boil in *Amos* likely reflects the fact that, as Gottwald points out, the AMP [Asiatic mode of production] retained as its *economic* base the “agrarian, pastoral, and handicraft villages which constitute[d] self-sufficient units of residency and production” in which most of the nation’s people lived and most of its wealth was produced. The emerging cities, on the other hand, in which *political* power was being concentrated, “lacked a truly urban ethos and a genuinely productive basis. They were centers of state administration and trading locations that were parasitical on the villages” (154).

But such diachronic study is not sufficient to describe a social structure at any particular point in history. Ahistorical, synchronic analysis is required as well. Althusser argues that the means to synchronic analysis is provided by Marx’s “theory of the structure of a mode of production,” a theory that includes

the mechanism which makes the result of a history’s production exist *as a society*; it is therefore the mechanism which gives this product of history, that is precisely the society-product he is studying, the property of producing the “*society effect*” which makes this result exist *as a society*, and not as a heap of sand, an ant-hill, a workshop or a mere collection of men. (“From *Capital*” 65, emphasis original)

This “mechanism of the production of the ‘*society effect*’” is complex. The work of the structural, synchronic, social analysis upon which Althusser insists

is only complete when all the effects of the mechanism have been expounded, down to the point where they are produced in the form of the very effects that constitute the concrete, conscious or unconscious relations of the individuals to the society as a society, i.e., down to the effects of the fetishism of ideology (or ‘forms of *social* consciousness’...), in which men consciously or unconsciously live their lives, their projects, their actions, their attitudes and their functions, as *social*. (“From *Capital*” 66, emphasis original)

The largest question, then, that Marxism addresses is the mechanism by which individuals come to find themselves linked together in a society. I use the term *mechanism* here because Althusser himself uses it. As we have seen, E. P. Thompson ridicules him for reducing complex human interactions to a mechanism. Perhaps Althusser’s word choice is infelicitous, but it fits his insistence that Marxist theory includes not only a philosophy but a science: the science of history and, by extension to the synchronic analysis to which its practitioners are also called, the science of society (Althusser, “Philosophy” 17).

2. A Shepherd's Place within the Relations of Production in the Highlands of Canaan

The Marxist theory I have so far summarized dictates that to uncover more than the trace of Amos¹ that exists in *Amos*, we must comprehend him socially, materially, in terms of the relations of production through which he and others corporately produced not only their material necessities but also the “complex hierarchy of [their] *non-physical* needs” and their sense of belonging to a socially organized species. This understanding is necessary to establish the class position from which the social critique attributed to Amos¹ originated. As the ambiguity concerning his prophetic status indicates, this is not a simple task. It is, moreover, one that is further complicated by an ambiguity concerning his pastoral activities, an ambiguity we are about to explore.

At the outset of this study I state my assumption “that the literary Amos the text embodies has been shaped to serve certain sociopolitical interests” (2 above), a process upon which I dwell in detail in Chapter 3. Before doing so, however, Amos¹ must be theorized to extricate him from a text that misconstrues him in the very process of representation. For reasons adduced in Chapter 1, this process of extrication involves a high degree of speculation. There is no way to verify the results. But they can at least be tested by putting the words attributed to Amos¹ into the mouth of the theorized Amos¹. If they ring true, then we may be on to something. *May* is normally the best one can hope for in this type of speculating.

2.1. A Herdsman and a Dresser of Sycamore Trees

As for Amos¹'s place in the relations of production, I maintain the position adopted in my earlier paper that he actually *was* a shepherd, and I focus upon the implications of that.¹¹ Most scholars who address the question of Amos¹'s occupation study the text to determine what it might reveal about biblical prophets. Few have ever taken it up to determine what it might have to say about biblical shepherds. Andrew Mein rightly observes that “[g]iven the shepherd's

¹¹ Some of the material on Amos¹'s occupation draws upon my unpublished essay, “A Herdsman and a Dresser of Sycamore Trees’: Notes toward a Reading of the Book of Amos in the Light of Pastoralist Experience,” in which I discuss the textual ambiguity concerning the type of pastoralist Amos¹ was, a herdsman or a shepherd. I conclude he was a shepherd, a conclusion I stand by in this study without revisiting my earlier arguments. I am occasionally constrained to use the term *herdsman* because it is the best translation for בקר (boqer) in 7.14, a word at the heart of the ambiguity just mentioned. More frequently, I use the term *pastoralist*. It typically appears in my sources as a word applying to the activities of either herdsman and shepherds. Regardless of that, I consistently conceptualize Amos¹ as a shepherd throughout this study.

familiar place in the biblical landscape, it is surprising how rarely commentators take an interest in the practices of animal husbandry that lie behind biblical stories and metaphors” (496). However, some earlier critics did allow their imaginations to dwell upon Amos¹ as a shepherd. For instance, in 1922 Julius Brewer stated his belief that Amos¹

was not a professional prophet but a plain shepherd and dresser of sycamore trees in Tekoa, Judah. His mind was wonderfully clear, his moral nature finely developed, his spiritual sensitiveness singularly alert. He lived in the solitude of the steppe. In the silence of the desert he meditated on important problems, pondered till a great fear came upon him, a dark presentiment of impending disaster; he brooded over it until he was in the ecstatic state, where his feelings crystallized into a vision in which Yahweh would have destroyed Israel by a locust plague, if Amos had not interceded for them. (87)

Although Brewer imagines Amos¹ living as a shepherd “in the solitude of the steppe,” the whole tendency of his speculation is to determine the origin of Amos’s prophetic activity and voice. But Amos denies—or seems to deny, depending upon how one construes the text—that he is what Brewer calls “a professional prophet.” What if, after all, Amos¹ were simply “a herdsman [or shepherd] and a dresser of sycamore trees” and nothing else?

The issue is complicated by the superscription, which, in Wolff’s view, appeared some 150 years after the *Amos* material began to coalesce (108, 117–8). It states that Amos was among the נִקְדִּים (noqədim) of Tekoa (1.1). At this point the RSV does render the word as *shepherds*, but, as I indicate previously (34 above), this translation may be a bit misleading. The root shows up in only one other place in the Bible (2 Kgs 3.4), this time in the singular (נִקְדֵּי, noqed), where it characterizes King Mesha of Moab in his pastoral pursuits, which he conducted on a substantial scale. At this point the RSV renders the word as *sheep-breeder*,¹² a better choice than shepherd, for—whatever else he may have been—King Mesha of Moab was certainly not a shepherd. Before he “rebelled against the king of Israel” of his day (2 Kgs 3.5), he had to deliver to him an annual tribute of “a hundred thousand lambs, and the wool gathering of a hundred thousand lambs” (3.4).

The most convincing explanation I have found as to why someone like Mesha would be called a *noqed* is supplied by Murtonen. He points out that a modern Arabic cognate of *noqed*, *naqqad*, means *shepherd*, upon which he elaborates:

¹² The JPS and Wolff (116) use *sheepbreeders* or *sheep breeders* respectively to translate *noqədim* in *Amos* 1.1. Andersen and Freedman use *sheep raisers* (xxv).

[T]he meaning “sheep-raiser” is very easy to derive from the original meaning of the root *nqd* “to puncture”. We know from the OT that the ancient Israelites marked their slaves with an aul (Ex. xxi 6). What is more natural than to suppose that they marked also their sheep to distinguish them from those of other cattle-raisers? The meaning of the root *nqd* fits very well the sense of such a marking. (170–71)

As I stated in my previous study,

[i]f *puncture* were the original meaning of the word — and if the Deuteronomic scribe who provided this description had a sense of that — it could mean that a נקד was a sheepman who branded his flock. He would do this rather than keeping them in pens. This would explain its application to Mesha, who simply had too many sheep to keep them in folds. By necessity, they would need to range free. Branding would be the only viable option to identify them and to discourage theft. (“Herdsman” 10)

If a *noqed* when applied to someone in the livestock business originally distinguished a *puncturer* or *brander*, its use may imply that the person so designated had so many sheep that he had to resort to this practice out of necessity.

Amos’s description as a *noqed* has fueled millennia of speculation that he was something more than a labourer who tended sheep. An early Jewish tradition holds that Amos owned not only the flocks he tended but also the sycamore trees he cultivated (Cathcart, Mahler and McNamara 91; Neusner 104).¹³ Moreover, various cross-cultural studies of the occupational

¹³ The question of what a בלם שקמים (*a dresser of sycamore trees*, boles *šiqmim*) may have been is even more vexed than that of a *noqed*. It has produced at least one doctoral thesis in its own right, that by Steiner, who reviews the ancient and medieval interpretive history of the phrase. It is generally agreed that שקמים (*šiqmim*) denotes a relative of the common fig tree (3). Since the word *sycamore* also “is applied to unrelated trees in America and England” (3–4), Steiner uses *sycamore* to designate the Palestinian fig tree with which Amos was involved. I follow this procedure.

The interpretation of the present participle בלם is much more complicated. Not only is it a *hapax legomenon* (a word appearing only once in the Jewish Bible) but, as Steiner observes, “even its root is unattested elsewhere in the Bible” (2). He discusses the Septuagint’s rendering of בלם שקמים as κνίζων σκαμίνα, which, he says, is best translated as “a scratcher of sycamore figs” (7). Although various explanations have been advanced over centuries of exegesis to explain the ancient practice of gashing sycamore figs prior to their harvest, recent experiments have demonstrated that “gashing stimulates the production of ethylene, a gas that is used commercially for the ripening of oranges, bananas, etc. With the sycamore fig, it acts as a growth

roles signified by the Arabic, Babylonian, and Ugaritic cognates for *noqed* connect it to some position within a ruling establishment. For instance, Bic contends that *noqədim* “had a cultic function that may have extended to the practice of augury” (293–6). Craigie goes beyond this to argue that as large scale “sheep managers” most *noqədim* were “servants of a king,” some of whom “reported to a High Priest” (33). Rosenbaum concludes that Amos as a *noqed*

could have been some sort of district supervisor of royal herds since נִקֵד indicates no ordinary shepherd. The use of the plural נִקְדִים makes it possible that there were several people, perhaps a guild, with similar responsibilities in different administrative districts. Why a group of these people should cast up in Judean Tekoa remains obscure. (46)

Such speculations as Rosenbaum’s remain unaccountably obscure. How can we characterize the suggestions of Bic, Craigie, or Rosenbaum just summarized in respect to the light they shed upon Amos¹? In some other time and place, *noqədim* may have been district supervisors of royal herds, some of whom may have reported to a high priest. But how can anyone believe that Amos is such a civil servant employed by the king? Who can read Amos’s encounter with Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (7.10-17), and think this—or contend that Amos and Amaziah are engaged in some bureaucratic turf war?

stimulator as well as a ripener, inducing a very great increase in size and weight” (9). However, influential as the Septuagint’s understanding of בלס as deriving from *scratching* may have been, it has hardly been decisive.

Steiner also considers Rashi’s eleventh century reading of בלס as deriving from *searching*. This interpretation focuses upon the sycamore as a source of timber rather than fruit. Sycomores were cultivated as the best local source for roof beams. Although there have been still other renderings of בלס, *scratching* the fruit and *searching* for timber stock best reflect the most common forms of labour undertaken to enhance the sycamore’s commercial value.

After tracing the etymology and meaning of בלס in Mishnaic Hebrew and other semitic languages, Steiner concludes that the Septuagint’s reading of the word is too narrow. He insists that the word names the tree’s fruit generally rather than any operation specifically (45). It follows, therefore, “that Amos’ term בלס שקמים referred to a person that harvests the fruit of the sycamore” (46). He surmises that this term distinguished someone with a horticultural rather than a silvicultural interest in sycomores: a putative but unattested כורת שקמים (*cutter of sycomores*, koreθ šiqmim). This broader meaning for which Steiner argues does not preclude that of the Septuagint. After all, Steiner points out, the “gashing of the sycamore figs may well have been viewed as the beginning of the harvest, since the picking of the figs followed only a few days later” (47).

Regardless of the dramatic tension within the text itself, most commentators nevertheless tend to agree with Blenkinsopp, who observes that "[i]n the account of his arrest at Bethel [Amos] himself describes his profession as tending herds and dressing sycamore fig trees (7:14), which, whatever we make of it, does not warrant the image of an uneducated rustic visionary" (79). Perhaps some have believed that Amos¹ was something more than a simple shepherd because he declares he was called by Yahweh to prophesy, an event marking him as a special person, trusted to be a divine intermediary. Perhaps some have believed it because some editor thought to identify a particular collection of sayings as the words of Amos, thereby signalling him as a man to remember. These are a few good reasons to think that Amos was not an ordinary man.

But there are other reasons to think this as well, reasons that are more subtle. One of these is his very identification as a *noqed* that we have been discussing, which, whatever it may mean, is not the usual word for shepherd. That term, רועה (*roeh*), does appear twice in *Amos* (1.2, 3.12) but is never applied to him personally. At the very least, the application of the unusual term *noqed* to Amos¹ suggests that he was an unusual shepherd. The fact that the only analogue the Bible provides for fleshing out the term is King Mesha of Moab and his pursuits has had a very subtle but persistent impact upon colouring the interpretation of what sort of shepherd Amos¹ may have been and to which class he may have belonged. Although Amos condemns domestic crimes against the poor, there is nothing in the biographical fragment of his encounter with Amaziah (7.10-17) to suggest that he himself is affected by the depredations he denounces. Although he identifies himself as a working person, he seems curiously abstracted from the fray. The question arises of the basis upon which Amos qualifies as a spokesperson for the poor. Is it as a *boqer*—conceivably as one of them—or as a *noqed*—one who acts, perhaps, from a sense of *noblesse oblige*? To address this question, we need to think more deliberately about pastoral pursuits in the highlands of Canaan.¹⁴

2.2. Shepherds as Transhumant Pastoral Nomads

When we think of *shepherding*, I believe we have generally been conditioned by pastoral conventions to think of sheep grazing in a field with the shepherd more or less loafing around

¹⁴ The highlands of Canaan, where the biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah were situated, comprise the heartland of greater biblical Israel. The hill country west of the depression of the Dead Sea and the River Jordan, these highlands have traditionally been identified as the homeland of Yahweh-worshiping tribes named, from north to south, Manasseh, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Judah.

with a crook. More properly, such a stationary enterprise should be called *sheeptending*, for the herding involved is minimal. However, the invariable summer drought in the highlands of Canaan (Hopkins 80) necessitated that many biblical-era shepherds in the region be quite involved in actual herding. In discussing early settlement patterns in the region, Gottwald argues that herdsmen as well as shepherds were typically *transhumant pastoral nomads* (*Tribes* 435-63), *transhumance* being a technical term meaning *movement across the ground* that he defines as referring “to all pastoral nomadism in which there is a seasonal movement of livestock to regions of different climate” (444–45).

Regardless of what the superscription to *Amos* says, Rosenbaum is quite right to be puzzled as to why the *noqədim* he construes to have been administrators should have been “cast up in Judean Tekoa” (46). Mesha-scale *noqədiming* does not fit the highlands of Canaan. Neither the land itself nor the necessity of annual migration allows for sheep raising on Mesha’s scale. That requires land more suitable to the enterprise, land in the Mishor, for instance, that remarkably level plain of gently rolling country famous for its sheep in northern Moab where Mesha undoubtedly set up. If *noqədim* were the ruling-class types that Bic, Craigie, and Rosenbaum argue, they need not have established themselves on marginal lands requiring transhumance. Sheep raising in the highlands of Canaan was set up on a scale much humbler than that of Mesha, a scale insufficiently remunerative to allow for the presence of a managerial class of sheep breeders employing manual labourers. Sheep raising in the highlands required that shepherds take the sheep to water and pasture on a seasonal basis, a fact confirmed by Amos’s declaration that the Lord took him “from following the flock” (7.15) rather than from the midst of it. I argue that Amos¹ was himself a small-holder engaged in the actual physical work of shepherding and sycomore dressing.

A key to theorizing the social significance of small holding shepherds such as Amos¹ is transhumance. The seasonal movement required of them would not be random. They would have sought to reduce their risks by determining the best routes to follow on the basis of ecological, economic, and political factors.¹⁵ As itinerants, they would also have developed functions beyond providing meat and wool gathering to secure themselves a welcome in the places they visited, functions that would have caused their visits to be anticipated. As *Amos* 7.14 suggests,

¹⁵ In my earlier paper on *Amos* I study the geography of the ancient Near East to determine the routes an eighth-century shepherd from the highlands of Canaan would have likely followed. Not only do I agree with Wolff (150–1), Cohen (155–6), and Haran (278) that *Amos* describes only contemporary events, but I go beyond them to argue that they are events that a small holding shepherd might very well have seen on his annual peregrinations.

they may have provided other economic services such as dressing sycomores, a tree normally associated with the Shephelah or coastal plain that did not grow in the highlands of Canaan.¹⁶ Although there is no necessary connection between shepherding and sycomore dressing, the two activities are not mutually exclusive: in fact, they could be symbiotically related. Putting sheep needing pasture into sycomore orchards would, as Hopkins suggests (247), manure the ground while shepherds picked up dead fruit—to be mixed with barley or straw to make fodder—and gashed the figs (Wright *passim*).

More generally, however, I speculate that the chief social function of shepherds for those they visited was to bring the news. Perhaps unwittingly, but perhaps not, Amaziah is correct in calling Amos—as a shepherd—a *seer*, for he would have seen many things as he travelled around about which farmers rooted in the soil would have been curious. And he would have told those farmers about the world as he witnessed it. He would have told them about conditions elsewhere facing people such as themselves. And he would have been welcomed and listened to not as an agent of ruling class interests—not as a *noqed*—but as one of themselves, as a person facing the same challenges and hardships that they did.

It seems incontrovertible that, as transhumant pastoral nomads, shepherds would have spread news. In doing so, they inevitably comprised a specialized part of the mechanism through which the society effect was created. Not only did they distribute news: inevitably, they would have given it a distinctive shape. They would have edited it. They would have arranged it in a particular sequence in which some aspects of what they had seen were emphasized and others downplayed or ignored entirely. As we have seen, it is axiomatic in Marxist theory that the consciousness according to which such shaping is accomplished depends in the last instance upon social being. If shepherds generally had a sense of being hard done by, their news would have been shaped to reinforce similar sentiments on the part of the villagers among whom they came. They would have been more likely to vent their grievances than others. The dangers attendant upon speaking one's own mind “were mitigated by transhumance. If things got too hot, the sheepman could move on” (Cowsill, “Herdsman” 20). Moreover, Gottwald speculates that pastoral nomadism attracted people we would now call libertarian. He sees this life

in part as a form of political resistance. The rural segments of the populace, under pressure from the dominant urban centers, could relieve that pressure by moving

¹⁶ Zohary, in fact, assumes that the species in question “is indigenous to the southern part of the Coastal Plain” (69). The early Jewish tradition that Amos¹ owned the sycomores that he tended (52 above) locates them here (Cathcart, Mahler and MacNamara 91) or “in the valley” (Neusner 104).

toward pastoral specialization. Movable flocks and herds were less easily taxed than real property. The periodic trek over the steppe carried the nomads beyond the normal reach of the police power of the state and made impressment into the army less likely. Nomads who moved over regions that lay between two conflicting central authorities could parlay advantages by playing one authority against the other. In short, there were possibilities in pastoral nomadism for relative political independence vis-a-vis the state in comparison with the farmer wholly tied to his land. (*Tribes* 450)

Therefore, the sense of social reality that shepherds would have fostered would have accentuated the antagonism among the classes that Mays argues in Amos¹'s day were emerging from an "older homogenous economic structure" (2). They would have reinforced the conception that the society coming into being was, indeed, a structure in dominance marked by a network of asymmetrical relationships in which certain elements inevitably dominate others. Depending upon how effectively they highlighted the contradictions implicit in such a structure, such purveyors of news threatened to become agents of dialectical or historical change, i.e., relevant factors in the production of an ideology potentially sufficient in the struggle among groups to supersede or alter the current relations of production.

So we return to the question whether Amos¹ suffered from the domestic crimes against the poor that *Amos* denounces and, if so, how. Are the words of Amos attributable to a *noqed* chosen to deliver Yahweh's verdict upon Israel who is himself unaffected by the depredations he denounces? Or are there any traces in *Amos* of words that would ring true in the mouth of a consciously oppressed shepherd? I argue that there are, but, before proceeding to that argument, something of a digression upon reading strategy is appropriate.

3. Traces of Transhumance in *Amos*

3.1. Digression on Reading Strategy

Searching for traces of Amos¹ in *Amos* inevitably encourages the type of archaeological work discussed in Chapter 1 in which the critic attempts to neutralize the literary dimensions of the text beneath which Amos¹ is conceived to lie, to use Derrida's term, as a man *sous rature* (*under erasure*). Redaction is clearly one of these literary dimensions. One's views of the redaction history of *Amos* will govern the weight assigned to various passages as evidence for Amos¹. If one accepts Paul's argument that *Amos* comes from a single, unredacted source, all passages will be assigned equal weight. If, however, one follows Wolff, who distinguishes six levels of redaction in *Amos*, one will probably give greater weight to the earlier levels as being closer to

the living, breathing man. I adopt this procedure myself in my earlier study. It can lead, however, to the trap of distinguishing *authentic* from *unauthentic* oracles purely on the basis of some highly tenuous hypothesis about their date of origin. For instance, those who follow Wolff will tend to classify the oracles against the nations that he attributes to the eighth-century “Literary Fixation of the Cycles” (107–8) as *authentic* (Damascus (1.3-5), Gaza (1.6-8), Ammon (1.13-15), and Moab (2.1-3)) and those that he assigns to the seventh-century “Bethel-Exposition of the Josianic Age” (111) as *unauthentic* (Tyre (1.9-10), Edom (1.11-12), and Judah (2.4-5)) while accepting his verdict that the oracle against Israel (2.6-16) is *quasi-authentic*: on the whole, it is eighth century, but 2.10-12 is a seventh-century interpolation (169).

The trap in such classificatory schemes is that they beg the question: authentic in what respect? The common assumption seems to be that, if passages can be assigned to the eighth century, they can be assigned to Amos¹, but, if they must be assigned to a later period, then they must be assigned to a scribe—despite the equally common concession that the physical labour of actually writing the oracles down was done at all times by scribes. This assumption leads to two others: (1) that the eighth-century scribes involved with *Amos* were actually transcribers, whereas those who succeeded them worked with some creative latitude; and (2) that Amos¹ wandered around greater biblical Israel spouting oracles. Although I do think *Amos* has been redacted, I do not think that any of its oracles are more authentic than others. Of course, this question revolves around how one defines *authentic* and the value one assigns to the concept. I argue in Chapter 3 that all the oracles of *Amos* are the interpretive work of scribes, who, regardless of when they worked, did so with considerably greater creative latitude than several millennia of exegetes have normally suspected. In accordance with White’s contention that historiography involves an organization of data according to conventional literary plots (11-12 above), I argue in Chapter 3 that these ancient scribes themselves produced a fictional approximation of the otherwise unknowable reality of eighth-century Israel. Within such an assessment of the text, the concept of authenticity has no function. It serves only to identify an ideological and rhetorical ploy by which exegetes seek to enforce a particular view of past events. On the other hand, I find the archaeological work in which investigators such as Wolff and Coote assess various strata of redaction as being authentic expressions of ideology obtaining at various periods to be thoughtfully provocative exercises. However, because such speculation does not pertain to my own critical approach, it suffices to say that, as a rule, I will not distinguish between oracles according to some theory of redaction.

3.2. Something There Is that Does Not Love a Wall

I argue that there are traces in *Amos* of words that would ring true in the mouth of a consciously oppressed shepherd. These traces are not to be found in what we can deduce of the formal structure of *Amos*, i.e., in the self-conscious literary product produced by the scribal shaping of Amos^L from more original materials. They are to be found, rather, in the images and tone of *Amos*, which preserve something of the prototypical social consciousness upon which *Amos* is based, a social consciousness rooted in the tenuous experience of transhumant pastoral nomadism.

As for images, Amos is obsessed with building projects of all kinds. He is fascinated with *cities* (3.6 (twice), 4.6, 4.7 (twice), 4.8 (twice), 5.3, 6.8, 7.17, 9.14), with their environs and appurtenances. He is fascinated with *sanctuaries* (7.9, 7.13), *temples* (8.3), and associated *high places* (7.9). He focuses upon structural details: *gate bars* (1.5), *capitals* (9.1), and *thresholds* (9.1). Depending upon how one construes some notoriously difficult Hebrew in 7.7-8, his visions may also include a carpenter's tool, the *plumb line*.¹⁷

Above all, Amos is engrossed with houses, strongholds, and walls. The word *house* appears in some form 27 times. In some instances, these are concrete images of buildings. He speaks of *great houses*, a *winter house*, a *summer house*, and *houses of ivory* (all 3.15), as well as *houses of hewn stone* (5.11) and a *house of the realm* (s. בית ממלכה, beṯ mammələxch: 7.13; translated ““temple of the kingdom”” in the RSV). He speaks generically of *the great house* and *the little house* (both 6.11). He speaks of being ““in one house”” (6.9) or ““in the innermost parts of the house”” and of bringing bones ““out of the house”” (both 6.10). Most frequently, the word is used to designate a monarchy or a people. In the former sense, Amos speaks of *the house of Hazael* (1.4) or *the house of Jeroboam* (7.9). In the latter, he speaks many times of *the house of Israel* (5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.25, 6.1, 6.14, 7.10, 9.9) as well as *the house of Jacob* (3.13, 9.8), *the house of Joseph* (5.6), and *the house of Isaac* (7.16). It may be argued that the use in these instances is figurative, but the word for the tangible object remains on the scroll.

Amos is also preoccupied with ארמנות (pl. 'armənoθ), which always appears in the plural and which the RSV and Wolff rather quaintly translate as *strongholds* but which the JPS renders

¹⁷ There is no consensus what the word אֲנָךְ ('ənak) that the RSV here translates as *plumb line* means. It appears four times in 7.7-8 but nowhere else in the Bible. Paul claims that Landsberger has definitively shown that it means *tin* and offers an interpretation based upon this meaning, but he concludes, for reasons he does not spell out, that “it is no wonder that the prophet, as well as his exegetes, remains baffled by its symbolism” (233–5, qtd. fr. 235). Its frequent repetition suggests that it is a word play, the precise meaning of which we may never sort out. Word play does appear in the vision of “a basket of summer fruit” reported in 8.1-3.

as *fortresses* and Andersen and Freedman as *citadels*. The word appears 12 times. The strongholds are everywhere: Damascus (“the strongholds of Ben-ha’dad” (1.4)), Gaza (1.7), Tyre (1.10), Edom (“the strongholds of Bozrah” (1.12)), Rabbah (1.14), Moab (“the strongholds of Ker’ioth” (2.2)), Judah (“the strongholds of Jerusalem” (2.5)), Assyria (3.9), Egypt (3.9), and, presumably, Israel (3.10, 3.11, 6.8). The walls show up everywhere as well. City walls (s. הַרְמָה, *homah*) stretch from Damascus (assumed by the *gate bars* of 1.5), Gaza (1.7), Tyre (1.10) to Rabbah (1.14) and include the wall by which or on which Yahweh is standing in the plumb line (?) vision (7.7). A house wall (s. קִיר, *kir*) shows up in 5.19.

Amos’s fascination with building projects is that of obsessive hatred. They are targets of Yahweh’s wrath against which he will wreak vengeance upon the various nations whose crimes Amos denounces. In the initial oracles against the nations, for instance, through Amos Yahweh promises to visit every nation mentioned other than Israel with fire. As for Gaza (1.7) or Tyre (1.10), he promises to “send a fire upon the wall” of each respectively, a fire that in turn “shall devour her strongholds.” The other nations are promised some variation of this arrangement (Damascus (1.4), Edom (1.12), Ammon (1.14), Moab (2.2), and Judah (2.5)). Some nations are promised other things as well, but, with the exception of Israel, the common denominator in all these oracles is wall- and stronghold-devouring fire. Moreover, although the destruction by fire of walls and strongholds is threatened only in the oracles against the nations, a more general and ominous threat of fire hangs over the rest of *Amos* as well. Hearers or readers are admonished to “Seek the LORD and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour” (5.6), while in a vision of cosmic dimensions Amos declares: “Thus the Lord GOD showed me: behold, the Lord GOD was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land” (7.4).

Neither fire nor walls nor strongholds, however, are mentioned in the oracle against Israel. What is portended here is the coming of a day when it will be pressed down and paralyzed:

- ¹³ “Behold, I will press you down in
your place,
As a cart full of sheaves presses
down.
¹⁴ Flight shall perish from the swift,
and the strong shall not retain his
strength,
nor shall the mighty save his life;
¹⁵ he who handles the bow shall not
stand,

and he who is swift of foot shall
 not save himself,
 nor shall he who rides the horse
 save his life;
¹⁶ and he who is stout of heart among
 the mighty
 shall flee away naked in that day,”

Says the LORD. (2.13-16)

The notoriously difficult Hebrew of 2.13 has been susceptible to a range of interpretive translations. For instance, Wolff reads it to mean that a heavily laden cart presses down and breaks open the soft earth (171). Significantly, however, he sees this as a simile for earthquake, the second great agency of destruction in *Amos*. Earthquake is consonant not only with the action of shaking down that the RSV translators seem to have in mind but also with the paralysis that verses 13-15 portray. On this reading, the phrase “stout of heart” (2.16) is ironical. Those “among the mighty” who survive the earthquake do so only with their lives, having been reduced to fleeing the wrath of Yahweh as completely and shamefully naked as the poor who once fled them. Anyone who has lived through earthquakes knows how difficult it is to move when the ground is shaking. Although earthquake brings paralysis to Israel in the oracles against the nations, it brings a wholesale shattering of structures in the rest of *Amos*. In a theophany, Yahweh is depicted as the “GOD of hosts, [...] who touches the earth and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and sinks again, like the Nile of Egypt” (9.5, cf. 8.8). When Yahweh so commands, “the great house shall be smitten into fragments, and the little house into bits” (6.11).

Amos is full of such shattered structures, but it is not always clear to what to attribute them. For instance, 9.1 states that “I saw the LORD standing beside the altar, and he said, ‘Smite the capitals until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people’” (9.1). Here some other agent of destruction is working, probably the invading armies who introduce the sounds of battle heard in the book. “‘Moab,’” we are promised, “‘shall die amid uproar, amid shouting and the sound of the trumpet’” (2.2). And although the strongholds of Rabbah will be devoured by fire, this will be accompanied “‘with shouting in the day of battle, with a tempest in the day of the whirlwind’” (1.14). Human and cosmic forces will work in concert¹⁸ to destroy

¹⁸ It amounts to the same thing if one reads *tempest* and *whirlwind* as metaphors for *shouting* and *battle*: the parallelism of the two phrases emphasizes that the human agent is functioning as a cosmic force.

not only the Ammonites of Rabbah but also the Israelites, for through Amos Yahweh declares that “I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall upon the earth.¹⁹ / All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, “Evil shall not overtake or meet us”” (9.9-10).

The destruction of physical structures does not exhaust the punishments to be meted out to those who have incurred Amos’s (Yahweh’s) wrath, nor do fire, earthquake, and invading armies exhaust the agents of this wrath. These extend to the “recurring fourfold pattern of ‘pestilence, sword, famine, and captivity,’ a cluster of threats that are said to be YHWH’s characteristically ferocious manifestation of sovereignty over recalcitrant subjects” (Brueggemann, *Reverberations* 145). But it is remarkable that the physical structures just surveyed predominate as the targets for destruction throughout *Amos*—and equally remarkable that they are the types of structures that would kindle the wrath of a hard-done-by small holding transhumant pastoral nomad. If there is someone who does not love a wall—or strongholds-fortresses-citadels, for that matter—that someone is a person dependent upon transhumance for livelihood. It is not so much that walls enclose the ground but that they block the roads. In biblical times, the southern Levant never counted for much in terms of the power dynamics of the Middle East. But it occupied a strategic position between Egypt and the powers to the north. It was traversed by north-south trade routes upon which caravans travelled to market and shepherds, so I speculate, travelled to pasture. Because these trade routes could be and frequently were paths for invading armies, they were heavily fortified at strategic spots for defensive purposes. These are the strongholds-fortresses-citadels upon which Amos calls down destruction. Amos’s grievances against the strongholds of other nations are not specified, but a part of his (Yahweh’s) indictment against Israel states that “They do not know how to do right, [...] those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds” (3.10-11). If the military garrisons straddling the roads throughout the southern Levant were also administrative centres, as there is evidence that the strongholds of Israel were becoming in the eighth century (Dearman 95), it seems likely that these were places where the surplus labour of shepherds and other transhumants was extracted in the form of tolls, customs, and other taxes. Given the prickly, libertarian streak that Gottwald speculates characterized transhumant pastoralists (56 above), it is altogether probable that they would have labelled such strongholds as places of “violence and robbery” that they would relish seeing destroyed.

¹⁹ I accept Wolff’s gloss that “[w]e must ... think here of a sieve with coarse meshing, such as is used on the threshing floor; the grains fall through, but that which is useless—straw, stones, clods of earth—is retained” and cannot escape the shaking action (349).

The language of *Amos* is hardly that of a *noqed* such as Mesha. Fortuitously, we have an extra-biblical example of such *noqed* language on a stele Mesha erected at an entrance to his kingdom. Among other things he proclaims that

It was I (who) built Qarhoh, the wall of *the forests* and the wall of the citadel; I also built its gates and I built its towers and I built the king's house, and I made both of its reservoirs for water inside the town. And there was no cistern inside the town at Qarhoh, so I said to all the people, "Let each of you make a cistern for himself in his house!" And I cut *beams* for Qarhoh with Israelite captives. I built Aroer, and I made the highway in the Arnon (valley); I built Beth-baath, for it had been destroyed; I built Bezer — for it lay in ruins — with fifty men of Dibon, for all Dibon is (my) loyal dependency.

And I reigned [*in peace*] over the hundred towns which I had added to the land. And I built [...] Medeba and Beth-diblathan and Beth-baal-meon, and I set there the [...] of the land. (Allbright 320–1, italics, brackets, and bracketed material in original)

This proclamation suggests values that run exactly counter to those of *Amos*. Mesha prides himself upon having built the very type of structures that Amos would see violently destroyed: he proclaims that it is he who built the walls (including those of the citadel), gates, towers, reservoirs, cities, and highways of the realm in which the travelers now reading the stele find themselves. Indeed, he restored some places, such as Bezer, from ruins. To crown this construction programme, he built the great house from which he now rules as king. This is a far cry from a vision emerging, as Brewer would have it, from "the solitude of the steppe." It is more in line with that of that same King Uzziah whose name appears in the superscription to *Amos*, who "built towers in the wilderness and hewed out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and the plain" (2 Chr 26.10).

3.3. Class Animus in *Amos*

Traces of the consciously oppressed shepherd also appear in the class animus according to which the wrath of Amos (Yahweh) is distilled in a tone of almost unrelieved accusation and threat. I concede that in some instances entire populations are threatened. "[T]he inhabitants from the Valley of Aven," for instance, will be "cut off," and "the people of Syria shall go into exile to Kir" (1.5). But he "that holds the scepter from Beth-eden" (1.5) or "from Ash'kelon" is particularly singled out for punishment. From among the Ammonites, it is the king who "shall go into exile, he and his princes together" (1.15). Who, after all, built the

strongholds to be fired and the houses to be smashed: the winter houses and the summer houses, the great houses and the houses of ivory? I have noted that the oracle against Israel suggests earthquake (61 above), but it is the *swift*, the *strong*, the *mighty* (2.14), and the *stout of heart* (2.16) who are to be particularly afflicted. Some of these are warriors: we are told that “he who handles the bow shall not stand” and that he “who rides the horse [shall not] save his life” (2.15). But who employs these warriors and whose interests have they been hired to defend?

Among the Israelites, the finger points to those accused in the indictments with which this chapter opens, indictments of domestic crimes against the poor. By implication, the *they* being accused—the *they* who “sell the righteous for silver” (2.6) or “trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth” (2.7)—are the wealthy or relatively wealthy, most probably those who are benefiting the most from the “social revolution” in which, as Mays remarks, “older homogenous economic structure of Israel” was giving “way to sharp distinctions of wealth and privilege” (39 above). The finger points to the emerging upper class then consolidating its rule in Israel.

In Chapter 5 I discuss *Amos* as a fantasy of violence in greater depth. At this point, I stress that the tone of accusation and threat against the ruling classes of various states exemplifies the manner in which a hard-done-by small holding transhumant pastoral nomad might well have vented his spleen. Moreover, it confirms that whoever did speak this way was no *noqed*. There is no hint here of the pride manifest on Mesha’s stele. Nor is there any hint of joy in the life that has been thus far led. Indeed, hatred of the good life that some lead is one of the tone’s more salient aspects.

4. Conclusion

In my earlier search for Amos¹, I conclude that he was not originally from Tekoa. I adduce some linguistic evidence to support this contention, but I base it principally upon the argument that the language and themes of *Amos* reflect the theological traditions of the northern kingdom of Israel rather than the southern kingdom of Judah, where Tekoa is located. If Amos¹ wound up in Tekoa, I reason, he did not start out from there. Having now reconsidered Amos¹’s origins from a class rather than national perspective, I conclude that Amos¹ was not a *noqed*, not, at least, as we can make sense of that word from what we can construe from cross-cultural studies and the life and times of Mesha of Moab.

As we have seen, however, even ancient Jewish tradition holds that Amos was a man of means, that he owned not only the flocks he tended but the sycomore trees he cultivated (52 above). If I am right in my contention that Amos¹ was originally a small holding transhumant shepherd, it is nevertheless true that in fairly short order he came to be seen as a *noqed*: that is, he

came to be seen less and less as a man of the people with a social consciousness materially determined in the last instance by his class position and more and more as an idealized, individualized rich man with a conscience. Why a person with the court connections theorized by Bic, Craigie, and Rosenbaum should be wandering around Israel expressing himself with images and in tones of violent discontent has apparently led very few to question whether his designation as a *noqed* accurately reflects his position in the relations of production of his place and time. In the next chapter, which takes up the literary—and ideological—production of Amos^L, I will speculate why.

Chapter 3

The Production of *Amos*^L

Over the past decade I have been pondering several intriguing questions. One simply asks, “Who read the Book of Job?” It does not inquire about Job’s audience since its incorporation into the biblical compendium. It asks, rather, who read it when the ink was just dry on the scroll, way back before the common era, in some tributary agricultural backwater of an Asiatic empire? It inquires about Job’s intended audience, the group of readers to whom it was originally directed.

The other question asks: “Why did ancient Israelites and Judahites collect and preserve prophecy?” More specifically, it asks what motivated them to collect texts such as *Amos*, which so stridently castigates ruling class practices and so violently fantasizes the destruction of the present order? Moreover, it asks what enabled them to preserve such texts, quite possibly in the same archives where government records were kept?

Both questions involve literary production. I raise them to introduce the search for *Amos*^L, *Amos* as a literary product, with which, I argue, *Amos*^L, the historical kernel of *Amos*, stands in dialectic tension. In some circles, the proposition that *Amos* is a literary product—a product of human labour—is highly contentious. For *Amos* is not just any text but a sacred one. Its canonization has mystified¹ it in a way that may affect our ability to comprehend and study it as a product of human labour in the same way that we would, for instance, the poems of James Merrill or the novels of Ian McEwan. Marxism has evolved a descriptive theory that helps to clarify such complications, one that I take up in this chapter in the ensuing discussion of literary production as an ideological practice and of *Amos* specifically as a literature of alienation reflecting the political hegemony of the existing ruling class. At the outset, however, I stress that I pose the two questions with which this chapter begins to introduce the discussion of *Amos* as a literary product and to suggest what kind of literature it originally was and how and why it came to be written. I turn now to consider the first of these questions: “Who read the Book of Job?”

1. Who Read the Book of Job?

I have thought about this question in several ways. It is fair to speculate that the audience in question would not have been large. Before the advent of books and printing, the slow speed and high price of producing manuscripts ensured that any reading public would be small. We

¹ I am not necessarily using this term pejoratively. Theologically, the sacred nature of these texts is frequently accounted to be a mystery of faith.

might assume, as well, that another factor limiting audience size in greater biblical Israel would have been a low literacy rate, but Richard Hess adduces evidence to the contrary by pointing out the numerous “[e]pigraphic and biblical attestations to the early and ongoing presence of readers and writers at many levels of [greater] Israelite society” (346). The Bible, after all, was neither written nor compiled in a vacuum. The diversity of its contents and the centuries of history they reflect testify to an enduring literary culture.

Despite its disarmingly simple plot, Job is not popular literature. It poses philosophical questions that have not lost their currency since the day it appeared. The book was intended for people like the person who wrote it, a subgroup, I speculate, of the persons now generally labelled as scribes. Scribes were professional writers and readers. Undoubtedly, many performed routine clerical and administrative tasks within monarchical government, in which secular and sacred tasks were not distinguished. They maintained official correspondence, kept records and accounts, collected and dispersed supplies, and performed the daily administrative tasks of government from central or regional centres. But some, I argue, were undoubtedly educators, wise men who as part and parcel of their place in the relations of production deliberately reflected upon issues that included the origins and traditions of greater biblical Israel. A compendium like the Bible, a literary labour of centuries, attests to their existence, for it could not have been produced without scholarly institutions to foster and sustain the work.

The book of Job, I suspect, was originally written by and for those involved in such institutions: teachers, for the most part, whose professional lives were also engaged in the production of knowledge. It was taken up and studied principally by the relative few engaged in their various and sundry projects within an ancient academy. If you queried peddlers sitting in a marketplace outside its walls about the Book of Job, I suspect you would have drawn many blank stares. Job was a literature for the erudite.

This question interests me in the context of the present study for several reasons. First, I speculate that the same scholarly, scribal types whom I argue wrote and first read the book of Job also wrote and first read the book of *Amos*—and that they did so in consequence of their usual employment. This, in turn, has provided me with a conceptual framework in which to articulate a process by which *Amos* may have been produced, one that accounts for what I take to have been normal scribal functions at its time of composition. Second, the question of who read the Book of Job and, by extension, the Book of *Amos* leads to the further question of what those original readers would have taken these texts to be. I submit that they would have taken them to be what we would now call literature of high culture. Regardless of their quality, however, the point I am arguing is that they would have taken them to be literature, i.e., to be a product of human labour intended to address and to meet some human need: in their case, the need to

identify and associate themselves with an idealized historical tradition. The assertion, however, that *Amos* and, by extension, other prophetic biblical books are scribal literature of the type that I suspect Job to be is highly contentious. To elaborate upon this assertion, I now turn to the second question upon which I have been pondering for so long: “Why did ancient Israelites and Judahites collect and preserve prophecy?”

2. “Why Did Ancient Israelites and Judahites Collect and Preserve Prophecy?”: The Production of *Amos*

Job and *Amos* clearly differ generically. Few people, I suspect, would fail to recognize that Job is a didactic story. *Amos*, on the other hand, introduces itself as a collection of “the words of Amos” (1.1). Indeed, the question I am now considering assumes this in its very terms. Compared to the common view about the Book of Job, it assumes that *Amos* is more a transcription than a literary product. Althusser, we will recall, states that all human products result from social practice involving a labour of transformation (46 above). The common view of *Amos* is that the scribal labour involved in its production primarily involved the transformation of audible into written signs. This hardly qualifies as a labour of literary production as I have defined it, which involves transforming experience into meaning by impressing some pattern upon it according to the various lexical, syntactical, tropological, rhetorical, and other choices governing the organization of a text. Granted, those who view *Amos* as a transcription will admit that the scribes involved did undertake the literary work of arranging the oracles into a sequence. By and large, however, the scribes’ function is seen to have been secretarial. The literary work must be assigned to whoever produced the oracles, either Amos or Yahweh himself, in which case Amos is seen to function only as a messenger.

Critics who do address the production of *Amos* tend to view the scribes’ function as a hybrid of secretarial and literary labour. For example, Wolff’s attribution of three of his six strata of redaction to later centuries clearly views the scribal work therein entailed as literary production. But, for the most part, he proceeds on the assumption that the core of *Amos* is a transcription. As we have seen, he assumes the existence of an Old School of Amos that included at least one eyewitness of Amos¹’s words and activities (10 above). He attributes his third stratum of redaction to this school, a stratum that includes Amos’s dispute with Amaziah (7.10-17) upon which I have focussed much of my attention. This school, he insists, “still had at its disposal remembered deeds and sayings of the prophet” (108). He does not, however, further specify how it came to have access to this material. He is even less specific as to how and by whom the materials in his first two strata were collected. “For the most part,” he says, along with the

material in the third stratum they “derive from Amos himself and his contemporary disciples” (107) and leaves it at that.

Although I do think that *Amos* is a hybrid product of scribal secretarial and literary labour, I suspect Wolff’s theory of an “Old School of Amos” and possibly other contemporary disciples is an idealist fallacy. His notion of the secretarial work of ancient scribes is too etherealized to bear the weight an historical account demands. A materialist analysis must make sense of labour output in terms of the material exigencies of the producers’ daily lives. Highly speculative though it may be, the reconstruction of Amos¹ offered in the previous chapter has the virtue of not abstracting him from the social matrix in which he lived and produced the necessities of life. It uses what we can theorize about the life of a shepherd in the highlands of Canaan to assess both the biographical scraps we are offered about him and the words that are attributed to him. In terms of those productive activities, it makes sense that, in addition to being a shepherd, he could also be a dresser of sycomore trees. It makes sense that he could come knowledgeable and expressively to articulate an experience of oppression that poor people could adopt as their own. It makes sense that he could appear at a place like Bethel to denounce that oppression caustically in terms of a hatred for walls, strongholds, temples, great houses, and the other physical symbols of an emerging ruling class consolidating its power. Before we can subscribe to an “Old School of Amos,” we should demand to know how to make similar sense of its members’ labour output in terms of their daily, productive activities.

Wolff does not doubt that Amos¹ supported himself through pastoral pursuits. He concedes that “he made his living raising livestock and as a tender of mulberry trees.” But he does not doubt, for all that, that Amos¹ was also a prophet, despite the fact that he “declined to be addressed as a professional prophet,” i.e., as a member of a prophetic guild. He also concedes that Amos¹ was peripatetic. But he does not connect his travels to the necessities of sheep tending. He argues, rather, for “the migratory character of [Amos’s] work” on the grounds that “he stirred up unrest in at least two localities, and perhaps three, of the northern kingdom”: Samaria (3:9; 4:1; 6:1), Bethel (7:10-17), and perhaps Gilgal (5:5).² He writes about Amos¹’s movements only in association with what he calls his “prophetic ministry,” as if this were the only work worth considering in a commentary on *Amos* (90).

² For Wolff the textual evidence for Amos’s presence in Gilgal is less compelling than for Bethel or Samaria. “[N]o one contests,” he states, “the fact that Amos [...] spoke out in the sanctuary of Bethel,” and he argues that the oracles associated with Samaria “become more meaningful when it is assumed that they were proclaimed” there (90). Nothing in the text seems to connect Amos to Gilgal other than its appearance as a place name.

In line with his conviction that Amos¹ is a prophet, Wolff accords him his prophetic due: as befits his conception of a prophet, he has Amos¹ not only attracting disciples but engendering a school. As I have already suggested, this aspect of Wolff's presentation is puzzling. How are we to think of these disciples who transcribed the words of Amos¹: as ancient groupies following their guru around lest they miss a single flash of oracular inspiration? And how are we to think of their school, the "Old School of Amos": as an ancient analogue, perhaps, of the Frankfurt school of critical theory or the Chicago school of economics? These questions are facetious, but they respond to some fuzzy thinking in Wolff that invites some level of gentle ridicule. It is simply too facile, whenever the question of the production of a biblical text arises, to posit the existence of some school and leave it at that. He needs to be more specific. Can we seriously believe that people followed Amos¹ around like modern field anthropologists, taking down his every word? If not, how did this "Old School of Amos" acquire its materials? What position did its members occupy in the relations of production that allowed them to attend to these materials—that allowed and motivated them to spend time and energy on them? And how did they eat while doing so? Who sponsored this work?

A better approach to the production of *Amos* involves taking a more practical view of the daily, secretarial work of scribes. I suspect that *Amos* itself does preserve an example of this work, one that, moreover, suggests how the memory of Amos¹ and his words may have been originally preserved. It is the passage that introduces Amos's dispute with Amaziah:

¹⁰ Then Amazi'ah the priest of Bethel sent to Jerobo'am king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired [קשר] against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land [ארץ] is not able to bear all his words. ¹¹ For thus Amos has said, 'Jerobo'am shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'" (7.10-11)

Whoever wrote this claims to be quoting from an official dispatch from the priest Amaziah to his king, Jeroboam. There can be no doubt that Amaziah is a royal functionary. After all, he goes on to describe the temple at Bethel where he serves as "the king's sanctuary," and he further qualifies it as "a temple of the kingdom" (7.13).³ The dispatch itself, the composition of which Amaziah would have entrusted to a scribe, has a ring of authenticity. It is precisely the type of document that a very accomplished scribe would have produced in Amaziah's behalf. In describing Amos¹'s activity at Bethel, the scribe uses the word קשר (*qasfar*: *bind, league together, con-*

³ The temple in Bethel had a status within Israel equal to that of the temple in Jerusalem within Judah.

spire) to accuse him of conspiracy. But Andersen and Freedman remark, quite correctly in my view, that “there is no indication that Amos was involved in political machinations to achieve the fulfillment of his own prophecies” (767). In his encounter with Amaziah, Amos¹ is portrayed as a lone ranger, as many shepherds tended to be. One cannot conspire in the singular: there must be co-conspirators for there to be any conspiracy at all. But קשר is precisely the type of word that a skilled scribe would have chosen for its rhetorical effect. By characterizing Amos¹’s activities as conspiratorial, the scribe thereby heightens their danger—and Amaziah’s importance. “There are dangerous characters roaming around here,” Amaziah seems to be telling the king, “who aim at your destruction.” But he immediately reduces the tension thereby created by declaring that “the land [ארץ] is not able to bear all his words” (10). Translating ארץ (eret) as *land* here seems misleading. It does mean that, but it can also mean the inhabitants of a land, just as in English we can ask people from what land they come when inquiring about a population. That meaning fits better here.⁴ As Andersen and Freedman point out, by using it Amaziah “assures the king that Amos has no popular support” (766). The message of Amaziah to the king, therefore, implies that, despite these being perilous times, the people here remain loyal to us—i.e., to you through me—by virtue of my vigilance and my capacities.

It is, of course, impossible to determine whether *Amos* 7.10-11 quotes or incorporates material from an official dispatch verbatim.⁵ At the very least, however, it is possible that it does, for scribes such as the one we can imagine composing Amaziah’s correspondence would also have been responsible for archiving it against a response and for future reference. The Deuteronomic History of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (Deuteronomy through Kings) refers continually to what must have been a fruit of such scribal archiving, i.e., to the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel, which were apparently still available to those who wrote this history hundreds of years after the time of *Amos* and the fall of the northern kingdom.⁶

More significantly, no theory of the existence of a group of disciples such as an Old School of Amos is necessary to account for the recording and preserving of Amos¹’s words at a place like Bethel. If Amos¹ had felt compelled to prophesy, it seems altogether likely that he

⁴ The JPS version is better: “The country cannot endure the things he is saying.”

⁵ The possibility that the dispatch would have been delivered orally by a messenger does not preclude the archiving of its written text.

⁶ For most of their subsequent history, what had been the kingdoms of Israel and Judah remained united under succeeding empires. Administrators in all times and places, I submit, have ever been loath to discard official records.

would have done so at Bethel, where cult prophets were employed and, presumably, their prophecy was publicly heard at least on festive occasions. On the other hand, if Amos¹ had felt compelled to vent his confrontational spleen concerning burgeoning class inequalities and their social consequences, it also seems altogether likely that he would have done so at Bethel. After all, as I have already pointed out, the sacred and the secular were not distinguished. The seats of official power were identical for each. The words of anyone assailing that power at Bethel would have been taken down, considered, perhaps acted upon, and then filed away, available to anyone among future generations of scribes who took an interest in them.

In fact, if Amos¹'s words as reported in 7.11 were taken from a state archive, no theory that they were originally uttered or understood as prophecy is necessary to account for their presence. Any threat directed against the monarch or his realm would qualify. They lack the formulae of prophetic speech—that, among other things, attribute the messages to Yahweh—that typify the oracles in *Amos*.⁷ On the other hand, Amaziah's immediate response to these words does confirm his belief that Amos is prophesying. For we are told that

¹² [...]Amazi'ah said to Amos, "O seer [הוֹרֵא], go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there; ¹³ but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

But these lines clearly form no part of the quotation in 7.10-11 that precedes them. Amaziah's response returns to the thread of a narrative into which archival material has been interpolated. What I suspect we have here is a literary production (7.12-13) inspired by and elaborating upon a scribal dispatch (7.10-11), a dispatch from an archive typifying the secretarial work done by scribes.

This construal of scribal secretarial work in terms of writing and archiving official documents, in this case relating to rural discontent, puts flesh upon Wolff's spiritualized notion of this same work as somehow dedicated to recording the words of recognized holy men wandering around Israel. One response, then, to the question of why ancient Israelites and Judahites collected and preserved prophecy is to wonder, in turn, whether that question assumes something that should be demonstrated. Did ancient Israelites and Judahites, in fact, collect prophecy? Or did they create it in interpreting their own historical chronicle? In the hindsight of history, Amos's declaration that "Jerobo'am shall die by the sword, and Israel must go into exile away from his land" certainly seems prophetic, if we mean by that term the ability to foretell the future. But would it have been so understood by those who first heard it, if it were, as I suspect, uttered by a small-holding transhumant shepherd? Might it not, rather, have been understood as rather

⁷ For a formal account of the basic forms of prophetic speech, see Westermann *passim*.

direful wishful thinking, as an exasperated venting of frustration? Might it not, in fact, have been accepted as the informed opinion of a perceptive traveler able to detect a power shift in the tide of international affairs and to read the handwriting on the wall concerning what this likely meant for the future of Israel? In view of this possibility, what is the link between Amos's sheep tending and Amos's prophesying?

Clearly, Wolff and other critics find this link in Amos's own conviction that he was called to prophesy, which he declares immediately after denying that he is a prophet by nevertheless proclaiming that "the LORD took me from following the flock, and [...] said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" (7.15). Moreover, words attributed to him declare the necessity to prophesy given the parlous signs of the times and strongly imply that those who do are to be counted among the Lord God's "servants the prophets" (3.3-8). Such convictions have persuaded millennia of exegetes to conceptualize Amos's life's work primarily in terms of prophetic labour, a labour that was peripatetic by virtue of the command to go out and prophesy to Israel as a whole. Yet this link becomes more difficult to establish as an historical datum if these words preserve something other than the secretarial transcription of a scribe recorded some contentious day when Amos¹ showed up at Bethel. I suspect that the link between Amos the shepherd and Amos the prophet was forged in the process of scholarly reflection long after the former was dust. I suspect, in fact, that Amos the prophet is principally a literary product, the result of a labour of transformation through which Amos¹ was recast as Amos^L.

I am not the only person to suspect this. I have already noted R. P. Carroll's suspicion that biblical writers "helped to *invent* the ancient prophets as biographical figures" by assigning various collections of sayings to them in the superscriptions of the prophetic books (6 above). He goes beyond this elsewhere to argue that prophets in general were scribal inventions. He points out that "[t]he problem of defining the term 'prophet' and thereby 'prophecy' dogs biblical scholarship and undermines much of what passes for it" ("Prophecy" 209). Considerable scholarly attention, such as that of Wilson and Petersen, has certainly been paid to defining prophetic roles and functions in biblical times. The text itself is not too helpful in spelling these out. Because prophets seem to address their contemporaries, we might assume that those contemporaries understood their role and function, thereby obviating any necessity of specifying it. However, it could be that the text is mute on the subject because its compilers had no clearer an idea about prophets and prophecy than we do. Carroll, at least, suspects this was the case. "The biblical traditions," he claims,

themselves are equally unsure of, and indefinite about, *what* a prophet is, *who* is a prophet, and *whether* prophets are or are not a good thing. That is, the Hebrew Bible presents so many different, ambiguous and ambivalent stories and treat-

ments of prophets that the modern reader has to admit that ancient Israelite writers had no clear image of what a prophet is or should be. (“Prophecy” 213)

To support this conclusion, Carroll summarizes scholarly work on the biblical tendency “to refer to all significant figures as ‘prophets,’” seeing it as a blanket term applied retroactively to any persons remembered to possess the oratorical power to move others, insisting that “there is no *prima facie* evidence for regarding any of these speakers as ‘prophets’ except for the secondary editing of the traditions and later traditional readings of the Bible” (213). Graeme Auld, for one, is convinced of this. Although cult prophets did function in the eighth century, he argues that prophetic titles such as those that appear in *Amos* were developed only from the mid-sixth century onwards and anachronistically applied to earlier texts by later redactors (*passim*). In a citation of Auld’s article, James Linville states that Auld “argues that the term ‘prophecy’ was anachronistically applied to the works of poets” (402). Although Auld makes no such argument, Linville’s note nevertheless intriguingly suggests what those who uttered speeches later identified as prophetic originally might have been: poets, poets recast as prophets at a later time when the role of prophets had become institutionalized and the activity of prophesying had come to be more greatly esteemed. Some of them may also have been shepherds, especially those who, in their capacity as disseminators of news, developed rhetorical or poetic skills to make their oratory memorable.

Quite clearly, this is a highly contentious point of view. The idea that greater biblical Israel was a place—not only *a* place, but, preeminently, *the* place—where prophets and their disciples wandered around is so firmly ingrained in the western imagination that it seems unassailable, particularly since it serves as a model for Jesus and his disciples. But unless someone can better specify how a person responding to a call to a peripatetic prophetic ministry highly critical of the existing ruling class supported not only himself but a band of disciples as they wandered around, it does not seem likely that much if any wandering could have been initiated in response to such a call. It seems more likely that persons who already wandered as a normal part of their place in the existing relations of production would develop quasi-prophetic skills (as those skills would later come to be romanticized) as part of their strategy to secure forage and shelter. As I propose in Chapter 2, these would include the skills of a news gatherer and disseminator (seer and story-teller). Quite conceivably, a transhumant pastoralist might learn, as a member of a oppressed underclass to whose experience he was giving shape, as Auden said of Yeats, to “Sing of human unsuccess / In a rapture of distress” (294, lines 60–1).

3. *Amos* as a Literary Production

It is impossible to determine what popular legends, if any, may have coalesced around the name of Amos. All we appear to have are transcribed records that appear to have been drawn from an archive. As testified by the presence of glosses such as the superscription (1.1) and the evidence of the careful arrangement of oracles, *Amos* is clearly edited. Moreover, it incorporates various conventions that distinguish prophetic literature generally. Among these may be the prophetic commissioning to which Amos alludes in 7.15. Petersen observes that “the stereotypic nature of these accounts” in books in which they do appear “makes claims for the historical veracity difficult to adjudicate,” which is a polite, scholarly way of intimating that somebody made them up, perhaps to give authority to words considered prophetic when they were eventually collected (76). He mounts an ingenious argument based upon a personal communication from S. Dean McBride that the vision report (7.7-8) immediately preceding the biographical fragment we have been considering (7.10-17) contains just such a prophetic commissioning account, a fact obscured by a pun so tortuously obscure that even the biblical editors missed it (77–78).⁸ Indeed, Shalom Paul expresses his conviction that the language in this passage is so convoluted that Amos himself has no clear idea what Yahweh means by using it (235). Regardless of the merits of McBride’s interpretation, he is probably correct that it involves some word play. His analysis illuminates the literary activity at the heart of the production of *Amos*, an activity that suggests the the mindset that cast certain psalms and a part of Lamentations as acrostics.⁹

Even if McBride proves not to have made a convincing case that the vision report in question is a conventional commissioning account, it cannot be doubted that *Amos*, however it originated, ultimately received the impress of generic conventions that made it a prophetic book. The oracles against the nations testify to such conventions. As John Hayes points out, “Every prophetic book in the OT, with the exception of Hosea, contains oracles against non-Israelite

⁸ I refer here to the passage in which the RSV editors include the image of a *plumb line* (see 73, note 17 above).

⁹ Petersen considers the divine commissioning account to be a distinctive, identifying feature of Judahite prophecy (e.g., First and Second Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel). Because he assumes that *Amos* is of southern, Judahite provenance, the apparent absence of a such a stereotypic account puzzles him and inclines him to accept McBride’s discovery of one. The possible presence of such an account in *Amos*, however, does not dissuade me that it is northern, Israelite provenance. The final editing had to have been done somewhere else, most likely in Judah.

nations.” Very perceptively, he goes on to remark that “[t]hese speeches against foreign powers represent a major problem-area for exegetes and commentators since they sit like extraneous literary and theological blocks within the prophetic books” (81). It is altogether natural to see *Amos’s* oracles against the nations, grouped together as they are at the beginning of the book and similarly patterned as they are in many respects, as just such a block—from one particular source—and to study them as such. Their cohesiveness certainly suggests that they were imported *en bloc* from somewhere. I argue, however, that the preoccupation of many scholars with identifying historical sources may have blinded some to the possibility that the problem to which Hayes alludes—that of the oracles against the nations sitting “like extraneous literary and theological blocks within the prophetic books”—may be at least partly literary. As I intimate above, it may well have been that their compilers were faced with literary conventions that dictated that prophetic books should have such blocks. Of course, if *Amos* were the first prophetic book, its compilers would have no such model to follow. But this observation begs the question of which compilers one is talking about—those who compiled the original oracles or those who were still reshaping them centuries later, at the time, for instance, when the Book of the Twelve itself was being compiled.

The formulaic nature of the oracles does suggest material that may have been chanted as some type of oracular refrain. In the RSV, for instance, each begins with the formula “Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of [name of a nation], and for four, I will not revoke the punishment’” (1.3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2.1, 4, 6).¹⁰ However, Barton reviews evidence that these formulae derive either from cultic observances or from the execration texts of international treaties (8), either or both of which is quite possible but which, in any case, suggests material deriving from a ruling-class establishment milieu. Moreover, an analysis of the sequence in which the oracles have been arranged in terms of the crimes denounced points to a very deliberate literary labour to achieve a rhetorical effect. The first six nations brought to the bar are indicted for their military conduct: indeed, Amos^L seems to be accusing them of war crimes. Damascus has

¹⁰ The main clause in this formula is a notorious Amosian interpretive crux. By glossing the final three words with “Heb *cause it to return*,” the RSV translators admit that, like the legions who have read it over the millennia, they can only guess at what it means, which they do with “I will not revoke the punishment.” Personally, I prefer the more literal translation: “Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of [name of a nation], and for four, I will not cause it to return.’” I am persuaded by Linville that in each instance the pronoun *it* refers back to Yahweh’s *voice* in 1.2: “‘The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers’” (416–7). This flies in the face of Wolff’s schema, which assigns 1.2 to a stratum some 100+ years later than that of most of these oracles, but that is another problem (112).

“threshed Gilead [traditional Israelite territory] with threshing sledges of iron” (1.3), Gaza has “carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom” (1.6), and Tyre has “delivered up a whole people to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood [probably treaty obligations]” (1.9). Understanding *brother* to mean *treaty partner* as suggested in the oracle just quoted, Edom also seems to be accused of some international crime, for “he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever” (1.11). Ammon has “ripped up women with child in Gilead, that they may enlarge their border [at Israel’s expense]” (1.13), and Moab has “burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom” (2.1).

The exceptions to the rule that the nations named are accused of war crimes are Judah and Israel. Judah is accused of violating its covenant with Yahweh, for “they [the Judahites] have rejected the law of the LORD, and have not kept his statutes, but their lives have led them astray, after which their fathers walked” (2.4). The real fly in the ointment, however, is the indictment against Israel, which, as the superscription declares, is the true subject of the words that Amos saw. There is not a hint of war crimes here. It makes sense that Israel should be the sticking point. Hayes observes that such oracles were originally curses hurled at enemies at the onset of battle (81–87) that eventually became ritualized within the cult (87–92). But, as the *domestic* target of the oracles in *Amos*, Israel is hardly a foreign power.¹¹

Barton observes that “Most commentators agree that these oracles build up to a climax in the oracle against Israel, and that the prophet’s intention is to startle his hearers by suddenly turning on them after lulling them into a false sense of their own security by denouncing their neighbours” (36). This tactic implies that the actions of the rich against the poor within Israel that *Amos* denounces are equivalent to the war crimes of the other nations, all of whom had been at war against Israel at one time or another. The upshot is that, because of these actions, Israel has become foreign to Yahweh as well. It could be argued that the rhetorical effect achieved by the sequencing of these oracles is simply a mark of good oratory. But the use of skills calculated to achieve an oratorical effect is foreign to the inspired immediacy characterizing prophecy. The hand of some non-prophetic type at home within a ruling-class establishment, skilled in writing and reading and well-versed in the history and traditions of Israel, is evident throughout the oracles against the nations.

I suspect the non-prophetic types whose work I detect in the pun(s) in the vision reports and in the arrangement of oracles are the same class of academics who wrote the Book of Job. Moreover, I suspect they are the same academic scribes who compiled the Bible itself, which I

¹¹ Although Judah also worships Yahweh, it is still a nation foreign to Israel.

see as an intellectual undertaking of great complexity aimed principally at coming to terms with several national catastrophes: the conquest and reduction of Israel and, more particularly, of Judah to tributary provinces in someone else's empire. In many respects, it is an edition of various source materials, primary and secondary, bearing upon the history of greater biblical Israel. If, while compiling these sources, the scribes in question came across materials critical of the Israelite monarchy that seemed in hindsight to have been prophetic, they may well have been encouraged to cast them up as prophecy. Therefore, if my question why ancient Israelites and Judahites collected and preserved prophecy be understood to ask why scribes collected material that castigated a regime they were seen to serve, I suggest they did nothing of the sort. They collected, rather, materials to enable them to analyze some predecessor regime that had failed.

This intellectualizing about the traditions of greater biblical Israel connects modern biblical scholars to the book's ancient compilers. As they configured their past into a structure of ideas, these compilers abstracted various persons named in their sources from the material drudgery of their daily lives and recast them according to nobler ideals. In the process a dirty, sweating transhumant shepherd like Amos¹ got *noqeded*, i.e., transformed into some type of agricultural potentate. The words attributed to him have been amplified and reworked into a rhetoric so sophisticated that no one could ever take his protest that he was "a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore trees" too seriously. As we have seen, early Jewish lore holds that Amos¹ was both a sheep breeder and landowner of considerable means (56 above, fn 16). As for modern critics, some, such as Petersen, simply pass over Amos's disclaimer that he is no prophet without comment. Others, such as Wolff, while acknowledging that Amos had a day job, downplay it, referring to it only in passing as a detail they must acknowledge. Wolff's interest centres on what he calls Amos's "prophetic ministry" (90). Willy Schottroff in "The Prophet Amos: A Socio-Historical Assessment of His Ministry" provides another case in point. Although he devotes a paragraph to the day job (28–29), he focuses almost exclusively upon what he sees as Amos's work of prophetic ministry, a labour preserved, as in Wolff, by equally undefined "disciples and other supporters" (29). Other scholars adopt a different approach to resolving the shepherd-prophet dilemma. Rather than downplaying Amos's pastoral activities, they accentuate them by speculating upon the implications of his being a *noqed*. As I point out in Chapter 2, Bic, Craigie, and Rosenbaum speculate that it connected him to the royal establishment as a civil servant. Regardless of the strategy employed, however, the conclusion seems to be universal: that the person presented to the world in *Amos*, Amos¹, "does not," as Blenkinsopp puts it, "warrant the image of an uneducated rustic visionary" (79). This view is so ingrained that it has assumed the characteristics of an ideology, to a consideration of which I now turn.

4. Ideology

Simply put, ideology is the network of ideas comprising the unacknowledged framework within which most conscious thought transpires. Althusser's most influential contribution to the theory of ideology emerges in his delineation of the processes involved in shaping human collectivities into distinct societies. He describes ideology in relation to practice, which, as we have seen, he defines as the transformative labour process through which we produce not only the material goods required to meet our physical needs but the complex superstructures of society itself—the social world in which we live. The most intellectually provocative aspect of his work on ideology has been his elucidation of its concealed political basis, its tendency to maintain the societies to which it gives shape as networks of asymmetrical relationships in which certain elements inevitably dominate others—in short, as structures in dominance.

Althusser writes about ideology from various perspectives. In construing the development of Marx's thought, he pinpoints the epistemological break initiating the materialist revolution in philosophy in Marx's realization that the idealist tradition of thinking about human nature in terms of universal qualities in which each person shares is simply an ingrained habit of thought, an ideology to be challenged and rejected to establish social thinking upon a scientific basis through the analysis of material processes. In language obviously influenced by Freud's *Traumdeutung*, Althusser elaborates upon Marx's

radical suppression of philosophy [...] inscribed in so many words in *The German Ideology* [1845-46].^[12] It is essential, says Marx in that work, to get rid of all philosophical fancies and turn to the study of positive reality, to tear aside the veil of philosophy and at least see reality for what it is.

The *German Ideology* bases this suppression of philosophy on a theory of philosophy as a hallucination and mystification, or to go further, a *dream*, manufactured from what I shall call the day's residues endowed with a purely imaginary existence in which the order of things is inverted. Philosophy, like religion and ethics, is only ideology; it has no history, everything which seems to happen in it really happens outside it, in the only real history, the history of the material life of men. (“Lenin and Philosophy” 41, emphasis original)

The key insights here are that the idealist ideology in which Marx was nurtured casts a veil over reality that conceals its true nature and that Marx took it upon himself to rip that veil off. How-

¹² Identified by Althusser with the *Theses on Feuerbach* as the “Works of the Break” (“From *Capital*” 39).

ever, despite Althusser's continual demands for philosophical rigour, his own writing about how idealist ideology in fact veils or distorts reality is remarkably imprecise. Reading Althusser, it is difficult to determine if idealist ideology distorts by virtue of being idealist or by virtue of being ideological. He frequently conflates the two as if they were identical. He makes a better case that the dragon Marx set out to slay was, in fact, idealism. Given Marx's proclivity to analyze social life in terms of dynamic processes he considered to be irreducibly complex, he could not fail to see that idealist abstractions distort the sense of our own involvement in these processes by imposing stabilizing patterns or structures upon them. This imposition of structure upon process necessarily valorizes one moment of that process among its many moments—one possibility—as representative of all its moments and possibilities. In the elegant dictum Stephen Heath attributes to Roland Barthes, the effect of such distortion is “to transform ‘history into nature’”(21). It veils the contingency of our real conditions of existence by eternalizing one historical moment—one historical configuration—as natural. The assessment that ideology *per se* distorts, however, cannot rest upon any specific content. It can only arise from a functional analysis. Although Althusser does not say this, channeling thought ideology distorts by limiting our sense of the possible, a factor best conceived in terms of power, for in and through its power to limit our sense of the possible the political dimension of ideology becomes most clearly manifest.

Althusser's more incisive work on ideology involves identifying the function of dominant ideologies in the formation of subjects and the reproduction of the social order.¹³ In his well-known essay “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” he observes that the task of molding subjects is entrusted by the state to various agencies or “state apparatuses,” previously the church and currently the schools. He argues that the success of these agencies in discharging this task depends upon their effectively inculcating existing habits of thought whereby the subjects formed persistently misapprehend their relation “to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, “Ideology” 153).¹⁴ “What do children learn at school?” he asks. Techniques, for one thing, and

¹³ Indeed, Stuart Hall points out that the best illustration Althusser adduces that ideology is a material force is its operation “in and through the production of subjects” (48).

¹⁴ The “Glossary” edited by Althusser and supplied by Ben Brewster in his English translation of Althusser's and Etienne Balibar's *Reading Capital* provides a more general definition of ideology:

Ideology is the “lived” relation between men and their world, or a reflected form of this unconscious relation, for instance, a “philosophy,” etc. It is distinguished from a science not by its falsity, for it can be coherent and logical (for instance, theology), but by the fact that the practico-social predominates in it over the theoretical, over knowledge. Historically, it precedes the science that is produced

concepts for fitting into society, for another. “They go varying distances in their studies,” he tells us,

but at any rate they learn to read, to write and to add—i.e. a number of techniques, and a number of other things as well, including elements (which may be rudimentary or on the contrary thoroughgoing) of “scientific” or “literary culture”, which are directly useful in the different jobs in production (one instruction for manual workers, another for technicians, a third for engineers, a final one for higher management, etc.). Thus they learn “know-how”.

But besides these techniques and knowledges, and in learning them, children at school also learn the “rules” of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is “destined” for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination. (“Ideology” 127–28)

The acquisition of techniques or job skills is obviously critical if goods are to be produced, but it will hardly suffice unless the application of such skills is harmonized by a sense of the appropriate relations of production—appropriate, that is, in the view of those organizing the instruction. Children are sent to school ostensibly to learn skills but in the last instance to imbibe as ideologies the rules that govern their formation into a specific society, rules for acting and thinking that they must accept and promote as their own. The enduring effectiveness of this process—in liberal western democracies, at least—depends upon ingraining the misconception in those under tutelage that they are autonomous subjects of consciousness who freely choose the places in the social structure for which they are trained and to which, in fact, they are assigned. Therefore, ideology as here conceived by Althusser is not just any ingrained system of thought but one that sustains the social structure by concealing or veiling our real conditions of existence

by making an epistemological break with it, but it survives alongside science as an essential element of every social formation, including a socialist and even a communist society. (314)

Much of Althusser’s writing deals with ideology in this broader sense of it being the “unconscious ... practico-social” dimension of our relation to our world. But he does insist that ideology causes us to misconstrue our sense of how we relate to our “real conditions of existence.” It is to this somewhat narrower sense of ideology as an ingrained or unconscious distortion that most of my remarks apply.

by misrepresenting them—to others, perhaps, but most particularly to ourselves—as better than they actually are.

Althusser elaborates the means by which a particular social configuration is sustained ideologically in the interests of a dominant class, thereby demonstrating that ideological practice is also political practice. Political struggle among classes is fought primarily in terms of ideology. Indeed, in the “Preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*,” Marx conceives the social superstructure, which comprises the systems such as law, politics, philosophy, religion, art and science in which social consciousness becomes manifest, as a theatre of “ideological forms in which men become conscious of [their conflicts] and fight it out” (qtd. in Williams, *Culture* 258). Given this conception of philosophy, Althusser argues that, correctly understood, it is “a practice of political intervention carried out in a theoretical form” (“Lenin Before Hegel” 105). “All philosophy,” he insists, “expresses a class position, a ‘partisanship’ in the great debate which dominates the whole history of philosophy, the debate between idealism and materialism” (105–06), a struggle in which Marxist philosophers are called to participate.¹⁵ As Althusser sees it, Marxist philosophy—dialectical materialism—is no less ideological than idealist philosophy. Its aim is political. It seeks to reveal the class interest behind the idealist transformation of history into nature that Barthes describes (80 above). In doing so, it aims to reverse the process, to transform nature back into history by illustrating that social configurations that idealism posits as immutably natural are merely historical contingencies subject to ongoing change. Ultimately, its aim is revolutionary (“Lenin Before Hegel” 106).

4.1. The *Noqeding* (and Prophetizing) of Amos¹

Gerhard von Rad writes very perceptively about the scribal transformation of traditional, cultic materials into biblical literature. The process of detaching such traditions “from the locality with which they had cultic associations,” he reasons, inevitably “caused their content to become highly spiritualised” (von Rad, “Form” 49). Although I argue against Bic, Craigie, and Rosenbaum that the provenance of *Amos* is not the cult but a record (or memory) of an angry shepherd, von Rad’s observation applies to the transformation of this shepherd into literature as

¹⁵ Althusser’s response to this call gives his writing a polemic edge that can lead him to overstate his positions. In consequence, he frequently does not express himself with the subtlety he attributes to Marx—particularly to Marx’s appreciation of social process as an ever-ramifying response to the never-ending stream of contradiction animating the pulse of social existence. To some extent Thompson is responding to Althusser’s stridency when he remarks that social process is not cut and dried as Althusser makes it out to be (29 above).

well. In the process Amos^L was abstracted from the material cares of his daily life and invested with the aura of a man with a ministry to something more glorious than sheep. This literary articulation has been decisive: for millennia of readers, the literary Amos, Amos^L, the sage who could see the future, has been Amos, pure and simple. His spiritualization has been so effective that even critics such as Schottroff do not wonder how this über-shepherd “was able to acquire a high level of self-expression and a familiarity with the broad range of Israelite educational tradition” (29), accomplishments most typically attributable to the academically-oriented scribes who undoubtedly edited the text.

In creating Amos^L largely in their own image (or according to their own ideals), the scribes involved were engaging in a practice—a labour of transformation—susceptible to producing ideology along lines that Althusser describes. Amos^L's real conditions of existence were distorted. In the *noqeding* process, he came to be represented, if not beyond the necessity of daily, physical labour, at least as a person with the leisure and the means to speculate and to cultivate his mind. His gentrification led by an easy step, despite his disclaimer preserved in the text, to his prophetization. Although I have touched upon the attempts of scholars such as Petersen and Wilson to figure out conclusively what the various intermediaries named in the Bible actually did, it is sufficient for my argument to state that the biblical compilers conceived them as holy people—as people, to adapt a phrase from von Rad, in whom faith lived freely (*Holy* 39)—and to leave it at that.¹⁶ Von Rad's contention that biblical sources were spiritualized in the course of their compilation illuminates the production of Amos^L, leaving us with the image of a person whose only real concern in life was the oppression of the poor. Furthermore, this spiritualizing bias of the compilers' practice significantly contributed to the emergence of one of the most powerful ideologies governing the reading of the text for millennia: that, to borrow von Rad's words once again, a “complex of religious ideas about God and creation, the person, sin and forgiveness, and so forth hover[ed] over the people of Israel like a spiritual cloud” (39). A principal beneficiary of this spiritualizing process has been the prophets, over whom the spiritual cloud has remained particularly dense ever since.

One effect of the biblical writers' practice of abstracting idealized characters from their material bases has been to divinize the text they populate: to saturate it with logos. In semiotic language clearly reminiscent of Althusser's writing on ideology, Fernando Belo states that “the ideological text brought into existence by the establishment of the logos (or the god) effects a

¹⁶ Following Carroll's lead, I believe the biblical sources about intermediaries are so vague that the question of precisely what any of them actually did—if, in fact, they existed at all—will never be answered.

division between the signifier (ever-already in a textual body) and the signified (which is put in an imaginary relation¹⁷ with the logos and with things).” The signifier in the literary as well as the social text is its material body, which, as we have seen, Marx envisions in terms of an ever-pre-given complexity from which he never derogates. The division that a logocentric text such as *Amos* effects between its material body and the meaning (the signified) with which we invest it is distorted by an idealizing simplification that promises to make all things clear, which encourages, Belo argues, “reading in which the elements of the whole are isolated from what determines them.” Moreover, the truth values that regnant ideologies attribute to certain logocentric texts largely determines the manner in which they are read. Belo observes that, “as readers fascinated by rational evidence (or divine revelation) or even by literary beauty or by the scholarly authority of the specialists in ideology, the agents read only ‘through the eyes’ of reason (or faith) and in accordance with its codes” (24).

Although it distorts, there is nothing necessarily sinister in the scribes’ practice of idealizing the source material available to them. As von Rad points out in a discussion of the transition from tradition to literature, it is hardly surprising that the scribes involved in the process would “take control of [the source material] and shape it according to the needs of [their] own reason” (von Rad, “Form” 49). If anything, it reflects a highly sophisticated attitude toward their sources. The scribal practice of shaping biblical sources “according to the needs of [one’s] own reason” and time has continued unabated among the exegetes of our day. The lack of precise knowledge about the functions of those figures the Bible identifies as prophets—a lack that, Carroll insists, goes right back to the biblical compilers themselves (74 above)—has made these figures susceptible to a broad range of interpretation. In the “Introduction” to his study of *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets*, John Dearman reviews typical avenues of critical approach to the social criticism attributed to prophets. One such approach posits that the “prophets perceived a *moral order* which was universal in scope and in which the consciousness of the prophet was deeply imbued.” A second conceives them as “*preachers of the divine law*” (5, emphasis original). A third stresses “a *societal ideal* upon which the prophets drew for their social critique,” an ideal frequently based upon some utopian vision of what Israel once was and should strive to become again (6–7, emphasis original). A fourth emphasizes *tribal* wisdom as the root of prophecy (7). A fifth “employs elements of *Marxist interpretation*” in which the “prophets are

¹⁷ Elsewhere Belo describes “an *imaginary* relation” as a “kind of identification,” which suggests that he has in mind the mirror-stage dynamics of Lacan’s imaginary register (12, emphasis original). See Lacan’s “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.”

perceived as representing *Urkomminismus* or protest against private property” (7–8, emphasis original). Dearman demonstrates that each interpretation in turn reflects a critical tendency prevailing at the time and place it originated. For example, the first alternative listed above, stressing that the “prophets depended primarily on the natural moral law and not on a written code” (3), prevailed among the nineteenth-century German and Dutch scholars Dearman discusses. He notes that “the apprehension of a moral world as the goal of history was an important theme in nineteenth century German historical scholarship” (3, fn 6), thereby implying that these scholars saw their own world view reflected in the text. He goes on to stipulate that “the moral character of God and prophetic individualism is symptomatic of nineteenth-century ethical idealism, making the prophets romantic figures while ignoring the specific location of the prophetic ministry” (8). He highlights the tendency toward eisegesis¹⁸ masked by several of these approaches by mentioning W. C. Graham’s *The Prophets and Israel’s Culture*, a 1934 American work in which the prophets are seen as offering Israel a New Deal (Dearman 4, citing Graham 40).

5. Why Do They Not Revolt?: Gottwald’s Elaboration of Social Revolution as One Model for the Settlement of Israel

A question continually recurs to me respecting *Amos* that no one else seems to ask: if things were as bad for the working class of Israel as Amos^L makes out, why did its members not revolt? The theory that most of them were rural poor tied to the land under the Asiatic mode of production rightly suggests that conditions were not normally propitious for revolt. But Gottwald, following George Mendenhall, advances a detailed argument in *The Tribes of Yahweh* that the forbears of these same rural poor had been Canaanite peasants who did revolt, probably around the 13th century, from monarchical city states in the lowlands of Canaan. His account of conditions there is remarkably similar to that of Amos:

For some centuries Canaan had been dominated by city-states with hierarchies of aristocratic warriors and bureaucrats who took over the agricultural surplus of the villages where the majority of the populace lived and primary production was based. This tributary mode of production (often called the Asiatic mode of production) laid on the mass of peasants and herdsmen heavy burdens of taxa-

¹⁸ According to the *OED*, *eisegesis* is “the interpretation of a word of passage (of the Scriptures) by reading into it one’s own ideas,” whereas *exegesis* is simply “the interpretation of Scripture or a Scriptural passage.” As I suggest throughout this study, the line between the two is so fine that it is typically difficult if not impossible to determine.

tion in kind, forced labor, and military service. Indebted peasants, deprived of independent means of subsistence, were recruited as cultivators of large estates or reduced to the status of tenant farmers. A large percentage of the communal productive energy and resources went into warfare and the luxuried life of the ruling classes that included lavish religious displays. (272–73)

The times being propitious for revolt, restive labourers abandoned the fields in which they had been oppressed to take a stand in the marginal, thinly-populated highlands of Canaan. They could do so because of three technological innovations: iron implements; rock terracing, which enabled them to plant intensively in the hill country; and water-tight cisterns, which allowed for the irrigation of crops during the summer drought (Gottwald, “Domain” 10). Over the next two-and-a-half centuries, they were joined by other marginalized, disaffected groups. In Gottwald’s view, the patriarchal history the Bible recounts is a synthesis of the traditions the various groups brought with them. One claimed to have descended from a patriarch named Abraham, another from one named Isaac, still another from a Jacob, and so forth. These legends were concatenated as various groups arrived by making Abraham the father of Isaac and Isaac the father of Jacob. One group came in from the southern desert with a legend that they had been led out of Egyptian slavery by a miracle worker named Moses. That story was threaded on to the ever lengthening chain of narrative as well.¹⁹

Gottwald’s book created quite a stir when it appeared almost thirty years ago. One does not hear much about it now. In the *The Quest for Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel* published in 2007, Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar present contrasting contemporary assessments. Finkelstein dismisses the social revolution theory as “a somewhat naïve product of Marxist undercurrents in American campuses of the utopian 1960s.” Not only does he state that archaeology comes “up short of tracing any clues to such a dramatic shift from the sedentary lowlands to the sedentary highlands in a short period of time,” but he insists that “there were not enough Late Bronze settlements in the lowlands to supply a sufficient number of withdrawing people” (75). On the other hand, Mazar observes that “nothing in the archaeological findings from this period [Late Bronze age] points to the foreign [non-Canaanite] origin of the hill-country settlers as posited by alternative conquest and immigration models for

¹⁹ Gottwald summarizes his theory of the development of the biblical narrative in the first six books of the Bible (the Hexateuch) from the patriarchal history (which begins with the story of Abraham in Gen 12) onward in *The Tribes of Yahweh*, pp 100–14.

the settlement of the area” (94).²⁰

It is not my purpose here to enter this argument in a decisive way. Being myself “a somewhat naïve product of Marxist undercurrents in American campuses of the utopian 1960s,” the social revolution model appeals to me. But I do not introduce it into a study of *Amos* to insist upon it in preference to a conquest or immigration model. The text itself is informed by the Exodus tradition normally associated with the northern kingdom of Israel, and I have no doubt that its compilers subscribed to a conquest model. I introduce the social revolution model here because of its ideological suggestiveness. Before taking up this suggestiveness, however, a more detailed theoretical discussion of Gottwald’s argument is in order.

This argument depends upon the concept of the Asiatic mode of production (AMP) to which, in the passage quoted above, he speculates the proto-Israelite revolutionaries had been subjected by the Canaanite city states of the plains. The AMP has a controversial place in the history of Marxist thought because it is not included in the scheme of successive “modes of production and types of society” outlined by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*, which Gottwald summarizes as

1. the classless primitive community;
2. the slave-based society of classical times;
3. the feudal society based on serfdom;
4. the modern bourgeois society based on the capitalist mode of production;
5. the classless society of the future. (Gottwald, “Hypothesis” 150)

This scheme is quite clearly based on the economic and social development of Europe. Proposed as a stage 2 alternate to classical, slave-based society, the Asiatic mode reflects the system of production typical of the large empires of North Africa and the Middle East (Sumerian, Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, to name a few).²¹ Gottwald summarizes the most prominent features of the AMP. First, in theory at least, land is not privately owned. All land belongs to “the state as sovereign and landlord” (153). Second, it is based upon “self-sufficient village communities” engaged in “agrarian, pastoral, and handicraft” pursuits as the source of its wealth. Third, it features a “highly centralized state in a commanding social role whose functionaries

²⁰ For a summary of hypotheses about Israel’s rise to power in terms of conquest, immigration, and social revolutions models, see Gottwald, *Hebrew* 261–76.

²¹ The Inca Empire also seems to have been functioned along the lines of what Marx identifies as the Asiatic mode of production (Jobling, “Introduction”). Although Prescott precedes Marx, his classic account of the Inca Empire at the time of the Spanish conquest still provides an excellent account summary of this mode.

exact tribute from village labourers both in kind and in labour” (upon public works “such as irrigation systems, defense works, administrative and religious structures, and storage of large quantities of food”) (154).

In describing the conditions prevailing under an AMP, Gottwald is discussing the polity of a state. It is not altogether clear from the above summary of successive modes of production that when a society evolves from the primitive (stage 1) to either the classical (stage 2) or the Asiatic mode of production (alternate stage 2), it becomes a state. Among other things, a political entity becomes a state by virtue of a centralization of power. Central governmental institutions—executive, legislative, and judicial—monopolize what comes to be seen as the legitimate use of force within a state’s territory. A Marxist tenet holds that, as a consequence of this centralization, the emergence of the state mirrors the emergence of class society by enabling a non-productive ruling group to enforce its claims within the relations of production. Gottwald sums up the Marxist position in observing that “class is seen to exist when some people live off the labor product of others” (147).

As a concomitant of this analysis, the primitive societies (stage 1) from which states emerge are designated as classless (as is that stage 5 society of the future when, according to Marxist eschatology, the state will finally wither away). In non-Marxist schema of the evolution of the state, these primitive²² societies correspond to segmentary, tribal societies, which Sigrist defines as ““an acephalous society, i.e. not politically organized by a central court, whose political organization is established by multi-graded groups which are politically of equal rank and similarly classified”” (30, quoted in Frick 52). Frank Frick theorizes that early greater-Israel moved on a “path from a segmentary society in the ‘tribal’ period (twelfth to early eleventh centuries B.C.), to a chiefdom in the days of Saul and the early David (middle to late eleventh century B.C.), to statehood under the later David and Solomon (first half of the tenth century B.C.)” (191). In this view, the chiefdom occupies an intermediate stage in the centralization of power, somewhere between its concentration in a state and its dispersal in a tribal polity.

Simply breaking free from the Canaanite city states would not have guaranteed the proto-Israelites against ultimately changing one master for another. To prevent this, they needed to achieve a social and economic as well as a political revolution. Analyzing the accounts of the occupation of the highlands in Joshua and Judges, Gottwald argues that the proto-Israelites involved were stridently anti-statist. To prevent once again being oppressed by class domination, they deliberately dispersed power so that a ruling class could not emerge. As an experiment in

²² The use of the word *primitive* here would be unfortunate if it were taken to mean *unsophisticated*. It is better to understand it to mean *coming first*.

radical egalitarianism, they *retribalized*, thereby turning the clock back to the polity in which they had lived—or thought they had lived—before being subjected to the Canaanite AMP (*Tribes*, summarized at 489-92).

For retribalization to work, tribal polity had to be conceptualized to overcome—at least partially—the contradictions inherent within it. The tribal organization Sigrist describes is two-fold: internal within tribes and external among them. Because tribes are multi-graded or hierarchical, internally they may be no less despotic than states. I suspect the tribal life of most pre-monarchic Canaanites had been no less “nasty, brutish, and short” than the life in the state that followed it. As for external relations, Gottwald theorizes that Israelite tribes co-ordinated mutual defense and cultic activities through sodalities that cut across the grain of tribal organization (*Tribes* 293-341). But I also suspect that much of the co-ordination among these tribes was likely enforced by some who were more equal than others.

Practical difficulties could be met, at least symbolically, by idealizing the co-ordination of inter-tribal relations. Lest the formally acephalous nature of those relations create a vacuum fillable by some flesh-and-blood person seizing monarchical power, the leadership of the emerging tribal confederation was vested in Yahweh (יהוה), a local war god with whom that confederation was now conceived to be in a covenant relation.²³ Regardless of who might be practically commanding the armies of tribal Israel on any given day, ideologically it was always Yahweh, to whom all victories could be attributed. Defeats, on the other hand, could be chalked up to the failure of humans to respond adequately to Yahweh’s commands. In either victory or defeat, Yahweh’s symbolic leadership served to brake the long-term consolidation of power by any individual.

If Gottwald is right, such deliberate retribalization would mark a dialectical crossroads in being the tangible fruit of a labour to supersede an existing, unsatisfactory state of affairs. When I first read Gottwald’s argument, I had much the same reaction as Finkelstein: that he is simply retrojecting 1960s utopian dreaming about building a classless society upon ancient peoples who could know nothing of modern sociopolitical theory. Upon reflection, however, I realized that Gottwald is suggesting precisely the thing that people do in revolutionary times: they think very deliberately about constructing ideal societies. One need only think about the radical reforms of the French, Russian, Chinese, and Cuban revolutions to verify this. On a humbler scale, the social agenda of the Münster rebellion, the Paris Commune, and the Republican government in Barcelona during the Spanish Civil War come to mind. If the founders of greater Israel were

²³ Covenants were international treaties regulating the relations between parties of unequal strength.

social revolutionaries, how likely is it that they would not have engaged in the sociopolitical theorizing and experimenting that marks revolutionaries generally? How likely is it that they would not have theorized how a new society effect could be created given their altered circumstances and aims? As social revolutionaries invariably do, they would have preoccupied themselves with idealizing new arrangements that would eventually become the ideological basis of a new society. To me, the thought that they could not seems the height of modern arrogance.

As I have intimated above, however, I suspect the everyday life of many persons and groups in tribal Israel was nowhere as egalitarian as Gottwald suggests. As insightful as it is, the chief value of his analysis of biblical texts covering this period lies principally in what it implies about their ideological motivation and their compilers' sophisticated understanding of the function of ideology in political practice. As Althusser points out, ideology does not reflect people's real relations of production or, as Thompson might add, their real experience. It always misrepresents either—misrepresents them by idealizing them—even as a political weapon in the hands of the working class. Instead of reflecting reality, ideology creates it: therein lies its real power. What counts is not what happens but what people can be persuaded to construe what happens—that and nothing else.

On the face of it, Gottwald's sociology of Israelite religion—focussing, as it does, on a period ending in the mid-eleventh century—would seem to have little to do with the issues in *Amos*, composed as it was from the eighth century onward. By Amos^l's day, Israel was evolving from a tribal society to a monarchic state. From the standpoint of Gottwald's theory, the experiment in *retribalization* had given way to the very polity it had been intended to replace: a monarchy based upon the Asiatic mode of production. Although Amos^l is typically considered to have been a southern, Judahite prophet, *Amos* is framed in terms of the northern, Israelite tradition of a conditional or Mosaic covenant. Walter Brueggemann observes that “the Mosaic tradition tends to be a movement of protest that is situated among the disinherited and that articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who decisively intrudes, even against seemingly impenetrable institutions and orderings” (“Trajectories” 14). Amos^l certainly seems to have been a spokesperson for rural folk for whom the “institutions and orderings” of a monarchical state may well have seemed “impenetrable.” As such, it could well be that the scribes who recast him as Amos^l saw him as a person whose thinking illustrated the force of what Raymond Williams calls *residual ideology*. “By ‘residual,’” he says, “I mean that some experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in the terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue —cultural as well as social—of some previous social formation” (“Base” 10). In Amos^l's case, that residual ideology had to involve an idealization of tribal life similar to that which, Gottwald argues, animated the ancestral occupiers

of the highlands who *retribalized* as a political practice. Amos^L would have idealized tribal life as one in which power was dispersed and land apportioned or justice dispensed based on the equality of tribes and of persons of similar rank. Such idealization would be particularly tenacious if there were some memory that tribal ideology had once served to resist monarchy. Although the crimes *Amos* denounces are reprehensible, Dearman's reading of the clause "they turn aside the way of the afflicted" (4.7) as evidence for "the failure of Israel's social institutions to administer YHWH's will" (22) leads to the interesting question of the degree to which Yahweh's will reflects the class position of the speaker. Members of the ruling class quite likely perceived Yahweh's will in different terms, making it, as Marx says, one of the "ideological forms in which men become conscious of [their conflicts] and fight it out." The extent to which Amos^L gave shape to rural discontent as arising from violations of Yahweh's will is impossible to determine. It is altogether likely he would have done so, if Gottwald's thesis is correct that Yahweh served an anti-monarchical political function in tribal Israel. But Yahweh's will as a factor in the history of Israel is perhaps *the* organizing factor in the reflections of the scribes who eventually put the Bible together. It is even fair to speculate that they saw Amos^L somewhat in the terms of Wilson's peripheral prophets, who, as we have seen (31 above), are peripheral in two respects: in respect to their own status and social power and in respect to the gods who possess them. In casting Amos^L as they did, they certainly seem to imply that an older, more traditional notion of Yahweh was becoming peripheral to the way that the more socially dominant members of Israelite society were now conceptualizing it.²⁴

5.1. Alienation

The foregoing discussion of the Mendenhall-Gottwald social revolution model for the origins of Israel provides context for the question that initiates it: if things were as bad for the working class of Israel as Amos^L makes out, why did its members not revolt? It demonstrates that, according to some theories, at least, the idea of revolution was not totally foreign to the traditions of greater biblical Israel. In fact, it suggests that the concept of Yahweh partly evolved in response to the exigencies of social revolution. However, even if scholars could detect no trace of a revolutionary motif running through the biblical traditions, the question posed remains an intriguing one, for some potential for revolution—even among peasants—certainly exists at all

²⁴ Because *Amos* is social rather than theological critique, it condemns ruling class worship as empty sacrificial formalism that does not lead to justice (5.21-23) without otherwise specifying how the concept of Yahweh may have been evolving to justify the exercise of monarchical power.

times and places where oppression on the scale depicted in *Amos* exists, a potential that has occasionally been realized (e.g., the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381). That potential exists in *Amos* as well, for Amos does envision sweeping change in Israel, envisions it in terms of the complete destruction of the existing order. But he does not envision revolutionary change in which the oppressed workers take any active part. They are consistently depicted as passive victims. The change to come is to be accomplished exclusively through Yahweh's agency. Therefore, in relation to the larger question of the functioning of ideology in the shaping of consciousness addressed in this study, a different question needs to be asked, one that takes the consciousness manifest in *Amos* as somehow representative of eighth-century rural discontent: if things are as bad for the working people of Israel as Amos makes out, why does he not conceptualize any possibility that they could mount a revolt? Indeed, why can he not conceive any practical action that the oppressed themselves could take to ameliorate their condition? The answer, I suspect, lies largely in the alienating effect of ideology, to a consideration of which I now turn.

Marx's theory of alienation emerged in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, a work not published until 1927 that precedes those that Althusser identifies as the "Works of the Break" (*The German Ideology* and *Theses on Feuerbach*). In fact, Althusser insists that this theory—more precisely, the theory of alienated labour—is not only untenable but part and parcel of the ideological mystification under which the young Marx laboured until the explosion of insight that comprised the epistemological break ("Lenin Before Hegel" 116–17). In consequence, Althusser has little to say about alienation beyond exposing it as a theoretical error. On the other hand, István Mészáros, who has written extensively on the subject, claims that the theory of alienation is the key synthesizing idea upon which Marx erected his system (18).

In its broad outlines, alienation arises in the specialization of labour, which makes it a commodity subject to exchange or confiscation. As we have seen (44 above), in Marx's view human nature expresses itself through productivity. The reification of labour, therefore, deprives humankind of its proper means of expression. Labour ceases to be a manifestation of life (*Lebensäußerung*), which it is when one works from an inner necessity. It represents, rather, an alienation from life (*Lebentäusserung*), which it becomes when one works from an external necessity—when, as Marx puts it, "I work in order to live, in order to produce a means of living, but my work itself is not living" (Mészáros 91, quoting Marx's "Comments on James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*" (c. 1844)). Under this circumstance, labour has been expropriated, torn from its proper place at the centre of human meaning-making.

In keeping with the complexity of Marx's vision of social reality, his theory of alienation is also highly complex. Mészáros points out that it is fourfold: humans are alienated from (a)

nature, (b) their own activity, (c) their “being as a member of the human species,” and (d) one another (14). In respect to (a), I have already discussed Marx’s concept that only humans have species-being and that productive activity mediates between them as species-beings and nature (44 above). Such activity is not inherently alienating. Only second-order mediations are alienating, those introduced by the reification and isolation attendant upon the emergence of the concepts of private property, exchange, and labour specialization that are dominant features of the capitalist system Marx principally analyzes (79). Such alienation strips humans of their species consciousness and reduces them to functioning only as individuals, which is a universal rather than a specifically human category (c above). As individuals, they are reabsorbed into nature and subjected to the natural law of a war of all against all, thereby alienating one person from another (d above). Paradoxically, however, such unmediated reabsorption into nature alienates humanity from nature (a above) because humanity’s proper relationship to nature is through the mediation of productive activity (labour or practice) that establishes humanity’s anthropological nature (107–8).

The aspect of Marx’s theory that best illuminates the dynamics of *Amos*, however, is that treating the alienation of humanity from its labour (b above), a manifestation of which is its inability to recognize its own products. Umberto Eco elaborates upon this in distinguishing Hegel’s concept of alienation from that of Marx. “Of course,” he says,

everyone is free to build a personal myth in which the word “alienation” has this particular meaning [of some alien, hostile force acting upon us], but this is certainly not the meaning it had either for Hegel or for Marx. According to Hegel, man alienates himself by objectivizing himself *in* the aim of his work or his actions. In other words, he alienates himself *in* the world of things and of social relationships because he has constructed it according to the laws of subsistence and development that he himself must adjust to and respect. Marx, on the other hand, reproached Hegel for not making a clear distinction between objectification (*Entäusserung*) and alienation (*Entfremdung*). In the first case, man turns himself into a thing; he expresses himself in the world through his creations, thus constructing the world to which he then commits himself. (*Open* 124, emphasis original)

Objectification (*Entäusserung*), therefore, is not in itself negative: it is integral to practice—to the transformative labour through which we create complex social structures within which we take our places and in terms of which we conceptualize what it means to be human.²⁵ “But,” Eco

goes on to declare,

when the mechanism of this world begins to get the upper hand—when man suddenly becomes unable to recognize it as his own creation, unable to use for his own purposes the things he has produced, and instead ends up serving their purposes (which he might identify with the purposes of other men)—then he finds himself alienated; it is his creations henceforth that tell him what to do, what to feel, and what to become. The stronger the alienation, the deeper man's belief that he is still in control (whereas, in fact, he is being controlled) and that the situation in which he lives is the best of all possible worlds. (124)

Alienation (*Entfremdung*), therefore, arises in misrecognition—the misrecognition of the very specific, time-bound world that we ourselves create and in which we contemplate ourselves. In this misrecognition, we come back full circle to Barthes' description of ideology in effect turning “history into nature.” Eco's conclusion that alienation produces an illusion of control among the controlled in its turn comes back to Althusser's description of ideology functioning to conceal or veil our real conditions of existence by misrepresenting them as better than they actually are. Insightful though Eco's conclusion is, it is a bit too sweeping, for people with *no* illusions of control also suffer alienation as an effect of ideology, which leads them to think not that they live in “the best of all possible worlds,” as Eco would have it, but that they live in the only possible world.

Amos is a profound literature of alienation. It is permeated by a structure of feeling that the poor of Israel are being overwhelmed by a totally incomprehensible system they cannot recognize as a human product, one which, most likely, was in process of being eternalized as Yahweh's will. This structure of feeling renders ironic the scribal dispatch (7.10) discussed above (71), which characterizes Amos's activities around Bethel as conspiratorial. The mystification of the oppressive forces arrayed against the poor affects Amos^L's ability to “take arms against a sea of troubles.” His inability to conspire—to become an agent for social change by *any* means—is an index of his alienation. His inability to act also marks his vision of the end

²⁵ Part of Marx's understanding of objectification pertains to the creation of humanity's sense of species life (species consciousness). For Marx, Mészáros points out, part of the “object of labour is the *objectification of man's species life*, for man ‘duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created’” (14, emphasis original, quoting Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*).

of Israel as a fantasy, as arising in that realm of waking dreams in which we achieve our ends—often socially proscribed—without lifting a finger.

6. The Rage of Amos

If we can neutralize the effect that later scribes created through their spiritualizing practice and entertain the possibility that the words of Amos¹ might have been something other than the inspired pronouncements of a holy man, some questions about those words arise that, I suspect, have rarely if ever been asked, questions that touch upon my original impression that *Amos* is a literature of madness. How can we, for instance, account for the vitriol or apoplectic rage of Amos¹? It makes sense that Amos¹, as a shepherd, would not love a wall and would want it down. But if we take him to be representative of working class people generally, does it make sense that he would fantasize its removal as part of a thoroughgoing orgy of destruction, even if we could imagine him as having a sense of being miserably enmeshed in a seemingly alien system? We can all think of isolated examples in which people have developed and acted upon such rage. But most people—working class or otherwise—develop strategies for coping with injustice, real or imagined, that stop short of imagining or committing mayhem.

The rage with which Amos expresses himself and the violence of his fantasy life that it reflects cannot be attributed entirely or even principally to alienation. The fact that things are rendered foreign or strange so that people can no longer recognize them for what they originally were does not necessarily conduce to anger. Indeed, as Eco points out, alienation can produce the illusion that people are in control—of all the processes that are, in fact, mystifying them. Eco explicates alienation entirely in cognitive terms as a consequence of misrecognition. But Marx's writing on alienation *is* charged with affect. Writing about “the fact that the worker is related to the *product of his labor* as to an *alien* object,” Marx goes on to state that

it is clear according to this premise: The more the worker exerts himself, the more powerful becomes the alien objective world which he fashions against himself, the poorer he and his inner world become, the less there is that belongs to him. It is the same in religion. The more man attributes to God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; then it no longer belongs to him but to the object. The greater this activity, the poorer is the worker. What the product of his work is, he is not. The greater this product is, the smaller he is himself. The *externalization* of the worker in his product means not only that his work becomes an object, an *external* existence, but also that it exists *outside him* independently, alien, an autonomous power, opposed to him. The life he has given to

the object confronts him as hostile and alien. (“Economic” 289–90, emphasis original)

A righteous anger against a seemingly alien, oppressive force reducing human labour to mere drudgery—and, in the process, hollowing out human existence—permeates these words.²⁶ This is not, however, an anger directed against the extortion of surplus value *per se*. It is anger, rather, directed against the psychic misery of being reduced to a cog in an intricate system operating according to an impenetrable logic of its own. It is, moreover, a constructive anger arising from Marx’s determination to redress the misery of alienation by illuminating its mechanism in order to assist those it affects to resist their oppressors and to adopt new, non-alienating social practices. Marx’s anger reveals that he himself is not alienated—that he can take action in a way that Amos^L seemingly cannot.²⁷

Amos^L’s loss of temper or command over his emotions may be largely attributable to a certain demoralization arising as a consequence of action. For, despite his alienation, Amos^L does respond to his discontent. He goes to Bethel and curses Amaziah.

As we have seen (54 above), Blenkinsopp characterizes this encounter as “the account of his [Amos’s] arrest at Bethel.” But this view is not supported in the text. There is no account of any arrest in *Amos*. Schottroff, on the other hand, states that “the priest Amaziah put a sudden end to his [Amos’s] activity at Bethel” (27). This statement is also highly dubious. The narrative in question is baldly inserted into a series of vision reports with no transitional material to indicate whether the encounter occurred at the beginning or end of what Schottroff calls Amos’s *ministry*. Moreover, in terms of the narrative itself, Amos is hardly intimidated by Amaziah. The priest’s command to “flee away to the land of Judah” (7.12), rather than ending Amos’s activity at Bethel, only inspires more:

¹⁶ “Now therefore hear the word of the LORD.

You say, ‘Do not prophesy against Israel,
and do not preach against the house of Isaac.’

¹⁷ Therefore thus says the LORD:

‘Your wife shall be a harlot in the city,

²⁶ “Authentic art” as Althusser defines it provides one example of labour that is not alienated precisely because it deliberately reflects “the *ideology* from which it is born” (“A Letter” 204, emphasis original, see 7 above).

²⁷ A moral dilemma of working class or peasant revolutions as opposed to more spontaneous outbreaks such as riots is that they are typically led by disaffected intellectuals with the means to theorize and the capacity to organize.

and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword,
and your land shall be parceled out by line;
you yourself shall die in an unclean land,
and Israel shall surely go into exile away from its land.”

In response to all Amos’s provocation, Amaziah neither arrests him nor makes any overt move to silence him. All we know from the narrative itself is that he makes a record of Amos’s appearance at Bethel and sends it off to Jeroboam.

To some extent, Amos^L’s rage may be born in his frustration that he can gain no sense of traction or leverage—no point from which to make a stand—in his sense of grievance against the current state of affairs. If Amaziah came out of the temple busting heads, he would provide some solid, representable basis against which resistance to the current regime could be defined. But he does not. He does not ignore the fact that Amos constitutes some sort of threat. Accordingly, he does what bureaucrats typically do: he reports Amos to the proper authorities. But he does not exaggerate the threat by overreacting to it, thereby creating a situation that could indeed make the threat worse than it actually is. In consequence, malcontents such as Amos can make no headway: it is as if they are always operating in quicksand. Amaziah reacts as an authority figure functioning within a hegemonic regime, a person who has assimilated the principles of such a regime even though he may not be able formally to state them. Antonio Gramsci did the seminal thinking on the theory of hegemony, to a consideration of which we now turn.

6.1. Hegemony

Chantal Mouffe contends that Gramsci was the first Marxist thinker to elaborate a theory of ideology totally free from the implications of rigid economic determinism, thereby founding a tradition of Marxist thought of which Althusser is perhaps the most illustrious heir (169). Although Georg Lukàcs and Vladimir Lenin strove in various ways to develop a theory of ideology freed from such rigid economic determinism (177), it was Gramsci who finally managed to do so. Within Marxism specifically, the problem of determination has normally been fought out over the nature and degree of the relation of a determining economic base (the index of social being articulated in the mode of production) to a determined superstructure (the index of social consciousness manifest in law, politics, philosophy, religion, art and science, all of which Marx considers ideological forms), a relation which, as Raymond Williams points out, “has been commonly held to be the key to Marxist cultural analysis” (“Base” 3). During the years of the Second International, a rigid economic determinism typically attributed to Karl Kautsky dominated Marxist thinking. In this classical Marxist theory of ideology, ideological superstructures are con-

ceptualized “purely as a mechanical reflection of the economic base,” which, in turn, leads to their being viewed as “epiphenomena which play no part in the historical process.” Moreover, they are “conceived as being determined by the position of the subjects in the relations of production” (Mouffe 169). In criticizing this species of determinism, Williams suggests that the early Marxists who believed in it had already lost touch with the key insights of Marx’s epistemological break. For the concept of determinism this classical theory evinces is clearly “inherited from idealist and especially theological accounts of the world and man.” Marx, however, consistently opposes a concept of ideology “insistent on the power of certain forces outside man, or, in its secular version, on an abstract determining consciousness.” For Marx, all social consciousness, though it may reflect social being, is ultimately determined in humans’ “own activities” (“Base” 4).

Writing about the fluidity in the relation of forces in a way that anticipates Foucault, Gramsci introduces a subtlety into the Marxist understanding of class dominance it had previously lacked. His theory of hegemony, developed during the 1920s and 1930s, has been decisive in granting an intermediate determinant function to superstructural elements. For one class to dominate others, he argues, its peculiar interests must be adopted as universal (Gramsci 181). This cannot happen if those interests are perceived as purely economic. Economic interests must seem to be transcended for the good of all, a transcendence only to be achieved on the superstructural plane. After all, as we have seen (82 above), Marx contends that people only become conscious of basic economic contradictions in their superstructural manifestations: that it is on the level of “the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic” that they “fight it out.” Picking up the thread of this argument, Gramsci was the first cogently to argue that the dominance of any particular class depends upon “bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity” (181), i.e., a superstructural consensus. Indeed, such dominance may lay in its flexibility to make continuous concessions. Gramsci points out that

the State is seen as the organ of one particular group, destined to create favourable conditions for the latter’s maximum expansion. But the development and expansion of the particular group are conceived of, and presented, as being the “national” energies. In other words, the dominant group is coordinated concretely with the general interests of the subordinate groups, and the life of the State is conceived of as a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria (on the juridical plane) between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups—equilibria in which the interests of the dominant group prevail, but only to a certain point, i.e. stopping short of narrowly corporate economic interests. (182)

In fleshing out Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Raymond Williams reminds us that

A lived hegemony is always a process. It is not, except analytically, a system or a structure. It is a realized complex of experiences, relationships, and activities, with specific and changing pressures and limits. In practice, that is, hegemony can never be singular. Its internal structures are highly complex, as can be readily seen in any concrete analysis. Moreover (and this is crucial, reminding us of the necessary thrust of the concept), it does not just passively exist as a form of dominance. It has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified. It is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own. We have then to add to the concept of hegemony the concepts of counter-hegemony and alternative hegemony, which are real and persistent elements of practice. (*Marxism* 112–13)

Maintaining hegemony is an ideological practice, and the success of any class in doing so ultimately depends upon how well it manages this practice amidst the daily vicissitudes of social life. Management may seem to be too strong a word, for the extent to which a ruling class may seem to control this process can vary widely. Because the terrain upon which the struggle for hegemony is fought is ideological, its ultimately political and economic nature may be effectively veiled even from the dominant class it principally serves.

For one class to maintain its hegemony, the state it controls must be seen to serve the interests of all classes. How well the state does so is perpetually contested, but the very fact that such contestation is tolerated—within limits—guarantees the continued hegemony of the dominant class. Its ideology consistently casts the state as the protector of all, rich and poor alike, and it continually rehearses the benefits that accrue to all from the state's existence. Granted, we do not see Amaziah, the state's representative, redressing Amos's grievances. Indeed, he warns him away. But the fact that Amos is not intimidated by the warning and that Amaziah does not back it up with force suggests that this state, to use Williams's words just quoted, "does not just passively exist as a form of dominance." It manages discontent partly by taking note of it, a note that remains in the archives as a record of rural discontent to which the state may one day need to respond. The dispatch that Amaziah sends to Jeroboam is not necessarily a prelude to repression. Indeed, it declares that the situation is well under control. Moreover, it implies that monarchical ideology has been largely effective: "the land," Jeroboam is told, "is not able to bear all his [Amos's] words" (7.10). Ironically, that monarchical ideology has had its effects on Amos as well, for he continues to engage the state, if only to denounce its representatives. Hegemonic states retain their control as long as their people continue to conceive them as adjudicators of their internal differences and continue to refer their grievances to them. When the people stop doing so, parallel governments are established, and revolutions begin.

Blenkinsopp's conviction that Amos was arrested at Bethel assumes that the monarchy of Jeroboam could tolerate no criticism. Such an assumption reflects the idealizing process that casts prophets as a species of principled knights errant waging war against oppressive states in the cause of justice. Furthermore, in abstracting Amos¹ from the material drudgery of his daily existence and recasting him according to the nobler ideal of Amos^L, the scribes involved were, I suspect, recasting him in terms of their own ideal selves. In producing the texts, they could, in fact, see themselves as spreading the prophetic word as the Amoses of their times, as *noqeded* spokespeople for the poor. To have done so, however, they themselves would have had to be working within a regime not itself particularly threatened by such a critique of a monarchical (or imperial) state, regardless of the extent to which that critique may have been blunted by being cast back in time or spiritualized by being transferred to the lips of an angry god.

7. Conclusion

In Chapters 2 and 3 I have elaborated a theory that the production of *Amos* involved a scribal idealization of an historical datum, one of rural discontent coalescing around various physical structures, not only the walls that impeded free movement in pursuit of livelihood but also the citadels that enhanced the state's capacity to extract surplus value. In Chapter 2 I have given flesh and blood to that historical datum in the form of a transhumant shepherd I have designated Amos¹ by adducing certain elements in the imaginary world of the text that reflect the frustrations a transhumant shepherd may have experienced. I have also theorized how shepherds may have gained the reputation of being worldly wise and the skills of storytellers or even bards, accomplishments that may have led them to be remembered as seers who expressed rural discontent. In Chapter 3 I have theorized that this working shepherd came to be represented as the literary figure whom I designate Amos^L through an idealizing process that shifted his principal, daily concern from earning his bread to speculating upon questions of right and wrong. In this process he was made a spokesperson for the northern, Mosaic tradition that Israel's covenant with Yahweh depended upon moral conditions that it had now irrevocably breached.

At the outset of this study I posit that a dialectic tension exists between Amos¹ and Amos^L. We will recall that Althusser states that the study of the dialectic is “the study of contradiction in the very essence of objects” (45 above) and that the supersession of contradiction gives rise to historical change (46 above). However, the tension between Amos¹ and Amos^L is not manifest dramatically in the text itself. It cannot be, for the Amos of the text is Amos^L, a product of idealizing literary practice. Amos¹ exists there only as a trace largely overwritten by Amos^L. He needs, therefore, to be resurrected theoretically from the few traces of him that the

text seems to preserve. The tension of which I speak, on the other hand, was a latent spring to the production of the text itself, a tension born in contradiction that was resolved or superseded in the very idealization of Amos¹ as Amos^L.

The contradiction in question is that between reality and ideology or, more particularly, the many social expectations that are ideologically shaped. Very early on, we come to believe in a host of seemingly natural causes and effects: to believe that if we do so and so, such and such will naturally follow. We come to believe that if we get a degree, a new job, a raise in pay, a different car, such and such will happen. These consequences are usually quite vaguely conceived: they are generally limited to a sense that something good or bad will ensue.

Contradictions arise when these expectations are clearly not met: when we get the degree and wind up working at a hamburger stand anyway. In that case, our situation is analogous to that of the ancient scribes puzzling over the covenant relation of Yahweh to greater biblical Israel. The expectation had always been that, even though Israel and Judah had had different notions of that covenant, in general it was a good thing: it augured well for both. How then, those scribes must have wondered, did Israel and Judah wind up a provincial backwater of the Persian Empire? How had the ideologically shaped expectation of Yahweh's protection failed? One way out of such an impasse is to glorify one's history to provide an imaginary origin through which one can be sustained. I may work at a hamburger stand, but by idealizing the education I have received, I can still maintain that I am a person of culture and vision. The biblical compilers may have been working, so to speak, in a hamburger stand of the Persian Empire, but by idealizing their history they could come to believe that they were, nevertheless, carrying on in the traditions of the spiritual heroes of their past—traditions that they were, in fact, in the process of elaborating as they worked.

Amos¹—dirty, sweating working person with some local grievance that he quite possibly was—simply would not do. He contradicts what the scribes needed him to be to make meaning out of their own lives. He simply would not bear the ideological freight they needed him to carry. Returning once more to Althusser's insight that ideology causes us persistently to misapprehend our relation "to [our] real conditions of existence," the problem with Amos¹ is that he represents those real conditions of existence. He represents reality.²⁸

²⁸ In saying this I do not intend to suggest that Amos¹ was not himself caught up in ideology. In fact, I have speculated above that he was motivated by an ideology idealizing what he took to be tribal virtues. But the necessity to earn one's daily bread by the sweat of one's brow is a reality that, in respect to Amos at least, Biblical compilers and interpreters have tended to obviate in the fictions they have created about him.

Some scholars have recognized the idealizing tendency of the biblical compilers. As we have seen, von Rad observes that their detaching traditions “from the locality with which they had cultic associations caused their content to become highly spiritualised” (82 above). But most have been quite willing to think in terms of the idealizations offered them by the compilers themselves: terms such as covenant and prophecy. The fascination that logos-saturated texts featuring prophets evoke, added to the prophets’ protean capacity to support a diverse range of meanings, has made them an irresistible point of imaginative contact for hearers and readers ever since they first appeared. As Dearman demonstrates, there has been a tendency among the well-educated, white, western liberals who produce much of the biblical criticism written and read in academia to continue the practice of their ancient, scribal forbears to cast up the characters they study in terms of their own values and class positions. Typically they see *Amos* as a call to justice, but of the type they imagine they themselves would make. Significantly for white American liberals, Martin Luther King, Jr. quotes *Amos* 5.24 in his historic “I Have a Dream” speech: “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” But the nature of justice itself, as Sergio Rostagno points out, varies according to the class position of the person calling for it. As a ruling-class institution and an ideological state apparatus, the church during the sixteen hundred years of Christendom tended to promote an interpretation of the biblical text based upon an idealist, individual conception of humankind stripped of class determination rather than upon a materialist, social one. God’s justice was seen to be available to all, rich and poor alike. Due to the influence of this teaching, Rostagno concludes that within western churches generally “[t]he Marxist belief that the mode of production in material matters governs the development of social, political, and intellectual life [came to be] regarded as merely a heretical way of thinking” (62). For a Marxist reading of *Amos* to be possible, Amos must be stripped of the ideality with which he has been invested by centuries of exegetes and reinserted into the working world in which he or the people he represents lived and breathed—complete with their class antagonisms. Traditional, idealist hermeneutics blind to the implications of class differ little in their ideological aims from traditional, idealist hermeneutics blind to the implications of gender or race among other categories. In his illuminating study on *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, Itumeleng Mosala demonstrates the necessity for black exegetes to correct for a normalized-as-white bias in interpretation (*passim*). Similarly, Marxist critics must correct for a normalized-as-idealized-individual conception of social existence if they are to conceptualize the dynamics of literary production at all.

Chapter 4

Amos and the Dialectic of Trauma

In Chapters 2 and 3 I use Marxist theory to speculate upon the production of *Amos*. Such a discussion of a text's compositional process would seem almost by necessity to involve some argument concerning authorial intention. But I use *Amos* to demonstrate the tendency of biblical compilers and interpreters to idealize the history of greater Biblical Israel. Whether they do so from deliberate intention is a grey area indeed, for the larger issue I address is the idealizing tendency inherent in the operation of ideology. Marx understands ideology to be a latent process governing thought and action, a process whose functioning, like that of Freud's unconscious, can be comprehended only through analysis. In line with the argument introduced in Chapter 1 that Marxist and psychoanalytic theory complement one another, in Chapters 4 and 5 I turn to psychoanalytic theory to evaluate *Amos* in the form in which it eventually appeared in the Jewish Bible. Because I now consider *Amos* synchronically rather than diachronically as a work in progress, I henceforth drop the distinction between Amos^I and Amos^L. Furthermore, I leave the question open whether the traumatic reading of *Amos* I propose in this chapter is a product of conscious design. It is aesthetically appealing to believe this, but the question of authorial intention need not be pursued when analysis turns away from a theory of production.

1. *Amos* and the Trauma of Earthquake

As we have seen, *Amos* begins with a superscription. Because I take it as my own starting point for the psychoanalytic evaluation of the text, it bears restating here: "The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Teko'a, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzzi'ah king of Judah and in the days of Jerobo'am the son of Jo'ash, king of Israel, two years before the earthquake" (דְּבַרֵי עָמוֹס אֲשֶׁר-הָזָה בְּנִקְדִים מִתְּקוֹעַ אֲשֶׁר הָזָה עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיַמֵּי עֲזַרְיָה מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה וּבְיַמֵּי יִרְבָּעָם) (1.1). The word that most interests me by way of reintroduction is the second to last in the Hebrew, לְפָנָי (lifne). Its root is construed to be פנה (paneḥ), which, for some reason yet to be adequately explained, is written invariably in the plural, פנים (panim). It means *face(s)*. The root has been prefixed and inflected to produce a construction meaning *in the face(s) of*, which the RSV translators render into English as *before*. Therefore, a biblical Israelite standing *before* the king was literally understood to be standing *in the face(s)* of the king. I point this out to emphasize that the construction originally denoted a *spatial* relation, one that was later adapted to denote the *temporal* relation of one event occurring prior to another. The upshot is that לְפָנָי can be used either spatially or temporally, as can its English analogue *before*: e.g., I brushed my teeth before (temporal) I stood before (spatial) the king.

In the superscription to *Amos*, לְפָנָי is conventionally translated temporally, just as the RSV translators have rendered it. They construe the superscription to mean that Amos prophesied at a point in time two years prior to another point in time, that of the earthquake. How would this meaning change, however, if we translated לְפָנָי spatially? One could render it more literally, according to its original meaning, in which case the English for the conclusion of the superscription would read “two years in the face of the earthquake.” This reading is intelligible if we make the earthquake something more than a mere reference point, i.e., if we make it integral to the prophesy itself. For the phrase “in the face of the earthquake” can be taken to imply not only that Amos experienced the earthquake but that it remains engraved in his *memory*. On this view, the words that Amos saw might be a response to an experience that he relives, as if it were unfolding before him spatially in his mind. The two years, then, become not the point in time at which he prophesizes but the period of time during which he prophesizes affected by his memories of catastrophe.¹

In contemporary psychotherapy, such memories are termed *traumatic*. In this chapter, I review some early thinking about trauma in the history of modern psychiatry. I discuss trauma in terms of *dissociation*, a concept embraced by many current theorists. I move on to speculate about how the concept of dissociation fits a psychology of consciousness, taking as my particular reference the thought of Freud’s contemporary Pierre Janet. Against the background of dissociation and a psychology of consciousness, I discuss Freud’s turn to a psychology of unconscious drives and distinguish his theory of trauma based upon repression from that based upon dissociation. I go on to speculate that there is a dialectic to trauma in that it affects the psyche both on the level of the unconscious instincts, which humans share with all living beings, and on the level of the conscious cognitive schemes that are distinctively human. Relying upon Ernest Becker’s existentialist psychology, I argue that the essence of the traumatic is an inexorable sense of vulnerability arising in an experience of shock, as a result of which the structures of meaning within which humans normally take shelter are shattered. I conclude by using the theory of trauma I elaborate to suggest a traumatic reading of *Amos*.

¹ I am indebted to the late Roger Pavey, rabbi emeritus of Congregation Agudas Israel in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, who confirmed to me orally that this proposed reading is entirely natural and plausible in terms of the grammar, syntax, and semantics of biblical Hebrew. In fact, he points out that interpretation in terms of the literal meaning of words, in this case reading *before* spatially rather than temporally, is the guiding principle of the first level of biblical interpretation employed in the Talmud.

2. Some Early Thinking about Trauma in Modern Psychology

Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart point out that, toward the end of the nineteenth century, “the very foundation of modern psychiatry was laid with the study of consciousness and the disruptive impact of” overwhelming or what we now call “traumatic experiences.” The disruption in question seemed to involve the processing of memory. Certain memories, it seemed, “became obstacles that kept people from going on with their lives” (425). “Certain happenings,” the psychologist Pierre Janet later recalled, “would leave indelible and distressing memories—memories to which the sufferer was continually returning, and by which he was tormented by day and by night” (qtd. in van der Kolk and van der Hart 425).² Janet joined other turn of the century investigators such as J. M. Charcot, Alfred Binet, Morton Prince, Josef Breuer, and Sigmund Freud in attributing such memories to a “wounding of the *mind* brought about by sudden, unexpected, emotional shock” (Leys 3–4, emphasis original).

The concept of wounding is appropriate to a discussion of trauma, for, as Ian Hacking points out, “[t]rauma means wound” (76, see also Leys 19)³. One can quite correctly speak of surgical trauma: a wound to the body deliberately inflicted by incision. But the concept of a wound to the mind was based upon an analogy to “what we now call whiplash injury, or the old ‘railway spine’” (Hacking 76). Contrary to surgical trauma, what were conceived to be the wounds of psychological trauma seemed to occur accidentally rather than deliberately. Moreover, they left no visible, physical scars.⁴ Many of the early railway accidents of which Hacking writes seemed to produce wounds such as this. “Engines went off the rails,” he tells us, “steam boilers blew up, cuttings caved in, at a rate per mile that would now seem impossible to us” (76), but people walked away apparently unfazed only to be afflicted later on by a bewildering array of ailments that incapacitated them seemingly as the result of a “catastrophic global reaction in the entire organism” (Leys 19). The symptoms following upon an experience of what Allan Young

² The documentation for the source of the Janet quotation is inaccurate in van der Kolk and van der Hart. It is a translation from Janet’s *Les médications psychologiques* (580).

³ “‘Trauma’ is a term that has long been used in medicine and surgery. It comes from the Greek τραῦμα, meaning wound, which in turn derives from τινρώσχω, to pierce. It generally means any injury where the skin is broken as a consequence of external violence, and the effects of such an injury upon the organism as a whole; the implication of the skin being broken is not always present, however—we may speak, for example, of ‘closed head and brain traumas’” (Laplanche and Pontalis 465).

⁴ In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (henceforth *BTPP*), Freud classifies such railway accidents among the “traumatic neuroses of peace” (12).

calls “fear plus surprise” included “weak and fluttering pulse, cold sweat, relaxed sphincter muscles, shallow breathing, deep depression, incoherent speech, etc.” (90)—symptoms comprising a syndrome often accompanying the intrusive flashbacks⁵ and nightmares tending to recur as an aftermath of trauma.

The upshot, Young reports, is that the “earliest medical reports concerning the phenomenon that we now call traumatic stress” were written generally by “surgeons employed by railway companies” that believed they were “targets of people seeking compensation for spurious disabilities.” “[T]he physician’s job,” Young continues, was “to distinguish the fakes from functional disorders, that is, cases in which the disability [seemed] authentic enough even though its physical basis [was] unknown” (90). Sufferers from railway spine constituted a class of male hysterics (Hacking 76) who complemented the female sufferers of conversion hysteria populating “Breuer and Freud’s ground-breaking *Studies of Hysteria* (1895)” in which, according to Elaine Showalter, “women’s voices, stories, memories, dreams and fantasies enter the medical record” (155). A third group that became a subject for early theorizing about psychological trauma comprised the shell-shocked soldiers of the First World War—the sufferers of what Freud calls war neuroses—who, as Robert Waelder, “a distinguished second-generation Viennese disciple of Freud,” remarked, could be seen shaking in the streets of Europe (qtd. in Lifton 164). The nature of the psychological wound afflicting the various groups of sufferers was so mysterious that, as Ruth Leys observes,

[t]he twin problems of suggestion and simulation have haunted the history of trauma from the beginning. Victims of railway accidents were often accused of malingering, especially when they sought compensation in the courts of law. Hysterics were frequently suspected of feigning the symptoms they so dramatically displayed in their spontaneous or hypnotically induced performances. And the shell-shocked soldier of World War I was repeatedly accused of fabricating his symptoms in order to avoid combat.^{6,7} (153)

⁵ I use the term *flashbacks* to refer to “daytime reexperiences or reenactments of the traumatic event” that take “the form of recurrent, intrusive images or sensations associated with [it] or of a sudden feeling that the traumatic event is literally happening all over again” (Leys 241). The term only entered the psychological lexicon in the 1960s (see Frankel *passim*).

⁶ To her credit, Pat Barker in *Regeneration*, a novel about shell-shocked soldiers based upon the notorious Siegfried Sassoon case during the Great War, leaves the extent to which he may have been simulating his symptoms ambiguous.

This last group, Waelder speculates, led Freud to refine and extend his earlier work on trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) (Lifton 164).

One lesson of “[t]he terrible war which has just ended,” Freud declares, which “gave rise to a great number of illnesses of this kind [‘traumatic neurosis’],” is that “it at least put an end to the temptation to attribute the cause of the disorder to organic lesions of the nervous system brought about by mechanical force.” He is particularly engrossed by the recurrent distressing dreams connected to the “severe mechanical concussions” either of “railway disasters and other accidents involving a risk to life” or of the shock of battle (*BTPP* 12). For, he insists,

[a]nyone who accepts it as something self-evident that their dreams should put them back at night into the situation that caused them to fall ill has misunderstood the nature of dreams. It would be more in harmony with their nature if they showed the patient pictures from his healthy past or of the cure for which he hopes. (13)

Freud’s thinking about traumatic dreams represents a watershed that very typically divides him and psychoanalysts generally from other theorists of trauma. To demonstrate this, it is necessary first to turn to a consideration of the concept of dissociation.

3. Dissociation

At the very beginning of Freud’s career as a psychological theorist, a career that would establish him as “a founding figure in the history of the conceptualization of trauma” (Leys 18), he and Breuer sought to understand the conversion hysterias suffered by their female patients by analogy to the delayed psychological effects of physical shocks. In their jointly authored “On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: A Preliminary Communication” (1893), they report that their investigations over a number of years have taught them “that external events determine the pathology of hysteria to an extent far greater than is known or recognized” (4), events that often comprise memories that “persist for a long time with astonishing freshness and with the whole of their affective colouring” but that, “unlike other memories of their past lives,

⁷ Since the mid-nineteenth century, the juridical consequences of trauma have helped to maintain it as a subject of popular consciousness. Over the past thirty years, the greatest public controversy has centered upon what Frederick Crews (*Memory Wars, passim*) has called the *memory wars* stemming from allegations of childhood sexual abuse based upon the reputed recovery of long- and deeply-buried memories. One of the most prominent advocates for the authenticity of such memory has been Judith Herman (see her *Trauma and Recovery*).

are not at the patients' disposal. On the contrary," they continue, "*these experiences are completely absent from the patients' memories when they are in a normal psychical state, or are only present in a highly summary form.* Not until they have been questioned under hypnosis do these memories emerge with the undiminished vividness of a recent event" (9, emphasis original). "*Observations such as these,*" they argue, "*seem to us to establish an analogy between the pathogenesis of common hysteria and that of traumatic neuroses, and to justify an extension of the concept of common hysteria.* In traumatic neuroses," they point out, "the operative cause of the illness is not the trifling physical injury but the affect of fright—the psychical trauma. In an analogous manner," they continue, "our investigations reveal, for many, if not for most, hysterical symptoms, precipitating causes which can only be described as psychical traumas. Any experience which calls up distressing affects—such as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain—may operate as a trauma of this kind...." (5–6, emphasis original).

The *operative* or *precipitating* cause in many of these illnesses, therefore, is trauma, which they identify as an "experience which calls up distressing affects": *fright* in the case of physical accidents or *fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain* in other instances (5–6). From the economic point of view of the Freudian metapsychology⁸ already being elaborated, the authors argue that, in certain dispositions, illnesses may occur that later manifest themselves either in chronic symptoms or in hysterical attacks (15–17) if patients do not react to trauma when it occurs to discharge its corresponding affect. In "a normal person who has experienced a psychical trauma," the authors state, the "memory of such a trauma [...] enters the great complex of associations, [and] it comes alongside other experiences, which may contradict it." Through its integration into a broad range of ongoing experience, the shocking episode is put into a context of meaning that prevents it from becoming life defining. Freud and Breuer elaborate:

After an accident, for instance, the memory of the danger and the (mitigated) repetition of the fright becomes associated with the memory of what happened afterwards—rescue and the consciousness of present safety. Again, a person's

⁸ Peter Gay explains that

[a]s Freud worked with his coinage "metapsychology," [...] he defined it more and more strictly, as a psychology that analyzes the workings of the mind from three perspectives: the dynamic, the economic, and the topographic. The first of these perspectives entails probing mental phenomena to their roots in conflict-ridden unconscious forces mainly originating in, but not confined to, the drives; the second attempts to specify the quantities and vicissitudes of mental energies; the third undertakes to differentiate distinct domains within the mind. Together, these defining perspectives sharply distinguished psychoanalysis from other psychologies. (369, fn)

memory of a humiliation is corrected by his putting the facts right, by considering his own worth, etc. In this way a normal person is able to bring about the disappearance of the accompanying affect through the process of association. (9)

Others who suffer psychic trauma, however, are not so fortunate. In some instances, people do not immediately and adequately react to a psychic trauma because its circumstances dictate against it. One reason adduced is that the trauma may involve “things which the patient wished to forget, and therefore intentionally repressed⁹ from his conscious thought and inhibited and suppressed” (10). In other instances, the person affected is incapacitated and cannot immediately and adequately react due to “severely paralysing affects, such as fright” or to “positively abnormal psychical states, such as the semi-hypnotic twilight state of day-dreaming, auto-hypnoses, and so on. In such instances,” the authors declare, “it is the nature of the states which makes a reaction to the [traumatic] event impossible” (11).

The upshot of the inability to react to the affect of the traumatic event by associating that event with other experience is that its memory becomes insulated from or encapsulated in that of normal, integrated experience in an abnormal, dissociated state of consciousness the authors describe as hypnoid, a state in which the affect connected to the trauma continues to press for discharge. This pressure produces the chronic symptoms or hysterical attacks from which the patient suffers, and it continues to do so until discharge is effected. The catharsis required may be achieved therapeutically through hypnosis, whereby the sufferer, by being returned to the hypnoid state in which the traumatic memory is encapsulated, is enabled to recall the event and react to it retroactively, a process the authors term *abreaction*. Abreaction facilitates symbolizing the event in language, which is often a key to discharge. “The injured person’s reaction to the trauma,” the authors insist, “only exercises a completely ‘cathartic’ effect if it is an *adequate* reaction—as, for instance, revenge. But language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an affect can be ‘abreacted’ almost as effectively” (8, emphasis original).

Much of what Breuer and Freud wrote in 1893 has remarkable currency. For instance, in summarizing the thought of Bessel van der Kolk, a prominent modern trauma theorist, Ruth Leys observes that, according to van der Kolk, traumatic memory

is not integrated into ordinary awareness but is cut off or “dissociated” from consciousness and hence is unavailable for normal recollection. Traumatic disorders are thus simultaneously disorders of remembering and forgetting: the traumatic

⁹ The editors point out that “[t]his is the first appearance of the term ‘repressed’ (‘*verdrängt*’) in what was to be its psycho-analytic sense.” At this early date, repression was still attributed to conscious intention (10, fn. 1).

“stimulus” seems to be recorded in the brain with unparalleled vividness and accuracy but, precisely because the traumatic event is so shattering, the memory of the trauma is radically dissociated from symbolization, meaning, and the usual processes of integration. (239)

Although Breuer and Freud make no statements about the accuracy of traumatic memory, this summary is otherwise consonant with views they express at the beginning of Freud’s career. But it is not Breuer and Freud among the progenitors of trauma theory to whom contemporary investigators now allude so much as Pierre Janet, whose “monumental legacy,” according to van der Kolk and van der Hart, “was crowded out by psychoanalysis, and largely forgotten, until Henri Ellenberger rescued him from total obscurity in ‘The Discovery of the Unconscious’ (1970).”¹⁰ Like Breuer and Freud, Janet also believes that some people are temperamentally disposed to suffer the effects of trauma more than others: to some extent the proclivity to suffer is inversely proportional to one’s “‘psychological force’ (overall energy level) and psychological tension (the capacity to focus on relevant information and utilize available data for appropriate action).”¹¹ More significantly, however, Janet insists that “healthy psychological functioning” depends upon the ability automatically to assimilate new experience into an ever-evolving, flexible network of memory now commonly referred to as *implicit* memory (426). Frightening experiences may pose cognitive problems that prevent their automatic integration into this implicit memory. “[E]xisting meaning schemes may be entirely unable to accommodate” such experiences, “which causes [their] memory...to be stored differently and not available for retrieval under ordinary conditions.” The upshot is that they become “dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control” (427).¹²

¹⁰ As I discuss below, in turning his attention to the instinctual basis of psychic life, Freud would soon dissociate himself from his early theories of dissociation and abreaction that have once again achieved prominence in the thinking of many trauma theorists.

¹¹ Breuer and Freud also declare that some people are more disposed than others to drift into the hypnoid states that render people more susceptible to suffering traumas with enduring, dissociated effects. Apparently, the tendency to drift into such states can be culturally enhanced. Such states, they speculate, often “grow out of the day-dreams which are so common in healthy people and to which needlework and similar occupations render women especially prone” (“On the Psychical Mechanism” 8).

¹² The authors are summarizing Janet’s views published in his *L’automatisme psychologique* and *Les médications psychologiques*.

Although Breuer and Freud on the one hand and Janet on the other agree (or agreed in the early 1890s) that traumatic memories are dissociated from normal consciousness, the former tend to see trauma as an emotional problem (a problem of undischarged affect) while Janet analyzes it more as a cognitive problem. The traumatic experience simply does not make sense in terms of a memory structure that one has elaborated in the course of one's life. In its dissociated state, however, Janet insists that the experience becomes a "'traumatic memory,' which merely and unconsciously *repeats* the past." The object of therapy is to convert that *traumatic* memory, if memory it is, into "'narrative memory,' which *narrates the past as past*" (Leys 105, emphasis original). Over time, therefore, the cognitive problem of trauma more and more becomes a temporal one. Traumatic memory may not be *memory* at all, for, so the argument goes, it is experienced in nightmares, flashbacks, and bodily sensations as if it were happening for the first time. The point of narrating the story of the traumatic event is to get the patient to "*say* 'I remember'"¹³ in order to put it "in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history"¹⁴ (111, emphasis original). The patient continues to suffer due to an inability to comprehend that the precipitating event properly lies in a past that has been survived. The resolution of traumatic neurosis, then, is seen to lie principally in putting one's experiences in proper temporal sequence.

4. Conceptualizing Trauma in Terms of a Psychology of Consciousness

When van der Kolk and van der Hart state that Janet's "monumental legacy was crowded out by psychoanalysis" (110 above), this is probably largely attributable to the circumstance that, "[i]n contrast with Freud, who thought that memories of conflictual issues were repressed, Janet thought that mental patients suffered from a loss of capacity to store and utilize conscious information" (van der Kolk, Brown, and van der Hart 376). In focussing as he does on the psychology of consciousness, Janet seems to be working within a western philosophical tradition stemming from classical Athens that the good life—individually and corporately—is achievable but only through the exercise of rationality. In particular, Plato and Aristotle teach that reasonable individuals can achieve not only intellectual and moral coherence but harmony within the political state and, through the contemplation of the good, within the cosmos itself. I believe I am on safe ground in arguing that the early psychological investigators of trauma—Freud as

¹³ Leys is quoting a translation from Janet's *Névroses et idées fixes* (137, emphasis added by Leys).

¹⁴ Leys is quoting from Janet's *Psychological Healing: A Historical and Clinical Study*, an English language translation of *Médications psychologiques* (1:661–2).

well as Janet—understand the resulting hysteria as rooted in a failure of the coherence that Plato and Aristotle value as an attribute of the good life.¹⁵ On this view, the goal of therapy lies in healing the fracture or wound produced by trauma in one’s psychic life by rendering a consistent account of one’s experience. This goal manifests the enduring appeal or desire for the wholeness characterizing the classical Athenian conception of the good life to which I allude above, an ideal translated into Christian terms by such biblical injunctions as “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mat 5.48).

Leys suggests the imperative dominating Janet’s therapeutic technique is to heal the traumatic wound by helping the sufferer to achieve a symbolically coherent account of his or her life by the best means available, even if this involves forgetting certain events rather than remembering them. In fact, she says,

[i]n 1894, Janet [...] remarked that one of the most valuable discoveries of pathological psychology would be a sure means of helping us to forget. The same year he criticized Breuer and Freud’s account of the cathartic cure on the grounds that what mattered in the treatment of the neuroses was not the “confession” of the traumatic memory but its elimination. Nor did the ethical implications of such “modern exorcism” or “psychological surgery” trouble him.¹⁶ (107–8)

On this view it is more important therapeutically that the sense the patient makes of his or her experience be coherent than truthful.¹⁷ The history of a life is as liable to the same literary construction as Hayden White claims that political or social history is—as liable to be narrativized

¹⁵ For Aristotle tragedy arises in a flaw in the hero’s otherwise noble character representing a fracture in his or her rational and moral capacity that invariably undermines the social order (48).

¹⁶ She is here summarizing ideas that appear in Janet’s *Névroses et idées fixes* and *Psychological Healing: A Historical and Clinical Study*.

¹⁷ Herman condemns Janet in that he “sometimes attempted in his work with hysterical patients to erase traumatic memories or even to alter their contents with the aid of hypnosis.” This violates her conception of “[t]he fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic work,” which, she asserts, “is a belief in the restorative power of truth-telling” (181). In commenting upon these statements, Leys observes that “[f]or Herman and for the modern recovery movement generally, even if the victim of trauma *could* be cured without obtaining historical insight into the origins of her distress, such a cure would not be morally acceptable” (109, emphasis original). For the trauma of childhood sexual abuse in which she specializes, Herman argues that truth-telling is necessary for social healing. Her argument is similar to that which animated truth commissions in Guatemala and South Africa.

according to a standard set of plots that, I suggest, derive principally from the ideological repertoire of one's culture. This view of trauma therapy is consonant with the notion that subjectivity itself is largely a fiction imposed upon experience to impart meaning to it.

The imposition of form upon experience is a function of the subjectivity that distinguishes humans among animals. Georges Bataille says that "in our eyes, the animal is in the world like water in water," a poetic expression of a suspected lack of subjectivity that manifests itself in a sense of the world's immanence (*Theory* 24). "It is only within the limits of the human," he insists, "that the transcendence of things in relation to consciousness (or of consciousness in relation to things) is manifested" (23–24). This insight suggests that it is only among humans, on the one hand, that a sense of consciousness exists as something apart from and over against everything else, and it is only among humans (and perhaps some other primates), on the other hand, that a special sense of structure exists that maintains the difference. This sense has allowed humans, otherwise incapable of surviving in "Nature, red in tooth and claw," to domesticate it by imposing forms upon it within which to take shelter and survive.

In elaborating his theory of archetypal meaning, Northrop Frye writes about the forms that "categories of reality [...] assume under the work of human civilization" in a way that emphasizes this point. "The form imposed by human work and desire," he tells us,

on the *vegetable* world [...] is that of the garden, the farm, the grove, or the park. The human form of the *animal* world is a world of domesticated animals, of which the sheep has a traditional priority in both Classical and Christian metaphor. The human form of the *mineral* world, the form into which human work transforms stone, is the city. (141, emphasis original)

Similarly, in terms of the psychology of consciousness I am now discussing, the narratives we continually elaborate about our own lives are, *ideally*, personal works of civilization. Like the gardens, farms, groves, parks, and cities of which Frye writes, they are structures or forms we construct and impose upon the flux of nature, forms in which we aim to take shelter and to live securely. Much of this structure consists of implicit memories, i.e., those experiences, as we have seen, that Janet posits are automatically assimilated into an ever-evolving, flexible network of memory (110 above). Part of this network is also a framework within which we conceptualize our lives unfolding, a framework comprising assumptions, beliefs, and expectations, among other things, which, like the memories from which it derives, are frequently implicit in the narratives that constitute our personal histories. Much of this framework is inculcated ideologically.

Janet's concept of dissociated memory arising from an inability to integrate experience into "existing cognitive schemes" of a "personal narrative" (van der Kolk, Weisarth and van der Hart 52) implies that consciousness *ideally* involves a coherent psychic organization that

determines the sense we make of things. That ability to make sense of things symbolically, which I speculate developed from the capacity to locate oneself as a subject within a structure, is a corollary of the loss of immanence. The recognition of a transcendent world introduces humans into a world of experience—a world that other animals do not suffer, a world against which humans require a defensive shelter if they are to survive. In elaborating his existentialist psychology, Ernest Becker refers to Rudolph Otto's capacity "to get descriptively at man's natural feeling of inferiority in the face of the massive transcendence of creation." Otto, he points out, "talked of the terror of the world, the feeling of overwhelming awe, wonder, and fear in the face of creation—the miracle of it, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinatum* of each single thing, of the fact that there are things at all" (49).¹⁸ It is this terror of the transcendent world, Becker insists, against which humans require protection. Other animals do not: living immanently—non-self-consciously—in the world as they do, they do not sense transcendence.¹⁹ Moreover, Becker points out,

nature has protected the lower animals by endowing them with instincts. An instinct is a programmed perception. It is very simple. Animals are not moved by what they cannot react to. They live in a tiny world, a sliver of reality, one neurochemical program that keeps them walking behind their noses and shuts out everything else. But look at man, the impossible creature! Here nature seems to have thrown caution to the winds along with the programmed instincts. She created an animal who has no defence against full perception of the external world, an animal completely open to experience. Not only in front of his nose, in his *umwelt*, but in many other . He can relate not only to animals, but in some ways to all other species. He can contemplate not only what is edible for him, but everything that grows. He not only lives in this moment, but expands his inner self to yesterday, his curiosity to centuries ago, his fears to five billion years from now when the sun will cool, his hopes to an eternity from now. He lives not only on a tiny territory, nor even on an entire planet, but in a galaxy, in a universe, and in dimensions beyond visible universes. It is appalling, the burden that man bears, the *experiential* burden. (50–51, emphasis original)

¹⁸ Becker is summarizing material in Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*.

¹⁹ I am well aware of the feminist critique that writing privileging the experience of transcendence is masculine gendered. For this very reason, Becker's text illuminates the psychic dynamics of a patriarchal text such as *Amos*.

The loss of immanence mirrors a shift in the sources of information upon which humans depend for survival. “[H]uman behavior,” Clifford Geertz observes, “is inherently extremely plastic. Not strictly but only very broadly controlled by genetic programs or models—*intrinsic* sources of information—such behavior must,” he concludes, “if it is to have any effective form at all, be controlled to a significant extent by *extrinsic* ones” (63, emphasis added). But the shift to a greater reliance upon extrinsic information that goes hand in hand with a sense of the world as transcendent has the power, as Becker details, to overwhelm us. What Frye calls the works of civilization—among which I include the narrative structures we construct about our own lives—are necessary, therefore, to carve out secure habitations in which to live by reducing the immensity Becker describes to a manageable scale.

My first thought in attempting to connect the foregoing ruminations to Janet’s concept of trauma is that traumatic experiences are those that threaten to fracture the civilizing frameworks in which we live. Thinking of traumatic experiences in terms of threat is consonant with thinking of those frameworks in terms of defence, the necessity for which Becker suggests by characterizing the human animal in the state of nature as defenceless “against full perception of the external world.” Moreover, characterizing trauma as a threat requiring a corresponding defence is the most dramatically appealing way of schematizing its force. On second thought, however, this way of putting things cannot accurately represent Janet’s view, at least in terms of emphasis. For Janet, the problem that trauma poses very much requires a cognitive resolution that requires putting experience into a proper temporal sequence. Traumatic experience is dissociatively walled off not so much because it poses a threat but because it makes no sense in terms of the cognitive schemes that comprise the content of consciousness.²⁰

As a psychologist of consciousness, it follows that Janet attempts to understand trauma in terms of cognitive dissonance. But I suspect that some of this focus upon consciousness is axiomatic: it seems to reflect a valuing of self-conscious wholeness understood as an ideal goal for human nature. Therapy aimed at achieving a temporally coherent narrative of one’s memories may reflect a subscription to some notion of entelechy, i.e., to a teleological concept of human nature whereby we continually attempt to realize a potential for wholeness. Herman’s statement that “[m]ost theorists [...] speculate that the repetitive reliving of the traumatic experience must represent a spontaneous, unsuccessful attempt at healing” (41) implies that we are psychically programmed to heal ourselves—to overcome our traumatic wounds perhaps by anal-

²⁰ Early in his career Freud distinguished between hypnoid and defence hysteria as if the former were not a form of defence. Later he came to suspect that dissociated consciousness is also a form of defence.

ogy to the physiology of bodily healing. Of what such psychic healing consists, of course, can only be determined normatively.

Because humans are thinking animals, I do not doubt Paul Ricoeur's assertion that "conceptual clarification [...] has therapeutic value" (*Living* 8). Such clarification, however, need not result from deliberately rational processes. Janet's notion that the structure of consciousness comprises automatically assimilated memories underscores the assumption that this structure itself is the complex fabrication of a mechanism of which we can hardly be aware. The many elements of that structure absorbed ideologically are not subjected to critical scrutiny in that process.²¹ Indeed, the automaticity of the normal assimilation of experience into memory is remarkably similar to that characterizing the ideological formation of political subjects discussed in the previous chapter.

At this point, I turn from Janet's elaboration of trauma in terms of a psychology of consciousness to consider Freud's elaboration of a theory of instinct as the basis for his ongoing speculations about the nature of trauma.

5. Freud and the Turn from Consciousness to Instinct

Observing that "Freud has gone out of fashion," Ian Hacking comments that, as a corollary to this, some historians of psychoanalysis who would bury him once and for all try "to ignore the fact that Freud transformed Western consciousness more surely than the atomic bomb or the welfare state." Among the "more fundamental aspects of his work" that "we often ignore," he argues, is that "[h]e cemented the idea of psychic trauma" (76). *Cement* is an odd word to employ to characterize the consequences of Freud's work on trauma, for his ideas on the subject never, it seems, held together with much consistency. Leys insists that "it cannot be emphasized too strongly that [...] Freud's writings of the 1920s and 1930s remained fraught with doubt and vacillation. In particular, everything he wrote about the ego's defences in the traumatic neuroses of war was marked by hesitation and contradiction" (25).

It is not, however, Freud's work on trauma that accounts for his revolutionary impact upon modern thought. That impact, rather, arises from the manifold ramifications of a lifelong investigation articulated upon the premise that human beings, regardless of their current state of

²¹ Clifford Geertz, for one, observes that "[w]here science is the diagnostic, the critical, dimension of culture, ideology is the justificatory, the apologetic, one—it refers 'to that part of culture which is actively concerned with the establishment and defence of patterns of belief and value'" (71). Geertz is quoting Lloyd A. Fallers, "Ideology and Culture in Uganda Nationalism" (677–8).

evolution, are still animals. His early notoriety arose from the scandalous implications of that work: that humans (and, more particularly, children) are subject to the same creaturely impulses that characterize *animality* and make it a term of contempt. When Bataille distinguishes the human from the animal in terms of the capacity to perceive the world's transcendence, he is participating in the age-old philosophical undertaking of idealizing humans as subjects of consciousness, which is indispensable to idealizing them further as subjects of will. To Janet and his followers, the wound of trauma impairs the will. "In his use of language," Herman states, "Janet implicitly recognized that helplessness constitutes the essential insult of trauma, and that restitution requires the restoration of a sense of efficacy and power" (21), in short, the restitution of conscious mastery over one's life.

In conceptualizing human beings as animals, Freud tends to collapse distinctions valorizing humans in terms of the quality of consciousness. "Psycho-analytic speculation," he insists, "takes as its point of departure the impression, derived from examining unconscious processes, that consciousness may be, not the most universal attribute of mental processes, but only a particular function of them" (*BTPP* 24). A more universal attribute of mental processes is the force of instinct, a force so universal that, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud ascribes the origin of life itself to the awakening of instinct. It is remarkable the extent to which this book speculates upon the hypothetical "living organism in its most simplified possible form as an undifferentiated vesicle of a substance that is susceptible to stimulation" (26). Freud is here searching for the basic principles that separate the living from the non-living, principles of life rather than consciousness that characterize one-celled organisms as well as humans.

In what he admits to being an "often far-fetched speculation" (24), Freud searches for those principles in terms of the response to stimulation. Conceptualizing the "undifferentiated vesicle" representing "the living organism in its most simplified possible form," he speculates that "the surface turned towards the external world will from its very situation be differentiated and will serve as an organ for receiving stimuli." "It would be easy to suppose," he continues, that as a result of the ceaseless impact of external stimuli on the surface of the vesicle, its substance to a certain depth may have become permanently modified, so that excitatory processes run a different course in it from what they run in the deeper layers. A crust would thus be formed which would at last have been so thoroughly "baked through" by stimulation that it would present the most favourable possible conditions for the reception of stimuli and become incapable of any further modification.

Eventually, the elements of this "baked-through" crust "would have become capable of giving rise to consciousness" (26). Characterizing consciousness arising from a physical crust is a

curious procedure. Nevertheless, it suggests that topographically consciousness itself evolved as part of a protective shield.

One significance of this line of thought in a discussion of trauma is that it demonstrates Freud thinking about the processes that gave rise to life itself—and the consciousness that eventually arose in animal life—as traumatic events. In a vision similar to Becker's, he imagines his “little fragment of living substance” exposed to an external world that threatens to overpower and destroy it (Becker, 114 above). He sees it “suspended in the middle of an external world charged with the most powerful energies[,]” one in which “it would be killed by the stimulation emanating from these [energies] if it were not provided with a protective shield against stimuli” (*BTPP* 27). “*Protection against stimuli*,” he insists, “is an almost more important function for the living organism than *reception of stimuli*” (27, emphasis original). Here we have a concept of a living thing as a entity (an inside) that requires, as a condition of its existence, a defence against a force or forces (an outside) that threaten to destroy it. This necessity accords with the concept that humans require shelter in which to live, but Freud extends his thinking on the subject to all forms of life. After a long speculation upon the evolutionary development of his primitive organism's defences, Freud arrives at his most basic definition of trauma: “We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (29).

The universal tendency of living things to defend themselves against the unpleasure of excessive stimulation illustrates the operation of the pleasure principle as if it were a natural law. “In the theory of psycho-analysis,” Freud states in the opening sentences of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, “we have no hesitation in assuming that the course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle.” He immediately summarizes what he means by this: “We believe that the course of those events is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and that it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension—that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure” (7). The equation *tension = unpleasure* is axiomatic in Freud's work. In consequence, from the economic point of view of his metapsychology, he consistently sees mental processes as dedicated to binding the free psychic energy that he conceives as the source of unpleasurable excitation in order to reduce it to quietude. “We have decided,” he concludes, “to relate pleasure and unpleasure to the quantity of excitation that is present in the mind but is not in any way ‘bound’; and to relate them in such a manner that unpleasure corresponds to an *increase* in the quantity of excitation and pleasure to a *diminution*” (7–8, emphasis original).

At the risk of oversimplifying Freud's concept of instincts,²² their most basic function is

automatically to regulate the psychic mechanism to keep its overall level of excitation as constantly low as possible. They do this by developing a pressure counter to that exerted by unbound psychic energy, in order to effect a result analogous to that of a discharge in a steam or hydraulic system, a result achieved in Freud's system, as just noted, by the binding of energy. Laplanche and Pontalis point out that the "idea that the instincts are to be defined essentially by the pressure that they exert dates from the beginnings of Freud's theoretical thought" (330).

6. Repression versus Dissociation

Not long after Freud and Breuer collaborated in 1893 on "On the Psychological Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena: A Preliminary Communication," Freud dissociated himself from the concept of dissociation. Already by 1895, when Breuer's and Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* appeared, Freud makes it clear that dissociation was Breuer's idea. Although he concedes that "[i]t was hypnoid hysteria²³ which was the first of all to enter our field of study" (285), he declares that "I have never in my own experience met with a genuine hypnoid hysteria. Any that I took in hand has turned into a defence hysteria" (286). In each of his own cases, he states, he "was able to show afterwards that the *so-called* hypnoid state owed its separation to the fact that in it a psychological group had come into effect which had previously been split off by defence. In short," he con-

²² Freud uses two terms—*Instinkt* and *Trieb*—that, as Laplanche indicates, "in common [German] usage [...] have more or less the same meaning." Both are frequently translated into English and French as *instinct*. But Laplanche insists that Freud "exploit[s]" the "objective duplicity" of the terms "to introduce a slight difference of meaning, which is occasionally barely perceptible, but will at times be accentuated to the point of constituting a veritable opposition" (*Life* 9). To distinguish the two, Laplanche translates *Instinkt* by *instinct* and *Triep* by *pulsion*, which his own translators render into English as *instinct* and *drive* respectively. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, Freud uses *Instinkt* (*instinct*) "in the classical sense" to speak, for instance, of the responses of "animals confronted by danger" (*Language* 214). In *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche states that Freud typically but not consistently uses *Triep* (*drive*) to refer to instincts as they are modified and operative in humans. In his discussion of *anaclisis*, Laplanche argues that drives are derived from instincts in early childhood through metonymic associations (15–18, 74, 86–87). In this study I follow these distinctions: *instinct* refers to a phenomenon applicable to animals generally and *drive* to one applicable to humans specifically. Quoted material does not always follow suit, thereby reflecting the terminological imprecision of Freud and his translators and interpreters.

²³ *Hypnoid hysteria* refers to the symptoms arising from dissociated memories. The hypnoid state is that in which traumatic memories are encapsulated (see 109 above).

cludes, “I am unable to suppress a suspicion that somewhere or other the roots of hypnoid and defence hysteria come together, and that there the primary factor is defence. But I can say nothing about this” (286, emphasis added). Contrary to this final admission, he would spend the rest of his life elaborating the largely unconscious mechanisms of defence that aim “at the reduction and elimination of any change liable to threaten the integrity and stability of the bio-psychological individual” (Laplanche and Pontalis 103).

A problem that Freud had with Breuer's concept of dissociation is that in it “[n]o psychological force has [...] been required in order to keep it [the pathogenic idea] apart from the ego and no resistance need be aroused if we introduce it into the ego with the help of mental activity during somnambulism [hypnosis]” (Breuer and Freud, “Studies” 285). The theory of dissociation fits neither the dynamic nor economic perspective of Freud's metapsychology. In attempting to describe dissociation, van der Kolk and van der Hart state that it “reflects a horizontally layered model of the mind: when a subject does not remember a trauma, its ‘memory’ is contained in an alternate stream of consciousness, which may be subconscious or dominate consciousness, e.g., during the traumatic re-enactments” (438).²⁴ Although it is not clear how a subconscious psychic region is to be conceived as an alternate stream of consciousness, the main idea here seems to involve parallel regions between which the mind flickers back and forth as if there were some insulation failure between the two. Clearly, such flickering cannot be analyzed according to Freud's dynamic approach, which accounts for mental phenomena in terms of conflicts marking the vicissitudes of instinct. Nor can it be analyzed economically in terms of “the circulation and distribution of an [instinctual] energy [...] that can be quantified, i.e., that is capable of increase, decrease and equivalence” (Laplanche and Pontalis 127).

The idea of a psychic force that Freud misses in Breuer's—and, by extension, Janet's—concept of dissociation fits better with the idea of repression, which, in contrast to the horizontal structure of dissociation, “reflects a vertically layered model of the mind: what is repressed is pushed downward, into the unconscious. The subject no longer has access to it. Only symbolic, indirect indications would point to its assumed existence” (van der Kolk and van der Hart 437–38). Van der Kolk and van der Hart conclude that “[a]ttempts to relate both models [of dissociation and repression] to each other have, so far, been rather unsuccessful [...]. One failure is that in these combined models, traumatic memories cannot be both dissociated and repressed” (438, typographical error corrected).

²⁴ The authors are summarizing ideas they attribute to Janet's “Historie d'une idée fixe” contained in his *Névroses et idées fixes*.

Although I agree with what van der Kolk and his associates say in contrasting dissociation and repression, it begs the question of why researchers would seek to relate them. Properly understood, repression is also a response to cognitive dissonance. “Strictly speaking,” Laplanche and Pontalis state, repression is “an operation whereby the subject attempts to repel, to confine to the unconscious, representations (thoughts, images, memories) which are *bound* to an instinct.”²⁵ Repression occurs when to satisfy an instinct—though likely to be pleasurable in itself—would incur the risk of provoking unpleasure because of *other requirements*” (390, emphasis added). Repression so defined is a defence against the threat the idea representing the drive would pose by emerging into consciousness.

In Freud’s scheme, therefore, instinct is one type of defence, and repression another. Instinct is a defence against excessive stimulation characterizing all life forms, one to be sought ultimately on the cellular level. Repression, on the other hand, is a defence against the satisfaction of a drive. Operating according to the pleasure principle, it functions when the pleasure of satisfying a drive threatens to become unpleasurable “because of other requirements” (Laplanche and Pontalis 390). Those other requirements are those of human culture that assume so prominent a place in the cognitive schemes comprising the content of consciousness. Humans are subjects of instinct because they are living beings but subjects of repression because they are a particular type of social being. Their society does not depend, as it does with ants and bees, upon instinct understood classically as patterned “behaviour determined by heredity” (Laplanche and Pontalis 214). It depends, rather, upon the ability to take one’s place within a symbolic order that endows existence with meaning.

Freud understands repression as a response to the threat (symbolized in the threat of castration) through which society enforces its demands that the gratification of drives conform to normative patterns. Repression is the mechanism through which individuals signal acceptance of the power relations of the symbolic order and take their places within it. The movement of self-limitation implicit in repression is part of that dynamic through which human beings seek secure shelter in a universe that threatens to overwhelm them. Becker insists that repression is absolutely essential if a child, for instance, is to develop the capacity to function in the world, what with its wonder and terror. Living within the framework of culture reduces the terror of an otherwise inexplicable cosmos to a framework of symbolic meaning. For human beings, the pro-

²⁵ Freud’s stipulates that “[a]n instinct can never become an object of consciousness—only the idea that represents the instinct can” (“Unconscious” 177).

tective shield that Freud stipulates is a *sine qua non* for the continued existence of living beings extends to include the cognitive schemes of culture as well.²⁶

Dissociation and repression, therefore, are both theories that account for a failure to integrate certain experiences (identified as traumatic) into existing patterns of meaning. Dissociation theory, on the one hand, operates on the principle that traumatic experience makes no sense in terms of existing patterns of conscious meaning. According to van der Kolk and Greenberg, the difficulty of integrating such experience is exacerbated because it resists symbolization. Traumatic memories, they insist, “are encoded in sensorimotor or iconic form and therefore cannot be easily translated into the symbolic language necessary for linguistic retrieval.” They conclude that “[t]he essence of the trauma experience is that it leaves people in a state of [literally] ‘unspeakable terror’” (“Retrieval” 193). Repression, on the other hand, operates because the subject affected would be all too clear about the meaning of the experience in question were it allowed to enter consciousness. Construed in terms of a threat, that experience is pressed down into the unconscious so that the subject may avoid consciously coming to grips with its meaning, which, however, continues to be addressed unconsciously through dreamwork and neurotic symptoms.

The foregoing discussion treats repression in its strict sense. As with most things Freudian, the concept has an ongoing life and development that renders its more complex. Laplanche and Pontalis point out that

[i]n a looser sense, the term “repression” is sometimes used by Freud in a way that approximates it to “defence.” There are two reasons for this: first, the operation of repression in [the strict] sense [...] constitutes one stage-to say the least-in many complex defensive processes (and Freud takes the part for the whole); secondly, the theoretical model of repression is used by Freud as the prototype of other defensive procedures. (390-91)

In the ensuing discussion of repression as a defence against the terrible knowledge that traumatic experience imparts, I use repression in this looser sense used by Freud.

²⁶ Although Freud recognizes that the social life upon which human survival depends is a product of repression, his clinical practice was dedicated to liberating neurotics from the effects of excessive repression.

7. The Dialectics of Trauma

Long ago western thinkers conceptualized that humans occupy a place within the plenum of existence or upon a chain of being intermediate between spiritual and animal spheres (Lovejoy). For instance, in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) has God proclaim to humanity:

I have put thee in the center of the universe in order for thee to see better what is there. I did not make thee either a heavenly or an earthly creature, either mortal or immortal; I created thee so that as thine own sculptor thou makest thine own features. Thou canst degenerate into an animal; but thou canst also be reborn, through the free will of thine own spirit, into the image of God. (qtd. in Choron 96)

Freud's work on trauma reflects a concept of the human condition reminiscent of Pico's: that of an animal also capable of recognizing itself as a subject over against an environment that it transcends or that transcends it. However, Freud would qualify Pico's assertion in several ways. Over the long run, most of us are likely neither to "degenerate into an animal" or to be "reborn [...] into the image of God." Most of us, rather, are condemned perpetually to oscillate between the two poles Pico's thought comprehends: an animal pole manifest in instinctive desire and a social pole manifest in submission to a demand that animal desire be strictly controlled and limited. And the question of sculpting our nature with the freedom of will that Pico attributes to us is simply out of the question.²⁷ The best most of us can do is to strike some balance between these poles of our psychic existences. Our condition is perhaps best characterized in terms of a dilemma, for the demands these poles represent cannot be reconciled. In the heat of passion, the animal seeks liberation from law and all institutions that aim to regulate its conduct. But, as subjects (and objects) of culture, humans consistently seek to deny (or repress) the animality (or creatureliness) that also informs them.

²⁷ Although Freud is a materialist who emphasizes human animality, he nevertheless aims therapeutically to free people from the grip of neurotic or psychotic symptoms. It may seem incongruous to introduce a quotation from Pico, with his Christian talk of being "reborn...into the image of God," into a discussion of a secular thinker such as Freud, but the tension Pico describes mirrors the tension I here summarize in psychoanalytic theory. Moreover, engaged as Pico seems to be in the early modern discourse on free will, his talk of a humanity "reborn...into the image of God" may be taken to symbolize a humanity that has achieved a sovereign freedom. Pico and Freud differ fundamentally in the framework of their thought, but they share the aspiration that humanity achieve a greater degree of freedom.

Traumatic experience involves both poles of the psyche. Taking Freud's general theory of the instincts as an investigation of the denominator common to all life forms—i.e., the psychic dimension of human animality—we will recall that Freud defines as traumatic “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield.” Although Freud does write of this shield as a lifeless membrane, it is clear that, in humans, the system *Cs.* that lies adjacent to it, the system in which consciousness is contained (*BTPP* 28), works in protective conjunction with this shield. In respect to what he calls the “ordinary traumatic neuroses” (i.e., the “neuroses of peace” such as the railway disasters that first informed his thinking on trauma rather than the neuroses that surfaced during the Great War), he observes that “two characteristics emerge prominently: first, that the chief weight in their causation seems to rest upon the factor of surprise, of fright; and secondly, that a wound or injury inflicted simultaneously works as a rule against the development of a neurosis.” In other words, it is not physical trauma that produces psychic trauma but the “factor of surprise” (12). The fright so decisive in rendering a railway disaster traumatic arises in the total unpreparedness for the shock the disaster produces. Preparedness, which can only exist in the system *Cs.*, is part of the protective shield. It allows us, as it were, psychically to brace ourselves against the oncoming blow, which reduces the overall level of excitation this blow produces. In a curious phrase, Freud states that the fright “is caused by lack of any preparedness for anxiety, including lack of hypercathexis²⁸ of the systems that would be the first to receive the stimulus” (31). Anxiety, then, is a necessary part of the defence against oncoming disaster. It signals the psychic system to prepare itself. Lacking that preparedness, the system's defences are inevitably breached. “I do not believe,” Freud states, “anxiety can produce a traumatic neurosis. There is something about anxiety,” he says, “that protects its subject against fright and so against fright-neuroses” (12–13). “Preparedness for anxiety,” he concludes, “and the hypercathexis of the receptive systems constitute the last line of defence of the shield against stimuli” (31).

The protective function of anxiety is the key to understanding a puzzling symptom of traumatic neurosis: the dreams that “have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright” (13). That such dreams should occur does not clearly and immediately fit Freud's theory that dreams

²⁸ In Freud's early work, *hypercathexis* refers to the additional energy attached to an idea or perception during the process of conscious attention (Laplanche and Pontalis 191). Laplanche and Pontalis state that, “[f]rom a rather similar perspective, Freud later gives the name of hypercathexis to the preparation for danger which permits the subject to avoid or to check the trauma” (192).

are wish fulfillments. He wrestles with that problem in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. At one point, he acknowledges that “it is impossible to classify [traumatic dreams] as wish-fulfillments.” But he immediately qualifies this statement in a way that seems to contradict it. In analysis, at least, traumatic dreams are compelled “by the wish [...] to conjure up what has been forgotten and repressed” (32). The twists and turns in Freud’s thought—and the provisional nature of his writing—make it difficult to appreciate that the question whether traumatic dreams satisfy wishes is something of a red herring.²⁹ A question better addressing the puzzle they pose concerns the principle according to which dreams operate. Previously, Freud had believed that dreams, as part of the binding process reducing psychic tension, operate according to the pleasure principle. He now came to understand that the dreams of traumatic neurosis operate according to another principle—one beyond the pleasure principle. “They arise,” he says, “in obedience to the compulsion to repeat.” But he is not prepared to abandon his thesis that the ultimate purpose of dreams is to satisfy wishes. Traumatic dreams fulfill a preparatory task too, one that “must be accomplished before the dominance of the pleasure principle can even begin. These dreams,” he insists, “are endeavouring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis” (32).³⁰

The cognitive problems arising from traumatic experience reveal its effect upon the other pole of psychic organization we have been discussing—i.e., the psychic dimension of humans as subjects (and objects) of culture. Cathy Caruth writes very provocatively of trauma in terms of *missed* experience (60–63). According to Caruth, the puzzling aspect of traumatic railway disasters, for instance, is that, other than the shock, nothing tangible really happens: the subject survives and “walks away apparently unharmed” (6). I grant that much has been written, particularly in holocaust studies, about the traumatizing factor in the experience of genocide and other scenes of mass death as being guilt: the guilt of having survived, incomprehensibly, against all

²⁹ Laplanche and Pontalis observe that “[t]he set of Freud’s thinking in the first chapters of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* does not come down to a simple rejection of the basic hypothesis according to which what is sought under the cloak of apparent suffering—as in the symptom—is the realisation of desire” (79).

³⁰ Freud does concede that traumatic dreams provide “a view of a function of the mental apparatus which, though it does not contradict the pleasure principle, is nevertheless independent of it and seems to be more primitive than the purpose of gaining pleasure and avoiding unpleasure” (32). He concludes that “[i]f there is a ‘beyond the pleasure principle’, it is only consistent to grant that there was also a time before the purpose of dreams was the fulfilment of wishes. This would imply no denial of their later function” (33).

calculable odds. I suspect, though, however real and painful that guilt may be, that it has little to do with rendering such experiences traumatic.

As I stress repeatedly, the problem is cognitive. Caruth declares that the traumatic accident, “as it emerges in Freud and is passed on through other trauma narratives, does not simply represent the violence of a collision but also conveys the impact of its very *incomprehensibility*. What returns to haunt the victim [...] is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence *has not yet been fully known*” (6, emphasis added). That which is incomprehensible in trauma is a consequence of the fact that humans are not, as Bataille puts it, “in the world like water in water.” Because we sense ourselves as subjects within an environment that transcends us, we are also aware—perhaps uniquely so among living beings—that we have a corporeal nature. The protagonist of V. S. Naipaul’s story “One Out of Many” sums up his transition from the life of a domestic servant in Bombay to that of a cook in Washington, D. C., as a movement from immanence to transcendence: “I was once part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence. Then I looked in the mirror and decided to be free. All that my freedom has brought me is the knowledge that I have a face and have a body, that I must feed this body and clothe this body for a certain number of years. Then it will be over” (61). In very measured tones, he presents the paradigm for the traumatic. All that is missing to make his realization itself traumatic is the shock. I argue that the essence of trauma is the incomprehensible implications of the insight—delivered in a shock against which we cannot prepare to defend ourselves—that we also have bodies.

Becker captures the flavour of the traumatic in elaborating upon Erich Fromm’s observation “that the essence of man is really his *paradoxical* nature, the fact that he is half animal and half symbolic” (Becker 26).³¹ Becker terms this an existential paradox:

We might call this existential paradox the condition of *individuality within finitude*. Man has a symbolic identity that brings him sharply out of nature. He is a symbolic self, a creature with a name, a life history. He is a creator with a mind that soars out to speculate about atoms and infinity, who can place himself imaginatively at a point in space and contemplate bemusedly his own planet. This immense expansion, this dexterity, this ethereality, this self-consciousness gives to man literally the status of a small god in nature, as the Renaissance thinkers [such as Pico] knew.

Yet, at the same time, as the Eastern sages also knew, man is a worm and food for worms. This is a paradox: he is out of nature and hopelessly in it; he is

³¹ Quoting Fromm’s *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil* (116–17).

dual, up in the stars and yet housed in a heart-pumping, breath-gasping body that once belonged to a fish and still carries the gill-marks to prove it. His body is a material fleshy casing that is alien to him in many ways—the strangest and most repugnant way being that it aches and bleeds and will decay and die. Man is literally split in two: he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever. It is a terrifying dilemma to be in and to have to live with. (26, emphasis original)

This vision of ourselves as worm-food with monstrous gill-marks provides a glimpse of the human animal outside the symbolic shelter of meaning-making.³² It is what the speaker in T. S. Eliot's "The Dry Salvages" glimpses in "The backward look behind the assurance / Of recorded history, the backward half-look / Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror" (195). The "assurance" that "recorded history" provides arises, once again, in that very meaning-making that endows each of us with the dignity of "a creator with a mind that soars."³³ The flash of insight investing the glimpse "towards the primitive terror" is a shockwave that momentarily ruptures the protective shield of all our cognitive schemes. That shockwave is what Jacques Lacan calls the *tuché*, "*the encounter with the real*. The real," he states, "is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies beyond the automaton, and it is quite obvious, throughout Freud's research, that it is this that is the object of his concern" (53–54, emphasis original).³⁴ It is an insight that repression aims to prevent: the chilling realization that the symbolizing creature who calls itself "I" is, as Yeats puts it, "fastened to a dying animal" (22). On the cognitive level, that paradoxical insight is the key to the traumatic.

³² Julia Kristeva records her reaction to our animal nature and functions in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*:

[a] wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. (3, emphasis original)

³³ The assurance of recorded history lies in its reduction of experience to meaning by imposing some pattern upon it—regardless of the horror that many of its events may evoke.

³⁴ I return to the Lacanian real in Chapter 5.

Becker contends that Freud correctly appreciates the dynamics of the existential human dilemma but states them in the wrong terms. For Freud, the traumatic indicator of our animality to be repressed is sex. For Becker, it is death. The common denominator of the two is vulnerability. Regardless of what Caruth states in the balance of her study, “[w]hat returns to haunt the victim” of trauma—the survivors of vehicular accidents, battlefield concussions, childhood abuse, rape, and genocide—is a sense that can no longer be entirely repressed: a sense of vulnerability experienced viscerally as a threat to the body.

The ultimate consequence of our vulnerability is death, a factor in human life to which we have responded symbolically since the dawn of civilization. But that symbolization has typically been in the service of domesticating death—of removing its sting, as it were—by continuing to conceptualize it in terms of living experience, as if it were an “undiscovered country, from whose bourn / No traveler returns.” The traumatic insight is that death has no sting, for it is no country and there is no traveler to feel it. To move from *Hamlet* to *As You Like It*, death leaves us “[s]ans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything,” with the caveat that it leaves us *sans us* as well, without any subjective point from which to experience and express nothingness. Returning to Caruth’s formulation, “what returns to haunt the victim” has less to do, as she suggests it does, with “the reality of the violent event.” As Freud observes, violence that inflicts real, physical wounds does not prove to be traumatic. It has more to do with “the way that [the event’s] violence has not yet been fully known,” but it is not precisely that either. The truth for the survivor that makes the violence of the almost-but-not-yet-experienced event incomprehensible is that it can never be known or symbolized because it portends one’s own death—which, as Maurice Blanchot tells us, cannot be represented. “If it is true,” he says, “that for a certain Freud, ‘our unconscious cannot conceive of our own mortality’ (is unable to represent mortality to itself), then it would seem to follow that dying is unrepresentable, not only because it has no present, but also because it has no place, not even in time, the temporality of time” (118).

8. *Amos* as Literature of Trauma

The contention that the traumatic is unrepresentable clearly challenges my claim that *Amos* can be read as a response to a traumatic event. Such an insight is hardly amenable to conclusive demonstration. As with much literary criticism, the evidence cannot be marshalled as an incontrovertible proof. It can only be presented in such a way that suggests (always imperfectly) how the work at hand can be read as a response to traumatic experience. I present the evidence below in terms of six categories: imagery, intensity of voice, incoherence of the text, production of anxiety, threat of exile, and non-representability.

8.1. In Terms of Imagery

That the various calamities—fire, earthquake, military invasion—pictured in *Amos* are to descend upon Israel is hardly persuasive of anything more than an armchair familiarity with such catastrophes. As Walter Brueggemann observes (62 above), these are conventional topoi that signify the ferocity with which Yahweh enforces his “sovereignty over recalcitrant subjects.” But the images in *Amos* have a vivid, explosive quality that suggests direct experience of the disasters they portray. Amos claims to report divine speech, but the content of that speech is not only highly visual but also kinetic and tactile. “Smite the capitals,” he hears the Lord say, “until the thresholds shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people” (9.1). “For lo, I will command, and shake the house of Israel among all the nations as one shakes with a sieve, but no pebble shall fall upon the earth” (9.9). The shaking of the columns from capitals to thresholds and the shaking of the house of Israel as if in a sieve from which no pebble escapes provide detail that exceeds a generic cataloging of conventional disasters, as if in the telling Amos is reliving a traumatic experience.

Particular qualities invest Amos’s earthquakes that persuade me they have actually been felt rather than imagined. One is the paralysis produced by the sensation of earthquake, a paralysis to which I can testify as a person who spent over a quarter century in a region where earthquakes are prevalent. It is a paralysis akin to that produced by the pitching of ships at sea. Lines such as “Flight shall perish from the swift, and the strong shall not retain his strength” (2.14) evince the sensation that one has lost the equilibrium necessary to move, a sensation best learned (and perhaps only learned) viscerally through experience.

Moreover, if the damage produced by earthquake has any logic to it—which, given the laws of physics, it certainly must—it is a logic that defies all human expectation. The flimsiest of structures remain intact while the strongest are atomized. The most various fragments come to settle into patterns that can only be described as grist for the surreal. “As the shepherd rescues from the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear,” we are promised in *Amos* 3.12, “so shall the people of Israel who dwell in Sama’ria be rescued, with the corner of a couch and part of a bed.” Such are the visions of those who have survived earthquake and surveyed the bewildering dispersal of fragments into patterns of new and frightening realities.

The death earthquakes produce becomes inscribed in the memory of survivors as the missed but only delayed experience Caruth posits as the essence of the traumatic. The causes of some Amosian disasters cannot be precisely determined. But the scale of death Amos prophesies frequently suggests the densely populated urban settings where earthquakes wreak their greatest havoc. The people of Israel are warned of the imminence of the Day of the Lord. “The songs of

the temple shall become wailings in that day,' says the Lord GOD; 'the dead bodies shall be many; in every place they shall be cast out in silence'" (8.3). Being the events of a single day, this description is not consonant with famine or plague. Nor does it suggest military invasion: the survivors are left in place to search for and cast out the dead. This grisly work—and the wailings in the temple—suggest direct experience of the physical and psychic shock of earthquake. The consequences of the promise that "I will deliver up the city and all that is in it" are equally dire. "[I]f ten men remain in one house," we are promised, "they shall die" (6.9). After that catastrophe, "a man's kinsman [...] shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house" which he will then burn (6.10). Such detail also suggests direct experience.

8.2. In Terms of the Intensity of Voice

Amos is hardly the type of poetry with which one would sit down in the evening, perhaps with a Mendelssohn quartet playing in the background and a glass of red wine at hand, to relax after a demanding day. The voice in *Amos* is frenzied, whipped up to a fever pitch from which it never varies. As one listens to this voice, it is easy to imagine it emanating from a psyche continually bombarded by stimuli. In consequence, Amos hammers away as if possessed by a force he can in no way control. As we see in the foregoing section, *Amos* is driven by the imperative mood, which reflects its intensity of voice. "Smite the capitals," Yahweh commands. "[S]hatter them on the heads of all the people." The imperative mood dominates from the third chapter on. In strident, accusatory tones, Amos's audience is variously commanded to "[p]roclaim to the strongholds in Assyria" and to "[a]ssemble yourselves upon the mountains of Sama'ria" (3.9); to "[h]ear, and testify against the house of Jacob" (3.13); to "[c]ome to Bethel, and transgress" and "to Gilgal [to] multiply transgression" (6.4); to "[p]ass over to Calneh, and see [...] and thence [to] go to Hamath the great [and] then [to] go down to Gath of the Philistines" (8.2).

Even when *Amos* shifts to the indicative mood, its tone is invariably emphatic. "I smote you with blight and mildew" (4.9), Yahweh declares. "I slew your young men with the sword" (4.10). The voice never modulates—never finds another gear than high. Not only is it hypertensive, but its images are hyperbolic. "I abhor the pride of Jacob," Yahweh declares, "and hate his strongholds; and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it" (8.8). Everything is maximal: Jacob's pride, Yahweh's hatred, Israel's punishment. There are no gradations, no nuances or subtle distinctions. Those who seek relief in Amos's world of constant tension are condemned. "Woe to those," the voice declares, "who are at ease in Zion" (6.1). "Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches" (6.4). "[T]hey shall now be the first of those to go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves shall pass away" (6.7).

It may be that the intensity of the voice speaking in *Amos* reflects a psychic system braced to bind stimulus. Freud does not consider this possibility in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. He considers the heightening of tension only a symptom of neurosis rather than a symptom of defence. I contend that the edgy, nervous, and imperious tone of this voice can be read as an index to the continuing effects of trauma.

8.3. In Terms of the Incoherence of the Text

In Chapter 1, using a term of Roland Barthes's, I observe that "*Amos* is a writerly text *par excellence*" (22 above). I state that because *Amos*'s editors seem to have cut the oracles "out of various contexts" and strung them together without "transitional interpretive material," they have thereby created an impression of "a rambling, disjointed *Amos* incapable of synthesizing his thought," i.e., the impression of a traumatized person. Because the meaning humans impute to experience forms part of the structure upon which they depend for survival, they are perforce "meaning-making mammals."³⁵ The massive stimulus of a traumatic event shatters the existing structure of meaning and undermines the ability to create a new one. The most notorious example of *Amos*'s disjointedness occurs in its final chapter (Chapter 9). It begins with an image of earthquake—Yahweh's command to "[s]mite the capitals" (9.1, see 129 above)—and continues in a tone of unrelieved doom through verse 10, in which Yahweh proclaims: "All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword, who say, 'Evil shall not overtake or meet us.'" But verse 11 immediately follows with a vision of an earthly paradise that continues to the end of the book:

¹¹ "In that day I will raise up
the booth of David that is fallen
and repair its breaches,
and raise up its ruins,
and rebuild it as in the days of
old;
¹² that they may possess the remnant
of Edom
and all the nations who are called
by my name,"
says the LORD who does this.

³⁵ I suspect that I have come across such a term in the work of Umberto Eco, but I cannot pinpoint it. It is currently implanted in my memory in consequence of a lecture by Professor Terry Matheson of the English department of the University of Saskatchewan.

- 13 “Behold, the days are coming,” says
the LORD,
“when the plowman shall overtake
the reaper
and the treader of grapes him
who sows the seed;
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and all the hills shall flow with it.
14 I will restore the fortunes of my
people Israel,
and they shall rebuild the ruined
cities and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and drink
their wine,
and they shall make gardens and
eat their fruit.
15 I will plant them upon their land,
and they shall never again be
plucked up
out of the land which I have given
them,”
says the LORD your God.

This conclusion is notorious.³⁶ It has puzzled commentators from time immemorial. It comes with a shock similar to that of trauma itself, for nothing in the preceding eight and a half chapters prepares the reader for it.³⁷ The qualification that immediately precedes it, that only the “sinners

³⁶ The shift here is only the most notorious incidence of incoherence in *Amos*. The shift from 5.14-15, which offers grace should the people become just, to 5:16ff, which promises that “[i]n all the squares there shall be wailing,” provides another example of rapid fluctuation between hope and despair.

³⁷ The fact that sudden shifts in mood occur in other biblical literature such a psalms does not mitigate the observation I here make about *Amos*. The psalms themselves are dramatic liturgical texts whose parts were read by various persons during celebrations in the Jerusalem temple.

of my people” who presume that “Evil shall not overtake or meet us” “shall die by the sword” (9.10) is too abrupt to serve as an adequate transition.

Wolff deals with this conclusion by attributing it to a postexilic eschatology of salvation. “After the early postexilic period [late 6th to early 5th century],” he claims, “when salvation prophecy came to the fore, it was no longer possible to transmit a prophetic proclamation of judgment as onesidedly harsh as Amos’ without adding a new word of salvation (9:11-15)” (113). This implies that *Amos* as it then stood so traumatically threatened the cognitive schemes of the scribes involved that they could not let it stand as they found it.

Wolff’s observation provides a diachronic escape from the controversy engendered by *Amos*’s conclusion, one that will not serve in a synchronic analysis of the finished product. From a Marxist perspective—i.e., from the perspective of class struggle—one might argue that Amos’ (and Yahweh’s) anger is only directed against the ruling class and that the idyllic concluding vision looks forward to the society that a righteous agricultural remnant will rebuild once its exploiters have been expelled. If the “booth of David” to be repaired and raised up (9.11) refers to the temporary shelters in which he lived when he was still a shepherd, that image might refer to a period of idealized rural virtue that obtained before his ascension to monarchy. But this reading is not problem free. David was not the first king. And the cities that Amos (and Yahweh) so thoroughly detest will also be rebuilt.

Over the years *Amos* has certainly become for me, in Barthes’s term, a more readerly text. Interpretation has so reduced the tension of the writerly that my contention that *Amos* is a writerly text is now based largely upon the memory of my first reading.³⁸ What if, however, an interpretive assessment concluded there were no grounds sufficient for integrating *Amos*’s conclusion with the rest of the text? What if *Amos*’s conclusion were no more than a disjointed fantasy? There would then be some grounds for characterizing *Amos* as a poetry of madness, a madness induced by an experience of trauma.³⁹ It would not be so characterized because it violated any-

³⁸ The *readerly* text has been reduced to meaning through interpretation (17 above).

³⁹ By applying modern psychopathological theory to *Amos* I have medicalized the text, medicalization being “the process by which medical assumptions, practices, values, and vocabularies penetrate traditional, prescientific attitudes, institutions, and practices” (Micale 77). I do not intend to suggest, however, that the term *madness* is embraced by the modern medical establishment. It reflects, rather, what that establishment would likely consider to be “traditional, prescientific attitudes.” As I state above, I use the term neither pejoratively nor precisely. I use it to convey my impression that the text and characters under consideration are fragmented beyond our interpretive capacity to put them together again (21 above). It is a writerly term, one more

one's norms but because it could achieve no internal norm of consistency of its own. It would mean that the framework for meaning-making of the person whose voice we hear is fractured. For any person living outside that framework—living, as Lear would have it, as an “unaccommodated man,” as a “a poor, bare, forked animal” completely unsheltered and therefore vulnerable to all experience—the burden of that experience would be truly appalling.

8.4. In Terms of the Production of Anxiety

The brooding anxiety in *Amos* is unmistakable. In two of the most prominent instances, the anxiety arises from a sense that there is no safety to be found from a pursuer. In Chapter 5, for instance, at the precise moment when the subject seems to have escaped one threat, another that was not anticipated at all prevails:

¹⁸ Woe to you who desire the day of
the LORD!
Why would you have the day of
the LORD?
It is darkness, and not light;
¹⁹ as if a man fled from a lion,
and a bear met him;
or went into the house and leaned
with his hand against the wall,
and a serpent bit him.⁴⁰

The anxiety in Chapter 9 arises not so much from the pursuit itself but from its relentlessness:

appropriate to a study of literature that does not refine the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* from experience through a clinical exercise of hyperrationality.

⁴⁰ I accept Wolff's judgment that 5.19 exemplifies village wisdom literature (97). “The subject matter here,” he observes, “is fully in keeping with the realm of a sheep breeder's experience” (256). In the same paragraph he states that “in the Old Testament the serpent is the deadly enemy of man,” but such symbolism would not have become apparent until the collected texts of the emerging biblical canon began to be studied centuries after Amos's time. Amos^I would not have been familiar with the story of the serpent in the Garden of Eden, which very likely originated as literature of the Jerusalem court. Amos^I moved in entirely different circles. As I note above (page 3, fn 9), I am convinced that *Amos* the text and Amos the man were Israelite rather than Judahite.

- ¹ I saw the LORD standing beside
the altar, and he said:
“Smite the capitals until the
thresholds shake,
and shatter them on the heads of
all the people;
and what are left of them I will slay
with the sword;
not one of them shall flee away,
not one of them shall escape.
- ² “Though they dig into Sheol,
from there shall my hand take
them;
though they climb up to heaven,
from there I will bring them down.
- ³ Though they hide themselves on the
top of Carmel,
from there I will search out and
take them;
and though they hide from my sight
at the bottom of the sea,
there I will command the serpent,
and it shall bite them.
- ⁴ And though they go into captivity
before their enemies,
there I will command the sword,
and it shall slay them;
and I will set my eyes upon them
for evil and not for good.”

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud theorizes that anxiety signals a threatened organism to defend itself against excessive stimulus. Due to lack of time, the suddenness of a traumatic event prevents the anxiety signal from functioning, which in turn prevents the organism from bracing itself against the oncoming shock. Freud does not specify the form effective bracing takes. He simply observes that, “[o]wing to their low cathexis,”⁴¹ “the systems that would be the first to

receive the stimulus [...] are not in a good position for binding the inflowing amounts of excitation” (31). However, Freud’s thinking about the defence against trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is not entirely economic. If we fail to bind unpleasurable stimulus by bracing against it in advance, we attempt to bind it by mastering it after the fact. The *fort/da* game Freud’s grandson plays to cope with his mother’s absence provides one example of an attempt to master unpleasure retrospectively (14–17). The dreams that sufferers from trauma are compelled to repeat provide another (125 above). This talk of retrospective mastery shifts the discussion to the dynamic point of view. It suggests that the binding the psyche requires can be achieved cognitively by imposing some pattern of meaning upon the traumatic experience that resolves the conflicts it engenders. As I have argued, the cognitive schemes through which we give meaning to our lives themselves seem to be structures of defence (122 above).

Amos has an oneiric quality. Amos’s anxious sense of a man being pursued in 5.18-19 repeats in 9.1-4, in which it extends to a group. The repetition imbues this anxiety with the relentless quality of traumatic nightmare its sufferer is compelled to repeat. In a reading of *Amos* as symptomatic of traumatic neurosis, it follows that the interpretations Amos offers are retrospective attempts cognitively to master the unpleasurable stimulus of the shock of earthquake against which he was inadequately braced. The tribal ideology that Yahweh protects Israel according to a covenant no longer makes sense. Some new meaning must be given to the Day of the Lord, that glorious day when Yahweh brings victory to his people. “Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD!,” Amos now proclaims. “Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light” (5.18). The Day of the Lord will no longer recapitulate the events in Egypt, when Yahweh passed over Israel to strike its enemies. “I will never again pass by them,” Yahweh twice declares about Israel (7.8, 8.2). Henceforth, “I will pass through the midst of you,” he announces (5.17), for “[t]he end has come upon my people Israel” (8.2).

Amos’s attempts to find new meaning for the Day of the Lord prove futile in binding the unpleasurable stimulus of the traumatic event. His revised cognitive schemes are insufficient to paper over the memory of the wailings on the day of earthquake when dead bodies were cast out everywhere. That memory is now his fate, which he signifies by casting it into the future (8.2). Given the intensity of his brooding, it is difficult to believe that the edenic vision plastered onto the end of *Amos* would be adequate to mastering the stimulus from which he suffers. The chal-

⁴¹ Laplanche and Pontalis define cathexis as an “[e]conomic concept: the fact that a certain amount of psychical energy is attached to an idea or to a group of ideas, to a part of the body, to an object, etc.” (62)

lenge this ending has posed for millennia of commentators has arisen, in part, from something they have tacitly recognized but not admitted—that the end of *Amos* fails to address the psychological issues confronting him. It is an act of desperation, a ruse, a fake—what Eugene O’Neill would call a pipe dream. It is a form of denial, as if we could somehow block coming to terms with our afflictions through the sheer positivity of our thought. The suffering of trauma is not tractable to such easy optimism. If *Amos* can be read as a representation of traumatic neurosis, it is truer to the nature of trauma to speculate that Amos would be perpetually condemned to re-experience it due to an inability to master its stimulus.

8.5. In Terms of the Threat of Exile

To the greater biblical Israelites of Amos’s day, the idea that they could survive as a nation without a land was preposterous, the subsequent diaspora history of their descendants notwithstanding. Originally, Yahweh was the god of a specific place: Israel. He was not the god of Moab, for instance, or the god of Edom. The covenant he struck with Israel depended upon his promise of its land, for it was only within that land that he could exercise his powers of protection. It is only in *Amos* perhaps—in the 8th century—that Yahweh’s power begins to be universalized. There we come across Yahweh’s claim that he brought other nations into their lands as well. “Did I not,” he asks, “bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Syrians from Kir?” (9.7).⁴² I argue that, psychologically, the land as home symbolizes that region in which, because all of its the references are clearly known, people can most easily maintain their bearings. The threat of exile leveled against Judah and Israel in the oracles against the nations, therefore, is a threat to expel the people from their frameworks of meaning making. On the symbolic level, a traumatized person may be said to be living in exile.

8.6. In Terms of Non-Representability

The most chilling memorial to the traumatic event in *Amos* is 6.10, which recounts the labour of searching out and disposing of the corpses of those killed, most probably, in earthquake: “And when a man’s kinsman, he who burns him, shall take him up to bring the bones out of the house, and shall say to him who is in the innermost parts of the house, ‘Is there still any one with you?’ he shall say, ‘No’; and he shall say, ‘Hush! We must not mention the name of the

⁴² Yahweh’s universal claim provides another instance of the incoherence of *Amos*. In judging Israel, Yahweh declares: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (3.2).

LORD’.” These lines create an exemplary scene, as Caruth would have it, for the incomprehensibility of trauma in the mind of a survivor. That incomprehensibility is twofold. First, there is the incomprehensibility of survivorship. “Why have they died,” we can hear one of them asking, “while I have been left to burn the bodies?” Second, there is the incomprehensibility of that aspect of the violence that “has not yet been fully known”—indeed, cannot be fully known—i.e., that “that which has happened to these will some day happen to me, with others left behind in their turn to collect my body and burn it, just as I am doing today.” The incomprehensibility of this turn is shadowed forth by what cannot be mentioned: “the name of the LORD.” For it cannot be thought, without risk to the structure of meaning within which we live, that the god in terms of which we articulate that meaning—god our preserver—is also god our destroyer.⁴³

9. Conclusion

The principal difficulty in assessing whether a work of literature may be informed by the experience of trauma is evaluating the extent to which it struggles against incoherence. Over the years I have been reading *Amos*, many of the nervous jumps between topics seemingly unrelated to one another that impressed my beginner’s mind have lost their edge, a fact I attribute largely to my own anxiety to overcome the incoherence such jumps signify. But I can remember the feeling which that first reading produced, a feeling that the text is riddled with cracks and fissures produced by trauma. *Amos* can be read as a response to earthquake, the shock of which has shattered Amos’s defences to reveal the ineluctable vulnerability of his animal body (and, as it proves, of the social body to which he belongs). He experiences that revelation so viscerally that he cannot repress the unbearable knowledge it contains. The cognitive scheme that had given meaning to his life is now shown to have been no more than a flimsy defensive facade against a reality too terrible to bear. Amos is condemned perpetually to relive his trauma in a futile attempt to reimpose coherence upon the structure of meaning that the memory of a fracturing physical world now symbolizes.

In the tradition of western philosophy, it has been axiomatic that the unexamined life is not worth living. I admit the appeal of that dictum. But it can be dangerous if our penetration to the heart of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinatum* of our experience reveals, after all, that no such mystery in the form of a meaning to be revealed exists. Such an unthinkable revelation is

⁴³ This construction was suggested to me by Eliot’s line in “The Dry Salvages”: “Time the destroyer is time the preserver” (195).

the incomprehensible heart of trauma. In plays such as the *The Iceman Cometh*, Eugene O'Neill senses that human beings can in no wise accept the truth of this unbeating heart. We require some pipe dream to inform our experience with meaning, even if that meaning is to be found, as the name suggests, in an opium pipe or, as the play demonstrates, in the bottom of a bottle. Without some such defence, he implies, we are all threatened with insanity. Choron suggests that Nietzsche penetrated to this unbeating heart of trauma. He quotes from one of Nietzsche's letters to the effect that "It is impossible to live with Truth," a letter that Choron dates to 1888, "shortly before," he observes, the "darkness will descend upon him" (201).

Chapter 5

The Regressive Pull of the Sacred

In this final chapter I employ Frank Kermode's distinction between fiction and myth as a framework to move from the treatment of traumatic neurosis undertaken in Chapter 4 to a discussion of the implications of regressive fixation implicit in the compulsion to repeat trauma. After summarizing Freud's description of regression, I argue that Amos is regressively fixated upon the myth of tribal, premonarchical Israel as having been a golden age of rural virtue of the type described by Raymond Williams in his classic study, *The Country and The City*. I amplify those remarks by using Georges Bataille's concept of sacred violence, which leads in turn to a discussion of Freud's notion of the death drive as the account of regression *par excellence*, one that situates *Amos's* potential to fuel fantasies and acts of violence within the psychic economics of pleasure.

1. Kermode and the Dialectic of Fiction and Reality

In *The Sense of an Ending*,¹ Frank Kermode takes up what he sees as the dialectical relation between reality and the fictions we elaborate about it. In making the argument of his fifth chapter, "Literary Fiction and Reality" (127–52), Kermode conceptualizes reality as a state of radical contingency upon which we impose the various forms he calls fictions. These fictions extend beyond the narrative plots with which White deals to include not only concepts such as causation and time but all the superstructural phenomena (law, politics, religion, aesthetics, philosophy, and so forth) that Marx conceives as the theatre of "ideological forms in which men become conscious of [their conflicts] and fight it out" (82 above).

Analyzing Jean-Paul Sartre's *La nausée*, Kermode argues that reality conceived as radical contingency cannot be represented fictionally: the very act of representation necessarily imposes what Frye calls civilizing forms upon that reality. Frye discusses how fiction imposes meaning upon space, a practice that Kermode resists. He focuses instead upon how fiction imposes meaning upon time. It does so by punctuating *chronos*, the time of eternal succession, to produce smaller units, among which is *kairos*, the type of time that predominates in fiction. As opposed

¹ Revisiting this classic in the epilogue to its 2000 edition, published 34 years after the original appeared, Kermode states "that I have not found good reason to disown it entirely" (181). Given the tenor of the rest of the epilogue, this observation is certainly much too modest, for, with an exception or two, that epilogue is a thoroughgoing defence of his earlier views. Little, it seems, had occurred in the intervening years to change his mind substantively on most of his original points.

to *chronos*, which he describes as “‘passing time’ or ‘waiting time,’” *kairos* is the time of “the season, a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end” (47).

Literary fiction typically focuses upon moments of *kairos*, points in time impregnated with meaning by a sense of impending closure. But in respect to novels particularly, it must deal with *chronos* as well. Most narratological primers indicate methods by which novelists link the various moments of *kairos* that fill their narratives. But such techniques typically impart a rhythm to *chronos* as well. Reality as endless succession would seem to be as impossible to represent as reality as radical contingency, a problem that reaffirms Jacques Lacan’s postulate that the real can be neither imagined nor symbolized. In Lacan’s thought the real is not immediately accessible to us. We can only apprehend it modally, by forming the flux of sensation into images (the imaginary register) and by relating those images to one another to create a structure of signs, thereby investing those images with significance (the symbolic register).² The real itself remains always just beyond our reach, shrouded in image and symbol.

As a literary critic, however, Kermode cannot abandon the problem of representing the unrepresentable. He insists that “the humanizing of the world’s contingency,” which he takes to be the aim of fiction, “cannot be achieved without a representation of that contingency.” Given the problem of representing that contingency formally, he suggests that it is better done thematically. “The representation,” he argues, “must be such that it induces the proper sense of horror at the utter indifference, the utter shapelessness, and the utter inhumanity of what must be humanized.” It can only be intimated indirectly by images that cause us to shudder—by images that evoke a sense of creation unfolding according to an indiscernible purpose of its own, unaffected by human projects and irreducible to human logic, scale or proportion.³ For fiction to

² In “Ahab between the Imaginary and the Symbolic: A Study of Subjectivity in 1st Kings,” I distinguish Lacan’s psychic registers in terms of C. S. Peirce’s three philosophical categories. Firstness, a monadic category corresponding to the Lacanian real, is a state of inchoate flux resistant to discriminations. Secondness, a dyadic category corresponding to the imaginary, is that in which the subject (and its corresponding objects) emerge as distinct images in response to the physical resistance inherent in the immediate apprehension of an other. Thirdness, a triadic category corresponding to the symbolic, is that in which structure emerges through the agency of third terms or symbols—principally those encoded as language—that come to mediate between the previously radically-equivalent images populating the imaginary.

³The Scottish poet Norman MacCaig evokes the real in his image of a “Basking Shark,” a “roomsized monster with a matchbox brain” (6) that, being stubbed with an oar, rose “with a slounge out of the sea” (2). “He displaced more than water. He shoggled me / Centuries back” (7–8).

achieve its aim, Kermode insists, this representation of contingency “has to occur simultaneously with the *as if*, the act of form, of humanization, which assuages the horror” (145). The evocation of the horror and the imposition of the form that makes it bearable must be articulated in dialectic tension.

Kermode castigates literature that eliminates the dissonance implicit in this dialectic. He approves Sartre’s attack upon the novels of Mauriac on the grounds that “they are dishonestly determinate. The characters in a Christian novel,” he paraphrases Sartre as saying, “ought surely to be ‘centres of indeterminacy’ and not the slaves of some fake conscience. It is by the negation of such formalism that we may make literature a liberating force” (141). He goes on to quote Sartre directly: “There is nothing else to spiritualize, nothing else to renew, but this multi-coloured and concrete world with its weight, its opacity, its zones of generalization, and its swarms of anecdotes” (141–42). The determinateness of which Sartre accuses Mauriac is an effect of too rigidly imposing “the *as if*, the act of form” upon reality, which is a more suggestive way of saying that such determinateness is an effect of idealism.⁴ It is an effect of conceptualizing the world according to forms that blind one to its concrete, protean, material nature. For Althusser, we will recall, Marx’s rejection of such a formal (idealistic) method led to the epistemological break that initiated the science of history.

2. The Kermodian Mythic

For Kermode, fictions that impose too rigid a determinateness upon reality threaten to degenerate into myths, which may have and have had dangerous social consequences. Given the critical enrichment of the concept of myth over the years since *The Sense of an Ending* was first published, his treatment of it now seems rather narrow and dated, particularly in his pejorative use of the term.⁵ Nevertheless, I find his distinction between fiction and myth useful in discuss-

⁴In “François Mauriac and Freedom,” Sartre goes so far to attribute it to “the sin of pride. Like most of our writers,” Sartre observes, Mauriac

has tried to ignore the fact that the theory of relativity applies in full to the universe of fiction, that there is no more place for a privileged observer in a real novel than in the world of Einstein [...]. M. Mauriac has put himself first. He has chosen divine omniscience and omnipotence. But novels are written *by* men and *for* men. In the eyes of God, Who cuts through appearances and goes beyond them, this is no novel, not art, for art thrives on appearances. God is not an artist. Neither is M. Mauriac.” (23, emphasis original)

⁵ Among the “protests against some of [his earlier] arguments” that he reviews in his epilogue to the 2000 edition, Kermode especially notes “the one that distinguishes between myth and fiction” (190). In fact, he anticipated the reaction to this distinction that in fact developed.

ing *Amos*, and I quote his summary of it fully cognizant that it limits the meaning of myth in a way not adequate to a full understanding of the term. Following upon a discussion of the fictions operative in the construction of Buchenwald, on the one hand, and *King Lear*, on the other, Kermode declares:

We have to distinguish between myths and fictions. Fictions can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive. In this sense anti-Semitism is a degenerate fiction, a myth; and *Lear* is a fiction. Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures. Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent. Myths make sense in terms of a of time, *illud tempus* as Eliade calls it; fictions, if successful, make sense of the here and now, *hoc tempus*. (150)

According to this scheme, fictions are tentative approximations of the real that we recognize as such. Their social utility lies in their hypothetical nature. They promote adaptation by providing possible models for making sense of change. Great fiction never loses contact with its provisional nature: Kermode argues that it maintains its provisionality by dialectically structuring a dissonance between what it proposes and the real world it can only approximately represent. On this criterion, his final assessment of *La nausée* is positive. Its form, he declares, “is an instructive dissonance between humanity and contingency; it discovers a new way of establishing a concord between the human mind and things as they are” (150).

Myths, on the other hand, are fictions that have lost contact with their fictiveness. The dissonance between what they assert and “things as they are” has evaporated. They are decisive patterns of explanation that call for absolute assent. In short, they are fictions that have degenerated into truth and which threaten to be acted on as such. Although westerners tend to associate myth with the Greeks, the twentieth century was very particularly and disturbingly an age of myth as Kermode defines it. In the 1930s, E. M. Forster appreciated this development in terms that anticipate Kermode. In his essay “What I Believe” (1939), Forster observes that his century had become a new age of faith, faith in systems and causes based upon the Kermodian

In the original text he observes, “It may be that treating literary fictions as myths sounds good just now, but as Marianne Moore so rightly said of poems, ‘these things are important not because a / high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because they are / useful’” (39).

mythic. Reacting to the mythic thinking that had come to dominate Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere, Forster declares, "I do not believe in Belief" (77). "I hate the idea of causes," he goes on to say. Any faith in ideal social systems was repugnant to the view of society ingrained in him at "the fag-end of Victorian liberalism" (qtd. in Smith 106). To adapt a thought of Churchill's, systems exalt the rule rather than the man, and the rules were proving to be inhuman (Morgan 106). Forster's distrust of systems, however, goes deeper than this. It is epistemological. Faith in the systems to which mythic thinking leads "is a stiffening process, a sort of mental starch, which ought to be applied as sparingly as possible (Forster, "What" 77). The faith in question distorts as it stiffens, producing a dogmatism that, as Frederick Crews declares, "shuts out the real complexity of things" (Crews, *E. M. Forster* 13). "The human mind," Forster writes in *Aspects of the Novel*, "is not a dignified organ, and I do not see how we can exercise it except through eclecticism" and all the dissonance that implies (212).

Kermode makes several provocative statements that relate myth to time. As we have seen, one such statement is that "[m]yths make sense in terms of a lost order of time, *illud tempus* as Eliade calls it." In continuing his discussion of the artistic representation of contingency, he quotes Henry James's observation in the preface to *Roderick Hudson*: "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle in which they shall happily *appear* to do so." James goes on to state that the artist "is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter for him, of comedy and tragedy; that this continuity is never broken, and that, to do anything at all, he has at once intensely to consult it and intensely to ignore it" (qtd. on 176, emphasis original). Because the art of fiction involves the creation of *kairos* from *chronos*, Kermode argues that a particular challenge of that art is to represent the "continuity and especially the successiveness of time." If "we fake to achieve the forms absent from the continuous world," he continues, "we regress towards myth, out of this time and into that time" (176).

Two terms in the concluding statement are especially interesting: *fake* and *regress*. The first, which Kermode admits he got from Forster (148), is part and parcel of the novelist's craft. "The novelist cheats," Kermode argues, "by arranging collocations which, since he is meeting us in a context which we both understand as we might understand the nature and the rules of a game, we shall not regard as fortuitous, in which we shall discover point and rhythm" (149). This faking, however, can become dangerous if we lose sight that it is performed in the context of a game. In that event, the collocations by which fiction proposes the "point and rhythm" of reality may not seem fortuitous at all but may, rather, be taken to comprise the very warp and woof of that reality. The fiction degenerates into myth as Kermode defines it by moving from *hoc tempus* to *illud tempus*, "out of this time and into that time," a phrase that neatly recapitulates

the mechanism of regression. Although Kermode does use the term *regression* nor account for it psychoanalytically, his concept of the fall of fiction into myth is an example of regression that provides an illuminating supplement to Freud's thought on the subject, to a consideration of which I now turn.

3. Regression

"The concept of regression," Laplanche and Pontalis state, "is a predominantly descriptive one, as Freud himself indicated." They admit that their own treatment of regression does "not manage to provide the notion [...] with a rigorous theoretical basis," an oblique way of indicating that Freud's does not either (388). However, in the 1914 revision of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud does introduce a tripartite approach to regression. "Three kinds of regression," he declares,

are thus to be distinguished; (a) *topographical* regression, in the sense of the schematic picture [of the psychical apparatus]; (b) *temporal* regression, in so far as what is in question is a harking back to older psychical structures; and (c) *formal* regression, where primitive methods of expression and representation take the place of the usual ones. All these three kinds of regression are, however, one at bottom and occur together as a rule; for what is older in time is more primitive in form and in psychical topography lies nearer to the perceptual end. (548, emphasis original)

Paul Ricoeur states that *formal* regression involves "the return of thought to pictorial representation" (Freud, 105). Although in his summary of regression just quoted, Freud implies that regression does involve pictorial thinking, I argue that this exemplifies *topographical* rather than *formal* regression. For Freud suggests the possibility of such pictorial thinking only in terms of the mind's topography: it occurs because it transpires in the "perceptual end" of the psyche. As Laplanche and Pontalis explain, the Freudian topology laid out in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is "an ordered succession of systems" through which the psyche's economy plays itself out. "In the waking state," they declare, "these systems are traversed by excitations in a *progressive* direction (traveling from perception towards motor activity); during sleep, by contrast, the thoughts, finding their access to motor activity barred, *regress* towards the perceptual system (*Pept.*)" (386, emphasis original). The two ends of the topographical system, therefore, are the perceptual and the motor. Regression is always towards the perceptual. It occurs as a reflux because the normal discharge at the motor end is blocked. Laplanche and Pontalis go on to observe that "[t]opographical regression is especially evident in dreams, where it is carried through com-

pletely. It is also found in other, pathological, processes, where it is less inclusive (hallucination), and even in some normal processes, where it is less thoroughgoing (memory)” (387, emphasis original).

Freud’s own summary of *formal* regression does not specifically mention pictorial representation. *Formally*, he says, regression is a state “where primitive methods of expression and representation take the place of the usual ones.” Ricoeur has, perhaps, incorrectly linked the primitive to the pictorial, a identification that Laplanche and Pontalis, in their assessment, do not make. They state that “[i]n the *formal* sense, regression means the transition to modes of expression that are on a lower level as regards complexity, structure and differentiation” (386, emphasis original). Keeping this definition in mind, I argue that the regression that for Kermode characterizes the degeneration from the fictive to the mythic is more than just a *temporal* movement from *hoc tempus* to *illud tempus*.⁶ It is also a *formal* movement to a simpler apprehension of experience that, as Crews would have it, “shuts out the real complexity of things.” For Marx, *formal* regression so defined inevitably distorts in subjecting the ever-pre-given complexity of the material world to Forster’s “mental starch” to produce the simplified and mystifying abstractions of the ideal.

4. Regressive Fixation

Laplanche and Pontalis conclude their treatment of regression by stating that it should not “be forgotten that the notion of regression is linked to that of fixation, and that this cannot be reduced to the implantation of a behavioural pattern. In so far as fixation is to be understood as an ‘inscription,’ regression might be interpreted as the bringing back into play of what has been ‘inscribed’” (388). Fixation is also a key concept for comprehending trauma. Trauma is an opening upon the Lacanian real, an intimation of the incomprehensible reality of our own vulnerability. Those affected by trauma become fixated to the traumatic event (*BTPP* 13) as to an unsolvable puzzle to which they are nevertheless compelled repeatedly to return.

In Chapter 4 I argue that the voice speaking in *Amos* has the intensity of a person compelled to repeat a trauma, which is perhaps the best known form of regressive fixation with

⁶ Laplanche and Pontalis provide a more expansive treatment of *temporal* regression than Freud does in his summary statement. They state that “Freud often laid stress on the fact that the infantile past—of the individual or *even of humanity as a whole*—remains forever within us” (387, emphasis added). “He was able,” they continue, “to identify this idea of a reversion to an earlier point in the most varied domains: psychopathology, dreams, the history of civilisations, biology, etc.” However, there is nothing in Kermode’s treatment of the mythic that suggests such reversion to earlier states of being.

which Freud deals. Kermode's discussion of mythicized fiction in terms of a fixation upon a lost order of time suggests that the application of the concept of regression may be extended from the study of psychiatry to the study of literature. Imperfect though such extensions of concepts from one field to another may be, they frequently shine a suggestive new light on a subject. Although regressive fixation is hardly a term that Marxist thinkers typically use, Kermode's remarks suggest the remarkable degree to which the effects of trauma discussed in Chapter 4 mirror the idealizing effects of ideology discussed in Chapter 3: both promote fixation to past events.⁷ In addition to being traumatized, Amos is also fixated on a mythicized fiction of Israel, so much so that this fixation exemplifies the radically simplified apprehension of experience characterizing *formal* regression. Although Amos predictably attempts to master his trauma retrospectively in terms of this mythicized fiction, I suggest that the regressive fixation manifest in *Amos* is overdetermined, for it is determined both traumatically and ideologically. I have dealt at length with the traumatic determination in Chapter 4. Its ideological determination bears more discussion.

In Chapter 3, I summarize Gottwald's hypothesis that this fiction of Israel, which I call the fiction of Yahweh's kingship, originated as a political practice of social revolutionaries, who adapted a local war god as a marker for the human king they had displaced. By filling the vacuum the elimination of monarchy had created, the fiction of Yahweh's kingship buttressed the people's determination to persist without a human king. By Amos's time, it still seems to have served politically as a symbol of social cohesion, particularly among the poor. Despite that, some 300 years after the reinstatement of human monarchy, this fiction must certainly have become somewhat less tenable than it had been in the premonarchic period.

"Fictions," we have seen Kermode observe, "can degenerate into myths whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive" (143 above). Fictions that enshrine political ideals frequently have a function that does not lose touch with their fictiveness, for it is understood by those who subscribe to them that the ideals are yet to be realized. But the belief that premonarchic Israel truly was a radically egalitarian society, by confusing an ideal with fact, is a fiction that *has* lost touch with its fictiveness. It is a fiction that has become a myth, analogous to the myth I was taught as an American school child that our founding fathers had developed political institutions guaranteeing liberty and justice to all—a myth peculiarly oblivious to the fact that a tenth of the population was enslaved at the time those institutions were established.

The idea that a *retribalized* Israel, if such a realm existed, could have realized the radical egalitarianism that Gottwald hypothesizes (and valorizes) is a fiction, one that, I argue, assumes a

⁷ In saying this, I do not deny that ideology can also have a future dimension. Amos's vision of the future destruction of Israel is, however, rooted in a mythic idealization of the past.

mythic quality in Amos's mind (and in the minds of the scribes who compiled his book). It is a myth of an idealized "lost order of time" upon which Amos fixates and according to which he thinks and acts. As we have seen, Laplanche and Pontalis state that such regression brings "back into play [...] what has been 'inscribed'." They do not further specify what they mean by this, but the concept of inscription very strongly suggests the inculcation of ideology as Althusser describes it, i.e., the ingraining of myths according to which people persistently misapprehend their relation "to their real conditions of existence."⁸

I dwell at some length upon Gottwald's concept of a *retribalized* Israel three to five hundred years before the advent of Amos not because I am convinced that such a thing actually occurred but because I am persuaded that it or something very close to it comprised the by-then-residual ideology forming the framework of Amos's protest. In assessing the effect of ideology, what actually occurred is not only beside the point but also, as I argue in Chapter 1, concealed by the fictions of historiography. What counts is what people *think* happened, which, as Althusser insists, is invariably an illusion. When ideology functions effectively, it creates an illusion of power—an illusion that persuades people outside the ruling class that they have a greater stake in maintaining the existing social order than a more detached, rational, scientific (read Marxist) analysis would reveal.

Because Freud's treatment of regression is predominantly descriptive rather than rigorously theoretical, he provides no motivation for the regressive fixation upon a residual ideology I ascribe to Amos. Regression toward the perceptual is more complex than the simple mechanical reflux that my foregoing treatment of Freud's *topographical* view of the matter suggests (145 above). I base my argument upon Lacan's concept of the mirror stage in human development, a stage in which, as its name suggests, the perceptual or imaginary dominates. It is, moreover, a stage in which an illusion of wholeness and power also dominates ("Mirror," *passim*). Regression, I argue, is motivated by the desire to recapture the sense of this power and the coherence that accompanies it—the power that obtains prior to the psyche's fracture in its eventual subjection to that symbolic structure in dominance that, in Marxist terms, comprises the social formation.

In making these observations, I am not attempting to elaborate a theory that the ideological is an invariable object of regressive fixation. Based upon my reading of Freud as fleshed out

⁸ I prefer *ingrained* to *inscribed*, for the former term better describes the pervasiveness of ideological conditioning.

by Lacan, I do argue that regression seeks an illusory power.⁹ Based upon my reading of Althusser, I also argue that much ideology is effective in that it offers an interpretation of experience that promotes a similar illusion. But the illusion at the heart of each is different. Regression seeks to escape social demand altogether by reverting to the imaginary state obtaining before the first such demand was made: the demand that we limit ourselves couched in the Oedipal threat. Ideology is nothing if not social: the magic it promises depends upon a sleight of hand that conceals a contradiction inherent in it by which it benefits one class at the expense of another without seeming to do so.¹⁰

I connect regressive fixation to an ideologically derived content principally to illuminate the psychosocial dynamics at play in *Amos*. The ideological basis of *Amos* itself is not clearly spelled out in the text. Nor should we expect it to be. Quoting Marx's well-known definition of ideology from *Capital*—"they do not know it, but they are doing it"—Slavoj Žižek points out that "ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive *naïveté*: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions" (28, emphasis original, in Žižek and presumably in Marx). In this, it is homologous to a definition Žižek offers for the unconscious, one that he also applies to the entire symbolic order: "the form of thought external to the thought itself—in short, some Other Scene external to the thought whereby the form of thought is already articulated in advance" (19). As with the unconscious, the ideological—the Other Scene, not in the play itself, according to which the action unfolds—can only be deduced indirectly by analysis.

A large part of the anxiety produced by *Amos* arises from accusations of misconduct for which no positive, specific correctives are provided. "Hate evil, and love good, and establish

⁹In Freud's view, even the compulsion to repeat that characterizes traumatic neurosis occurs as an attempt to master the traumatic event.

¹⁰As an example of a contradiction that ideology elides, Slavoj Žižek offers the example of the "falsity" of the freedoms that western, capitalistic societies offer its citizens as part of the ideology of the good life they offer. He speaks of freedom as a universal notion comprising a number of species (freedom of speech and press, freedom of consciousness, freedom of commerce, political freedom, and so on) but also, by means of a structural necessity, a specific freedom (that of the worker to sell freely his own labour on the market) which subverts this universal notion. That is to say, this freedom is the very opposite of effective freedom: by selling his labour "freely", the worker *loses* his freedom—the real content of this free act of sale is the worker's enslavement to capital. The crucial point is, of course, that it is precisely this paradoxical freedom, the form of its opposite, which closes the circle of "bourgeois freedoms." (22–23)

For the ideology of freedom to be effective, the superficial attractiveness of the concept must blind the subject to the deeper paradox that Žižek uncovers. A more current version of the freedom Žižek exposes is an American's freedom to die without health care.

justice in the gate,” the audience is admonished. If it does, “it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph” (5.15). But no prescription of good and evil is provided for those who might be inclined to take warning other than a somewhat vague association of evil either with economic depredations against the poor or with religious presumption. “They do not know how to do right,” Yahweh through Amos declares, “those who store up violence and robbery in their strongholds” (3.10). As a prelude to *Amos*’s best-known verse (Chapter 5), Yahweh goes on to declare that

²¹ “I hate, I despise your feasts,
and I take no delight in your
solemn assemblies.

²² Even though you offer me your
burnt offerings and cereal
offerings,
I will not accept them,
and the peace offerings of your fatted
beasts
I will not look upon.

²³ Take away from me the noise of
your songs;
to the melody of your harps I will
not listen.

²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an
ever-flowing stream.

What we have here are noble and high-sounding sentiments without a programme defining the virtues those accused are encouraged to embrace or specifying how those virtues are to be achieved. Without that programme, Amos can only be referring to what he conceives to have been common values—in fact, traditional values—that these accused have abandoned since comprising an emerging, ruling class but that their forebears exemplified in some mythic, egalitarian past.

5. The Myth of the Golden Age

The fact that *Amos* appears among the Minor Prophets has dictated that it normally be analyzed as a prophetic text. However, in terms of the psychosocial dynamic I sketch above—

i.e., in terms of its regressive fixation upon a mythic past—it is illuminating to think of *Amos* as writing about country life evocative of rural discontent of the type surveyed in Raymond Williams’s now classic study *The Country and the City*. In that work, Williams argues that the writing about country life he surveys has been powerfully shaped by the myth of a golden age, which in the classical tradition he traces as far back as the Works and Days of Hesiod in the ninth century BCE (14). He asserts that such a myth is threaded in a distinctive pattern through the texts he considers. The golden age whose loss the writers in question consistently mourn is not some vaguely mythic period at the beginning of things. It is, rather, a time just over the horizon, a time still fresh in the memories of living people, a time that preserved some essential and precious way of life that is just now passing away. In what he calls “A Problem of Perspective,” Williams traces this sense of immediate loss back through the generations of English country writing in a seemingly infinite regress that he imagines reaching back to Eden itself (9–12).

On this view, therefore, the mythic need not be something shrouded in the mists of time. It can refer to a period just beyond our grasp—to a period that we ourselves seem to have lived through, to our childhood, for instance, perhaps to the very dawn of our psychic lives. This idea of the close temporal proximity of the mythic reinforces the argument advanced in Chapter 3 (90 above) that *Amos* evinces a residual ideology according to which rural people, as Marx would have it, “become conscious of [their conflicts] and fight it out.”

It is clear, however, that the unhindered ease with which *Amos* wanders around and fulminates against the state reveals something more than the relatively untrammelled lives of shepherds. It also reflects the degree of hegemony that the monarchical state has achieved. Representing no threat to the state, malcontents like *Amos* are tolerated, perhaps to signify that the governing authorities take the peoples’ grievances to heart. It seems clear, however, that the group whose ideology *Amos* shares is losing—or may have already lost—the class war by a decisive margin. In terms of the dialectic Marx took over from Hegel, they represent an older dispensation in the process of being superseded.

6. The Ossification of Fiction into Myth and Its Social Consequences

Fixation upon the mythic does not allow for explanatory adaptation to changing conditions. Because it presupposes “total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were,” Kermode argues that the mythic dictates only “a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures” as a response to the ever-ramifying permutations of daily experience. In consequence, it fuels the alienation I discuss in Chapter 3, but in a curious way. There, I characterize *Amos* as a “profound literature of alienation,” one “permeated by a structure of feeling that the poor of Israel are being

overwhelmed by a totally incomprehensible system they cannot recognize as a human product” (94 above). However, once the fiction of the kingship of Yahweh became mystified into an inexorable expression of Yahweh’s will, the poor of Israel were not likely to recognize it as a human product either. As the fiction ossified into myth, it not only became alienated from the people for whom it once served as a principle of cohesion. It also prevented them from making sense of the changes confronting them in terms of any other paradigm. As greater Biblical Israel continued to evolve from a tribal society into a monarchical state, a mythology rooted in tribalism became less and less serviceable as an explanatory model for its social relationship. Nor was a tribal mythology likely to allow people to comprehend other ideological purposes to which the fiction of the kingship of Yahweh may now have been put. What Amos condemns as religious pretension may, indeed, ritually express a theological development he is ideologically prevented from understanding, viz., a messianic theology based upon the suzerainty of the king now envisioned as Yahweh’s anointed son. Perhaps what was needed in Amos’s day was for the class struggle to be joined on a new symbolic terrain. By reinforcing ideologically ingrained predispositions, mythic fixation shuts down the capacity to strategize such shifts.

The fixation upon the mythic, by harmonizing any dissonance between the fictions upon which it is based and the manifold reality those fictions represent, leads to serving up various fantasies, which we normally subsume under the rubric of *belief*, as exhaustive and conclusive models of that reality. One such fantasy is a notion of providence held dear by many American conservatives, which holds that the Protestant Christian god chooses *laissez-faire* capitalism to bestow his benevolence upon his chosen people. This fantasy is based upon the myth that this god still regulates the affairs of those who trust in him according to his invisible hand, a concept that Adam Smith proposed over two centuries ago in the springtime of modern liberalism (today’s neo-liberalism). The myth of divine providence dictates that the highest ethical imperative for any individual is to pursue his or her own interests. The individual who does so, Smith proclaims, is “led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it” (423). It follows, then, that any reliance upon human initiatives seen to interfere with this god’s will as it unfolds in the operation of free markets (initiatives, for instance, to institute universal health care) is condemned as a form of modern Pelagianism that lacks faith in the divinely-ordained plan for humankind.

7. A Matter of Principle

The phenomenon of Sarah Palin's meteoric rise to the Republican vice-presidential nomination in the 2008 American elections can be accounted for, at least in part, by her perceived ability, to use a term popularized by pundits on channels such as CNN and MSNBC, to *galvanize* her party's base. As she clearly lacks any demonstrable capacity to govern on the national level, the galvanization with which she has been credited lies in her recitation of what, in Smith's age, would have been called *maxims*, which in her case amount to pithy ideological tags reminding Americans that God loves their freedom to do whatever they please in the world. For a growing number of the electorate, these maxims comprise an outworn pastiche of ideas that have lost the potential to address their needs. They continue to resonate only among that shrinking minority for whom the maintenance of a posture of rugged American individualism sufficiently guarantees the continued beneficial operation of providence. However, many who insist that Sarah Palin is out of her depth as a national politician are willing to admit that she is a person of principle, however weirdly assorted and inapplicable to the world's problems those principles might now seem. But, to return to the imagery with which Kermode introduces his distinction between fiction and myth, Buchenwald itself was built—and staffed—by people of principle, principles derived from certain mythic convictions about national destiny.

Amos is also conceived as a person of principle. He is admired for his principled denunciation of the economic crimes of the rich against the poor. But he lacks a principle grounded in human interaction—a political principle—to address the problems he describes. All he can do is fantasize an orgy of destruction aimed at the material symbols of the class power that oppresses him: the various strongholds in which wealth is hoarded up and the walls that impede his free progress through the world. In our time we have seen such orgies as Amos fantasizes carried out by people who, by virtue of their capacity to act, are only slightly less alienated than he—people such as Timothy McVeigh and Mohammad Atta.¹¹

Amos's fantasies do not engage the world's problems. His justice is that of Pol Pot, which would simply wipe the slate clean and start again at the year zero. I do not doubt, for all that, that *Amos* is a sacred text. So much the worse, for its sacrality better qualifies it as bedtime reading for suicide-bombers on their last night on earth. I submit that many who admire *Amos* derive a vicarious sense of power from the earth-shaking, incendiary acts of Yahweh, even though those acts threaten to sweep away the oppressed as well as their oppressors. In this it

¹¹ As I point out above (93), alienation functions politically to prevent people from acting upon their grievances. McVeigh and Atta are less alienated than Amos in that they do more than fantasize, but they are only slightly less so in that their actions approach pure destructiveness.

confirms Laplanche's thesis that in Freud's thought people typically fear castration more than death,¹² making some quite willing to blow themselves up to achieve, as John Berger states in sketching the mentality of the conspirators ready to sacrifice all to assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand, "an independent life in the sky of the centuries" (228).

These considerations bring us back to the strange conclusion of *Amos* (see 131-32 above). In Chapter 4 I comment upon the almost insuperable contradiction of the tone of this passage with everything in *Amos* that precedes it. That contradiction remains, regardless of how one might interpret this conclusion. One interpretation I do offer is based upon the translators' construal of the tense as future, which would render the passage prophetic. This, then, would represent a vision of a paradise to come, one established among a righteous remnant once their class oppressors were obliterated. Playing upon Gottwald's thought, this new Eden might represent the effects of a *reretribalization*. This thought suggests another: that this vision is not exclusively proleptic. What we have, I suggest, tacked on to the very end of *Amos*, is a vision of the golden age myth, the regressive fixation, that animates the entire book. This is the way it was, back in the good old days of simple virtue, when David was still a shepherd in the fields, before the complications of monarchy and its unjust power relations seduced him and ruined us all. This is the way that it can be again, the vision entices to believe. The vision may appear at the end, but what Amos dreams of is getting back to the future—or moving forward to the past.

Due to the illusory sense of power arising from regressive fantasies, there is a natural tendency, particularly among but not limited to marginalized groups with uncertain futures, to idealize their pasts. In Chapter 3, I speculate upon the idealization by one such group—Jewish scribes in a backwash of the Persian empire—manifest in their recasting notable (and perhaps legendary) characters in their past as prophets. An unfortunate corollary of this tendency is the belief that the purity of an idealized past can be recaptured only if others whose presence is seen to complicate (and contaminate) the lives of the idealizing group can be eliminated. The nature of these others can be construed according to however the idealizers conceive their current predicament: these can be socioeconomic others, national others, ethnic others, racial others, religious others, gendered others, and so forth. Strategies for eliminating them range from separation to outright extermination. The Jewish Bible is replete with such strategies aimed at securing and maintaining the purity of Israel. The Exodus tradition provides one example. Yahweh

¹² In *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, Laplanche observes that "the occurrence of 'death anxiety' or of an originary wish to die will never be located, in analytic psychopathology, in that position of 'irreducible bedrock' which is attributed par excellence to the castration complex" (6).

promises the descendants of Jacob that he will “deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians” who oppress them, “and bring them up out of that land to a broad and good land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8). The catch is, of course, that they must first decimate the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, and other riff-raff who already occupy it.

8. *Amos* and the Sacred

Amos exemplifies the notion of the sacred elaborated by Georges Bataille in *Eroticism*, in which he distinguishes between discontinuous and continuous existence. Discontinuous existence is that in which we experience ourselves as discrete individuals. It is the state in which “[e]ach being is distinct from all others. His birth, his death, the events of his life may have an interest for others, but he alone is directly concerned in them. He is born alone. He dies alone. Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity” (12). In tension with this sense of discontinuous existence is a longing for a lost sense of continuity. “We are discontinuous beings,” he insists,

individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is. (15)

He characterizes this longing as a nostalgia for the unity in which we existed before appearing in this world. One is reminded here of Plato's theory that our sense of the ideal derives from memories of a realm in which our souls existed before birth (“Phaedo” 213). However, Bataille's conception is much more nebulous, for his sense of the continuous refers back to a time before any individuation whatever, psychic or physical.

These senses of discontinuous and continuous existence are binary poles around which Bataille's argument is organized. He associates them with the spheres of the profane and the sacred respectively. The discontinuous/profane pole is that of our quotidian human life. In the last instance, it is structured according to the taboos upon which human culture is founded. By limiting our sexual as well as other activities, taboos inculcate a sense of limitation and discreteness. Conversely, the continuous/sacred pole—representing, as it does, the longing for lost continuity—seeks to transgress the taboos from which our sense of discontinuity arises. It seeks to violate the structures upon which our lives depend.

The distinction Bataille makes between the discontinuous/profane and the continuous/sacred mirrors that which he makes between the transcendent and the immanent discussed in Chapter 4 (113 above). In his use of *transcendence*, however, the term acquires a meaning contrary to its typical connotation. As the principle by which a subject distinguishes itself or emerges from a ground, transcendence in Bataille aligns with the pole of the discontinuous/profane. As the state of presubjective existence in the world—i.e., as water in water—immanence aligns to the pole of the continuous/sacred. To extend this binary opposition in good structuralist fashion by one more term, the continuous/sacred/immanent runs along the axis of desire also discussed in Chapter 4, whereas the discontinuous/profane/transcendent aligns itself with the social demand that we channel our desires in conventionally acceptable ways (123 above).

Bataille does not define the sacred *per se*. After all, his subject is eroticism. But he deals extensively with the sacred in elaborating the erotic. For him, the erotic impulse seeks release from the conventions that normally bind us, conventions founded upon taboo. This impulse manifests itself in many ways. Some are obvious. For instance, orgy is commonly thought of as erotic because of its blatantly transgressive sexuality. But Bataille insists that marriage, at least at its outset, is erotic as well because it transgresses a “general and universal” taboo on sexual activity, which he conceives as “a fundamental rule which demands that we submit, and in common, to restrictions of one sort or another.” “Particular prohibitions” such as incest are simply “aspects” of the general taboo that vary from culture to culture (50). Other manifestations of the erotic impulse include cannibalism, dueling, feuding, hunting, war, sacrifice, and religious prostitution. Each transgresses some taboo, most typically involving sexual activity or the taking of life. Each involves violence in that the taboo in question is violated. Bataille claims that “the domain of eroticism is the domain of violence, of violation” (16). As the realm *par excellence* unaffected by the limitations impeding mere mortals, the sacred can only be approached erotically: by violating the limitations that structure the discontinuous/profane world. In its origins, at least, the sacred is connected inextricably to violence.

Although Bataille does not dwell upon what distinguishes the sacred from the profane, as a thinker with Marxist propensities he does differentiate them economically. Originally, Bataille contends, taboos had an economic provenance: “Taboos,” he insists, “are there to make work possible; work is productive; during the profane period allotted to work consumption is reduced to the minimum consistent with continued production.” On the other hand, “sacred days [...] are feast days” during which the “values of the workaday world are inverted.” “From an economic standpoint the reserves accumulated during periods of work are squandered extravagantly at feast times” (68). Bataille's conception of the sacred aligns with his theory of a general economy

inspired by Marcel Mauss's work on the potlatch.¹³ Moreover, his connection of the profane with production suggests its potential as a source of alienation. On the other hand, the association of the sacred with consumption suggests a desire to achieve a primal unity with all that is.

Bataille's connection of the sacred with violence may be difficult to accept in societies shaped by a Christian tradition. He insists that humans have “natural impulses to violence” (69), impulses manifesting dangerous desires to be held in check by taboos and the agency, as Althusser would have it, of the ideological state apparatuses among which the institutions of Christendom once played so prominent a part. Although Bataille does not say it specifically, to the extent that religion functions to create order and to restrain violence, it represents a profanation of the sacred as he elaborates it.

Bataille's thought on the sacred is consonant with viewing it as a force exercising a regressive pull against individuation back to a more primitive state. In Lacanian terms, regression may be thought as a movement from the *symbolic* back to the *imaginary* or, as Laplanche and Pontalis put it, “from a psychical functioning based on thought-identity to one based on perceptual identity” (387). In its most notorious Freudian formulation—that of the death instinct—regression exercises a pull right back to the inanimate state. It does so not in a search for power but as a manifestation of the economic function of instinct to keep an organism's overall level of excitation as constantly low as possible. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud observes that “*an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or, to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life (36, emphasis original). If we “pursue to its logical conclusion the hypothesis that all instincts tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things” (37), “then we shall be compelled to say that “*the aim of all life is death*” and, looking backwards, that “*inanimate things existed before living ones*” (38, emphasis original). He concludes this part of his discussion with one of the more cryptic statements in the entire body of his work:

The hypothesis of self-preservative instincts, such as we attribute to all living beings, stands in marked opposition to the idea that instinctual life as a whole serves to bring about death. Seen in this light, the theoretical importance of the instincts of self-preservation, of self-assertion and of mastery greatly diminishes. They are component instincts whose function it is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to

¹³ For an excellent summary of this theory see Shershow.

inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself.
(39)

The burden of aggression that the death instinct has been made to bear in the history of psychoanalysis cannot be inferred from the rather cautious and tentative introduction Freud provides the concept in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, a work he somewhat tediously but necessarily defends as highly speculative. The aggression upon which he would continue to elaborate over the balance of his career is only hinted at in the organism's determination "to follow its own path to death, and to ward off any possible ways of returning to inorganic existence other than those which are immanent in the organism itself." In *Eroticism*, Bataille shines a more brilliant light upon the violence inherent in the pull of regression, a force that, in his thinking, aims not only to smash but, more characteristically, to transgress the structures in and through which people seek to justify their productive relationships. As I have demonstrated, Amos's epic iconoclasm, which takes the entire fabric of his society as a symbol to be smashed, goes hand in glove with an equally epic compulsion to denounce, speaking, as he does, in and through the voice and character of Yahweh himself. Freud's theorization of the death instinct in terms of the economics of pleasure, incipient though it may be in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, at least suggests that Amos's regressive fantasies have a sadistic quality. Although Amos condemns the Ammonites for ripping up pregnant women in Gilead (1.13), this is only a more severe instance of the fate he himself fantasizes for those women he calls the "cows of Bashan," a pastoral area of Gilead (Chapter 4):

¹ "Hear this word, you cows of
Bashan,
who are in the mountain of
Sama'ria,
who oppress the poor, who crush the
needy,
who say to their husbands, 'Bring,
that we may drink!'

² The Lord GOD has sworn by his
holiness
that, behold, the days are coming
upon you,
when they shall take you away with
hooks,
even the last of you with fishhooks.

³ And you shall go out through the

breaches,
every one straight before her;
and you shall be cast forth into
Harmon,”

says the LORD.

Amos enjoys this vision. He attempts to master his own trauma by projecting it onto others, thereby converting his suffering to an experience he can also enjoy.

Conclusion

At the outset of this study I state that Marxist and psychoanalytic critical approaches complement one another well enough that they can be adapted and employed constructively to illuminate forces at work in literature and literary production. I agree with Paul Ricoeur that Marx and Freud are exemplars of a hermeneutics of suspicion—that they suspect things are not as they seem and seek to account for reality in terms of dynamic processes that lie concealed. In Chapter 5, I have focussed upon Frank Kermode’s concept of the mythic and Georges Bataille’s concept of the sacred because they both elucidate the regressive tendencies operating in the book of *Amos*. These regressive tendencies constitute the clearest point at which my thinking about *Amos* in Marxist and Freudian frameworks converges.

At the beginning of *The Tribes of Yahweh*, Norman Gottwald summarizes some of the challenges facing biblical critics. “The problem of the sources of our knowledge about early Israel,” he states, “is at first glance scarcely conceivable. Are we not, after all, provided with innumerable stories, laws, and poems which crowd the pages of the Hebrew Bible from Genesis to Samuel? Hardly any other people has produced so much material about its beginnings” (4). But, he goes on to observe,

it is equally evident that none of these materials is in unaltered form, although the alteration may be so subtle as to escape instant detection. The traditional sequences tend to break into units without certain chronological connection; and the more they are examined, the more certain it is that an idealized conception of Israel’s unity has been cast back into the earlier traditions, thereby lending them all the impression that their subject is a single people, stemming from a single line of ancestors and united in a tribal system from the days of their Egyptian bondage.
(4)

The “conception of Israel’s unity” is not the only idealized feature of the Jewish Bible. I have used Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology to argue that Amos^L—Amos as a *prophetic* spokesperson for the poor—is also an idealization. Such idealizations have *spiritualized* the biblical compendium as a whole, leading millennia of readers to believe, as Gerhard von Rad puts it, that a “complex of religious ideas about God and creation, the person, sin and forgiveness, and so forth hover[ed] over the people of Israel like a spiritual cloud” (83 above). This belief is similar to that which I argue is held by Amos himself, viz., that premonarchical, tribal Israel was an idyllic land where justice flourished.

Using Kermode’s terminology, I argue that such beliefs are myths that essentialize fictional lost orders of time as foundations for thought and action. Drawing inspiration from a time

and place in which the “Sea of Faith” was believed to be “at the full” (Arnold 762, lines 21-22) may have positive social purposes. By selectively reading the Bible, scholars such as Walter Brueggeman produce works such as *Hope Within History*, in which, the back cover declares, he “looks at the biblical text and finds the resources for hope within history, a hope that challenges hopelessness and despair.” If, following Hayden White, we take the history upon which Brueggemann draws to be a form of fiction, texts such as Brueggemann’s may well provide examples of how biblical literature humanizes “the world’s contingency,” which Kermode takes to be fiction’s proper aim. However, as my discussion of the historical imperative in biblical studies in Chapter 1 emphasizes, many of the Bible’s most serious readers have lost touch with its fictiveness. Ideologically predisposed as they are to accept the compilation as the word of God, they approach even the Book of Job, which patently introduces itself as a fairy tale, as if it were particularly saturated with logos. As a result, they are oblivious to the Bible’s many disturbing features, which, like “The Purloined Letter” in Poe’s story, are hidden from them, as it were, in plain sight.

I have used both Marxist and psychoanalytic theory to elucidate features in *Amos* that struck me as disturbing upon my first reading. I have argued, for instance, that the consciousness within *Amos* is so profoundly alienated that it can neither conceive nor urge any course of human action whatever in response to the injustices it denounces: it can only call down the Lord’s wrath upon them. Moreover, I have argued the merits of reading that consciousness as a case study of the effects of trauma—of reading it as being so shattered by a flash of insight into its own vulnerability that it can never again invest the world in which it finds itself with coherent meaning. All it can do is fantasize mayhem because that world cannot approximate the mythic neverland upon which it fixates. Walter Brueggemann does not refer to *Amos* in *Hope Within History*. He does observe, however, that “[t]he Jewish Bible, the Christian Old Testament, is fundamentally a literature of hope, yet, at least in Christian circles the Old Testament has such a caricatured reputation as a tradition of law, judgment, and wrath” (72). Reading *Amos*, I question how caricatured the Bible’s reputation for wrath may be.

The musicologist Richard Taruskin writes compellingly about the effect of canon formation on the recent reception of art commissioned by the Soviet government during the Stalinist purges of the late 1930s and the Second World War.¹ He takes particular umbrage at the contention that Sergei Prokofiev and, to a lesser extent, Sergei Eisenstein and Dmitri Shostakovich

¹ I draw from the following articles in Taruskin’s *On Russian Music*: “Prokofieff’s Return” (233-45), “Great Artists Serving Stalin Like a Dog” (270-76), and “Stalin Lives On in the Concert Hall, but Why?” (277-82).

accepted such commissions under duress but managed to produce work that was “secretly dissident,” trusting to the particularly sophisticated among their audiences to recognize this (“Great” 273). The work of spelling this dissidence out, Taruskin suggests, has spawned an industry engaged in posthumously rehabilitating these artists as tortured souls who struggled as best they could against their oppressors. Taruskin declares that, during the period in question, they were nothing of the sort. Prokofiev and Eisenstein accepted commissions to collaborate on films that glorified the Stalinist regime such as *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible* because they were opportunists: they wanted the money and the social perquisites the work provided. Taruskin argues that Prokofiev was similarly motivated to produce pieces such as “*Zdravitsa*, a ‘Toast’ to the Great Leader and Teacher on his sixtieth birthday in 1939[.] With revolting hypocrisy,” he continues,

it condemns prerevolutionary repressions (“for protest the Tsar killed us, left women without husbands”) while exalting as a rawboned, guileless folk hero—some kind of Jascha Appleseed—the perpetrator of savageries twice as vile. At that very moment old Jascha was wiping his maw after gobbling up eastern Poland in a deal with another beloved honcho to the west. (“Stalin” 278)

Given such circumstances, Taruskin observes that a film such as *Ivan the Terrible* “painfully poses all the hardest questions involving art and its purposes. The chief one is this: Is it possible to forget that this movie and this score, whatever their artistic merits, conveyed as poisonous a message as art has ever been asked to monger?” (“Great” 271).

The trick adopted by the rehabilitators is to focus upon the technical aspects of these works—to admire Eisenstein’s camera angles or Prokofiev’s modulation, which is “as innovative as the work of any of the more obvious modernists of the twentieth century” (“Prokofieff’s” 237). But is engagement with art no more than appreciating technical virtuosity while one determines to “[h]ang the ‘meaning’”? (“Great” 274). Taruskin argues that that meaning is also important—and that it “arises out of a relationship between the art object and a perceiving subject, who, I believe, ought to be alive to the world and perceive art, along with everything else, in the light of not only esthetic but also of ethical and moral concerns” (“Prokofieff’s” 236).

No one denies that Prokofiev, Eisenstein, and Shostakovich are world-historical artists. For this reason alone, we may attempt to persuade ourselves that everything they produced has a quotient of edification that we will find if we only search for it diligently enough—even their paeans to Stalin. To a lesser degree, the same might hold true of “Carl Orff’s celebrations of Nazi youth culture” or “Respighi’s evocations of the glory that was Mussolini’s Rome” (“Prokofieff’s” 237). However, Taruskin argues that technical merit alone should not guarantee a work an entrée into the canon of western art. Its *tendenz* in humanizing the world’s contingency should factor in as well.

In introducing Taruskin's comments on Soviet art into a discussion of *Amos*, I do not mean to suggest that *Amos* formally parallels works such as *Alexander Nevsky* and *Ivan the Terrible*. *Amos* does not, after all, self consciously present itself to the world as a work of art, although it does evoke the experience of anxiety and earthquake, for example, with a high degree of artistry. Nevertheless, Taruskin's observations are highly suggestive. Because of the biblical canon in which *Amos* appears, it has typically been assumed that diligent application to *Amos's* text will be repaid by some revelation into divine nature, which has been normally pinpointed in the demand to "let justice roll down like waters" (5.24). On the basis of this, exegetes such as Willie Schotroff reconstruct Amos's *ministry* to Israel. This characterization of whatever Amos¹—the historical kernel upon which the Book of *Amos* is based—was doing in biblical Israel is symptomatic of a blind spot that the ideological conditioning that the Bible is the word of God has created. The god that Amos worships and propitiates, somewhat like Jascha Appleseed, is about to gobble up his chosen people in his maw. The sadistic pleasure Amos takes in this prospect has elicited virtually no comment in *Amos* criticism. It remains hidden in plain sight.

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