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THE BIBLE AND ITS MODERN METHODS:

INTERPRETATION BETWEEN ART AND TEXT

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In memory of my mother

The Reverend Jane Anderson Morse

(1943-1995)

ABSTRACT

The dissertation that follows pushes the boundaries of biblical interpretation by formulating relationships between passages of the Hebrew Bible and unrelated works of Modern art. While a growing field of criticism addresses the representation of scriptural stories in painting, sculpture and film, the artwork in this study does not look to the Bible for its subject matter. The intertextual/intermedia comparisons instead address five different genres of biblical literature and read them according to various dynamics found in Modern images. In forming these relationships I challenge traditional perceptions of characters and literary style by allowing an artistic representation or pictorial method to highlight issues of selfhood, gender and power and by revaluing narrative and poetry in nuanced aesthetic terms.

The comparative analysis derives its two-subject structure for each section from the undergraduate art history seminar, in which two slides are projected and the group encouraged to identify similarities between disparate works. My use of this heuristic method then appropriates secondary sources to forge a relationship in which art criticism ultimately speaks for the biblical text.

Chapter I juxtaposes the figure of Michal in 2 Samuel 6 against that of *Queen Guenevere* (1858) by William Morris in an essay that questions the portrait popular opinion has painted of the barren daughter of Saul. The Pre-Raphaelite painting and Morris's related poetry help to build a defence for Michal against those who inflict her barrenness upon her as if it were a punishment from God. Morris's sympathy for his adulterous heroine allows us to see the Deuteronomistic History's maligned queen as one whose character and action in fact seem very in tune with the prophetic agenda of the greater work.

In Chapter II, a woodcut portrait of Friedrich Nietzsche (1905) by Erich Heckel provides a counterpart to Abraham's representation in Genesis 23. The German Expressionist reduced his palette to a bold black on white to memorialise the Modern father of great men. The comparison frames Abraham as the embodiment of the *Übermensch*, as one who laid waste to his father's heritage and followed his own God. His role as one who lives 'over' others casts the haste with which he gets up and buys Sarah's plot as a sign of his will to possess. Luce Irigaray's *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1991) is then incorporated to create a dialogue between the dark space of the portrait (symbolic of Abraham's masculine ego) and the white space caused by Sarah's death. Sarah thus speaks to 'Abraham the Overman' as the 'Marine Lover', beckoning him down from his high place and resisting the force in him that wants to bury her out of his sight.

Chapter III turns to prophecy and reconsiders Isaiah 44 first as a collage made in exile and then as a performance piece conducted in diaspora. The *Merzbild* by Kurt Schwitters entitled *Green Over Yellow* (1947) takes a critical Modern step away from representation and forward to abstraction. Schwitters assembled his cut-up forms to

give them new visual value and made conspicuous their arbitrary edges and artful overlapping—a compositional and structural ethos not unlike the collage of forms in the exilic prophecy. Schwitters' relative ease as an exile and expatriate in Britain also fuels questions scholars have asked about the nature and scale of the biblical exile. Finding that the text does not fully orient itself towards Jerusalem, a second part to this comparison introduces an alternative analogue for Is. 44 by treating it as a record of performance and drawing upon the work of Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) to discuss the passage's broad approach to land and identity.

The fourth chapter hangs an individual lament alongside Jackson Pollock's *Cathedral* (1947), likening its parallelisms to streams of paint poured across the canvas and foregrounding the site of Psalm 13 as a field of/for abstract expression. Short though this hymn may be, its generalised language makes it accessible to a universal audience and lets emotion be splattered about in a personal protest against pain.

Finally, Chapter V envisions wisdom literature and the character of Qoheleth with an understanding for the genre's 'conceptual' outlook and the speaker's sense of irony. A readymade gambler's bond by Marcel Duchamp is projected opposite the opening chapter of Qoheleth's reflections to introduce the wise man as a dandy who entertains his admirers through pleasing words. The comparison thus establishes a context in which a book that scholars have attempted to classify as either the work of an optimist or a pessimist can be appreciated for the attitude of witty indifference its author appears to affect.

The project actively conceives of the biblical text as a 'Modern' phenomenon by emphasising areas in which it seems to invite abstract or metaphorical modes of understanding over literal interpretation. It utilizes an understanding of Modernism based not on the rejection of tradition but on the desire to rectify it. And it draws out the ways in which the Bible scandalizes the pious pictures critics have painted of it. Thinking not only of reading and visualising the Bible as an artistic process, the analysis aims to illustrate the legitimacy of viewing the text itself as a work of art.

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In the fortieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the river Chebar, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God … As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber. (Ezekiel 1.1, 4)

INTRODUCTION

To define beauty, not in the most abstract, but in the most concrete terms possible. To find, not a universal formula for it, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of Aesthetics, who will ask…

…What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? And if so, what sort or degree of pleasure?

The Aesthetic critic … will remember always that beauty exists in many forms. To him all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal … The question he asks is always: in whom did the stir, the genius, the sentiment of the period find itself?
(Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance,* 1873)

By introducing a dissertation on the Old Testament/Tanakh with a passage about art, I hereby baptise my project with a scandalous beginning. By opening with the words of Pater, I also copy the choice made by Lionel Lambourne in his art historical monograph, *The Aesthetic Movement* (1996). The Glasgow University Library's copy bears the scars of a considerable history of perusal for a book so relatively young. The cover has fallen completely free of the spine, perhaps indicative of an emerging interest in the concept of an aesthetic way of seeing. Pater's gaze prioritises mental sensations over philosophical systems and equates all periods and tastes, while still enquiring about the source of the genius before him. But by explicating the Aesthetic student's aim to define beauty not in 'abstract' but 'concrete terms', Pater risks saying the opposite of what he really means. He does not want to define beauty in terms of an abstract divine construct but instead through the concrete medium of art and the sensations it produces. Yet his Aesthetic rejection of Realism surely encourages us to be less rationally concrete and more decadently and emotionally self-focused, and therefore more prone to subjective abstractions.

Much to the delight of Pater, Algernon Charles Swinburne and other Aesthetes, their 'modern gospel of intensity' (a term eventually coined by Harry Quilter in his 1880 comparison of the current style in painting to that of the Pre-Raphaelite forbears) reaped them a fashionable amount of notoriety. Henry James, for instance, criticised the introspective pool-gazing in Edward Burne-Jones's *The Mirror of Venus* (1873-74) as a sign of their turning away from the outside world and later slighted Aestheticism as a cliquey art of 'intellectual luxury', reminiscent of Pater's ivory-towered Oxford turf.[1] A year earlier *Vanity Fair* had linked the fleshiness of the late Pre-Raphaelite figures to 'immoral' writers like Swinburne, distrusting this secretive society that 'worshipped' moral dubiousness and sexual irregularity.[2] The talk at *The Globe* was of the 'hedonism' of Pater's own cult of beauty.[3] Pater's heretical substitution of aesthetic intensity for God was not however an entirely atheistic affair, for it was his experience as a church-goer that gave birth to his obsession with beauty. He had even planned to seek ordination, and it seems often overlooked that the Aesthetic artists William Morris and Burne-Jones both studied theology before switching to art and the conversion of middle-class homes into divinely decorated domestic temples. So it is ironic that the Aesthetic vision should have been derided as a pagan escapade when it is a vision that originated in and first made its mark in the church.

As the critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin saw it, art at any rate originated in the religious setting. In speaking of how mechanical reproduction destroys an

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[1] Pater studied at Queen's College before taking up a fellowship at Brasenose. J.B. Bullen cites James's 1877 review in her study, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford, 1998), 164.

[2] Pater and a number of his fellow Aesthetes, including Oscar Wilde, were gay. The arrest of the painter Simeon Solomon in 1873 for homosexual practices featured prominently in news headlines. The citation from *Vanity Fair* appears in Bullen, 158. For how Aestheticism was gendered as the philosophy of the feminine, see pp. 179-83.

[3] *The Globe* (1873); cf. Bullen, 159.

object's authentic 'aura', he wrote: 'Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind.'[4] While Benjamin finds that mechanically reproduced art 'begins to be based on another practice—politics', he mentions how prior to this the Renaissance 'cult of beauty' possessed its own 'ritualistic basis' that fell into crisis with the advent of photography:

> At that time, art reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*, that is, with a theology of art. This gave rise to what might be called a negative theology in the form of the idea of 'pure' art, which not only denied any social function of art but also any categorizing of subject matter.[5]

Benjamin's conclusion that the doctrine of art for art's sake was ultimately 'consummated' by fascism does not concern us here, for our focus is the modern aesthetic vision prior to its coercion by politics. And it is the close relationship between art and religion that makes Pater's substitution (or, as I see it, integration) possible. As J.B. Bullen has summarised Pater's view:

> it is not our knowledge and ignorance of the numinous, so critical to Mill and Mansel, that preoccupies Pater, it is art, and it is not God which gives meaning to our conscious life, it is, instead, the 'quickened, multiplied consciousness', as he puts it, achieved through the contemplation of works of art … and the critical theories of pure sensuousness.[6]

But the fact that Pater is not exclusively 'preoccupied' with God does not mean there is no God in the Aesthetic vision, for the movement seems rather to have raised the experience of art to a divine level. John Morley of the *Fortnightly Review* celebrated how Pater elevated 'aesthetic interest to the throne lately filled by religion',[7] and this critical theological shift is ever repressed in the histories of Modern art. The

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[4] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, (first published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* V, 1936; trans. Harry Zorn; London, 1999), 217.
[5] *Ibid*., 217-18.
[6] Bullen, 182.
[7] *Ibid*.

Aesthetic gospel of intensity was partly a response to the speeding up of vision that occurred through more accelerated modes of transport, the disposable pages of popular media, and ultimately the mass-produced patterns that would line every public and domestic interior for decades.[8] Pater's gospel allowed art to cohabit in the place of God, but the Aesthetic source of delight in ornamental pleasure was born from the ecclesiastical setting. Aestheticism in this light functioned as a kind of Modern material religion that spoke of how art, the beautiful, the object of sight, could be critically important to the development of an individual's personal inspiration. In this sense, the aim of Aestheticism seems not so far from the Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar's proposition that beauty could be a source of both love and redemption. 'Art', wrote an anonymous journalist in 1875, 'is a religion—a belief—a fanaticism. It is a moral emanation.'[9] Many of the Aesthetes would have objected to the pinning of moral qualities onto art, but few could have denied the religious devotion with which they now witnessed the art object. The modern understanding was that sensation was revelation.

My purpose in opening with Pater is thus to ask this: cannot the reverential perspective given to the work of modern art be translated into an aesthetic way of seeing the Bible?   The 'true student of Aesthetics' equalizes all pre-existing sentiments and styles and looks with fresh eyes to ask what effect a work has on him/her. Without necessarily searching for the 'genius' behind the works, as Pater does, can Modern aesthetics be utilised as a guide, or recognised as a precondition, for how we might view the biblical text?

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[8] Today we speak of the inundation of images imposed upon us by MTV and the internet, but the Victorians, the early Moderns, were equally and paradoxically visually distracted. While we live in a world of virtual vision that we watch in rooms with white or plain-coloured walls, they could hardly imagine a dwelling place stripped of the visual jungle of patterned wallpapers.

[9] From an article in *Artist* (1875), cited in Bullen, 182.

We will return to Pater in Chapter IV, but his aesthetic attitude introduces my approach to the biblical text as an aesthetic object whose 'methods', characters and styles can be read sensibly within a Modern artistic vision. In *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990), Terry Eagleton finds this perceptual category to be a 'high priority' in European philosophy; Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger all negotiate its place within the realm of human judgment.[10] His Marxist evaluation locates the birth of aesthetic theory in a middle-class ideological struggle in Germany that pitted itself against the hegemony of an absolutist political system dominated by an impotent nobility. The discussion of beauty and art therefore evolved as a way to speak of and express 'freedom and legality, spontaneity and necessity, self-determination and autonomy, particularity and universality'.[11] With the increased value placed on individual perception and sensation, conceptual thought could no longer account for everything that gives meaning to 'our creaturely life', yet Eagleton cautions against the outright rejection of all Enlightenment values, for 'only dialectical thought can adequately encompass "the contradictoriness of the aesthetic"'.[12] So he points in the direction of criticism that balances individual understanding with a reasoned awareness of an aesthetic object's social and historical context.

Without mentioning it, Eagleton follows the lead Hans-Georg Gadamer sets out in *Truth and Method* (1960), in which he accepts the inadequacies of the Enlightenment's presumed objectivity while never fully rejecting rational analysis. While he determines artistic-instinctive induction to be critical to the formation of conclusions in the human sciences, he emphasises the legitimacy of a collective sense and advocates aesthetic judgment cultivated within a 'historically effected

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[10] Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990), 1.
[11] *Ibid.*, 3.
[12] *Ibid.*, 13, 6.

consciousness' (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*).[13]　He notes how in the mid-nineteenth century the physician and physicist Hermann von Helmholtz 'laid greater emphasis on the superior and humane significance of the human sciences,[14] [but] still gave them a negative logical description based on the methodological ideal of the natural sciences':

> Both kinds of science make use of the inductive conclusion, but the human sciences arrive at their conclusions by an unconscious process. Hence the practice of induction in the human sciences is tied to particular psychological conditions.　It requires a kind of tact and other intellectual capacities as well—e.g., a well-stocked memory and the acceptance of authorities—whereas the self-conscious inferences of the natural scientist depend entirely on the use of his own reason.[15]

Gadamer highlights even the importance of forgetting in the formation of memory 'as an essential element in the finite historical being of man' and defines tact as 'a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them'.[16]　The tact through which human sciences thus form their judgments is not just 'a feeling and unconscious' structure but an operation bound up in the broader culture (*Bildung*).[17] Taste is as much a private sense as it is a social phenomenon.[18]

　　Gadamer argues that the broad experience (*Erfahrung,* as opposed to the more personal *Erlebnis*) of art ideally takes the form of play, in which a 'player' falls under the spell of the game of viewing and succumbs to a process without a goal, without trying to prove any presupposed premise.　Simple aesthetic consciousness—

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[13] So the translators of the Continuum edition follow the suggestion of P. Christopher Smith to relate a sense of consciousness that is 'at once "affected" by history … and also itself brought into being—"effected"—by history, and conscious that it is so'; see the Translators' preface in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (first published in 1960 as *Wahrheit und Methode*; trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall; London, 2004), xv.

[14] Most known for his role in applying discoveries in thermodynamics, acoustics, and other aspects of physical science to the analysis of the body and its perceptive faculties, Helmholtz was dismayed by how alienated scientific inquiry had become from philosophy.　In 1862 he lectured his peers on the limits of empiricism and went on to defend the artistic-inductive processes that govern the human sciences.　'Über das Verhaltniss der Naturwissenschaft zur Gessamtheit der Wissenschaften' (1862), in Hermann von Helmholtz, *Vortrage und Reden* I (Braunschweig, 1903), 158-85.

[15] Gadamer, 5.

[16] *Ibid.*, 14.

[17] *Ibid.*, 15.

[18] See Gadamer, 33-33.

distinguishing formal qualities or historical conditions according to preconditioned questions or knowledge—does not give way to revelation, for 'the [true] aesthetic attitude is more than it knows of itself'.[19] To understand the 'being of art' requires a mode of submission in which the object takes control of the viewer/reader:

> Someone who understands is always already drawn into an event through which meaning asserts itself. So it is well-founded for us to use the same concept of play for the hermeneutical phenomenon as for the experience of the beautiful. When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates us.[20]

In raising Gadamer and Eagleton alongside the Aesthetes, I aim to prepare a table onto which I might play a hermeneutical card-game of sorts. Biblical passages that have captivated me are revisited in an intuitive interchange of text and image, so that the different suits into which biblical literature are grouped are paired with corresponding cards bearing the faces of Modern artworks. And while I do not fully abandon myself to personal abstractions (because I make note of each object's stylistic and historical context), I surrender to a process that operates along instinctive rather than strictly rational lines. It is an individual approach that nonetheless hopes to reveal something beyond itself, something of the universal nature of the ancient text and the modern image. It suggests such things in the style of a salon at which ideas are exchanged via the art of conversation and not according to a rigid method. And so in order to identify where this study falls in the sphere of biblical criticism, I recall the words of Ferdinand E. Deist in the introduction to his posthumously published *The Material Culture of the Bible*:

> Biblical interpretation has since the 1960s been inundated with new exegetical methods, some as rivals to traditional methods, others as 'complementary' to or refinements of them. Most of these methods set out a sequence of steps to be taken in exegeting a text. It is, however, at the least debatable whether exegesis, like baking a cake,

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[19] *Ibid.*, 115.
[20] *Ibid.*, 484.

> is or can be done by following certain methodological 'steps'. If exegesis has to do with understanding, and has, consequently, something in common with the way human beings come to understand each other's talk, one would perhaps be better off in taking one's cue on interpretation from conversations at coffee tables than from neat 'steps' prescribed by some academic soliloquy.[21]

My interpretation between art and text comes to its conclusions by speaking liberally of how a biblical chapter can be viewed as a work of art. It circulates an array of ideas drawn from a range of criticism and commentary and entertains the idea of scripture's material and Modern functions. It is the work of an Aesthetic-minded scholar who prefers the dynamics of discourse in cafés and salons to the pretensions of concrete objectivity.

Studies in the Bible and art

The grounds for such an interpretive enterprise are formed within the parameters of biblical criticism and its intersection with cultural studies. Stephen Moore's 'From Birmingham to Jerusalem' and other entries in a 1998 volume of *Semeia* reflect the interest of many scholars in seeing the Bible's heritage in contemporary cultures. The variety of entries in this edition frequently engage in what some would claim to be methodologically loose comparisons between the Bible and extra-biblical subjects that stretch connections across extreme cultural boundaries. In the closing article, for instance, Alice Bach confesses to be 'troubled' by how 'through their intentionally outrageous analogies' a number of the contributors 'seem to trivialize cultural readings'.[22] But she does not mean to be one to disparage how cultural criticism has

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[21] Ferdinand E. Deist, *The Material Culture of the Bible: An Introduction* (Sheffield, 2000), 19.

[22] Alice Bach, 'On the Road Between Birmingham and Jerusalem', in *Semeia* 82 (1998), 303. Bach primarily reacts to certain entries that strike her as sensationalist forms of critique—ones that seem to sexualise biblical passages in ways that seem to her unnecessarily gratuitous. These include Roland Boer's pornographic reading of 1 Kings 1-11, 'King Solomon Meets Annie Sprinkle', 151-82, and Erin Runions's exposition of gender transgression in Micah that textually crossbreeds the prophecy with lines from the 1991 documentary on Harlem drag balls, *Paris is Burning*, in 'Zion is Burning: "Gender

broken free of method's control. In 2007 Moore proved himself to be not so suspicious as Bach with regards to the context made for illuminating the biblical text through culturally foreign models, but he continues to challenge biblical scholars to acknowledge their own fetish for methodology. So in contrast to the supposed freedom of interpretation commonly encoded in reader-response criticism, Moore looks at how literary and reader-response critics (especially in New Testament studies) can assume 'a reader who is on a tight leash held by the author and who jumps obediently through all the hoops that the author has ingeniously manufactured'.[23]

Moore's collaboration with J. Cheryl Exum, *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies* (1998), likewise treats the Bible in various cultural contexts and includes Exum's article with Fiona Black on Burne-Jones's depictions of the Song of Songs, as well as David Jasper's analysis of J.M.W. Turner's theological interpretation of light and colour in landscapes that have otherwise been more narrowly understood as early expressions of industrialization's impact on the Victorian physical and psychological landscape.[24] Collections such as this, as well as the growing number of seminars conducted under the heading of 'The Bible and Art', reflect the surge of interest in the interplay between the biblical word and its representation as an image.

Cases in point include Yvonne Sherwood's *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives* (2000), which examines how the story of Jonah has been represented in psalters, stained glass, and sixteenth-century engravings, while entries in Martin O'Kane's

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Fuck" in Micah', 225-46. While I find these studies interesting and even enlightening for refusing to accept the Bible as a sanitised moral treatise, I sympathise with Bach and hardly think she is a prude in concluding, 'They turn artistic freedom into banality'.

[23] Stephen Moore, 'A Modern Manifesto for New Testament Literary Criticism: How to Interface with a Literary Studies that is Post-Literary, Post-Theoretical, and Post-Methodological', in *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007), 5. His lengthy footnote (44) on p. 19 lists the many scholars who have found answers to the question of the Bible as a cultural icon by examining the cultural significance of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ*, of biblical citation from the mouth of George Bush, and of other handlings of the Bible in classical and contemporary art, in music, and in film.

[24] See Stephen Moore and J. Cheryl Exum (eds.), *Biblical Studies/Cultural Studies* (Sheffield, 1998).

collection, *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible* (2002) cover a broad range of reception histories. O'Kane argues that the attention granted to art inspired by the Bible 'continues the broad Catholic tradition of embellishing canonical stories in order to provide greater opportunity for the reader or viewer to identify with the theme or characters of a story'. The incorporation of extra-biblical material keeps apace with what he summarises as Robert Carroll's indication that contemporary biblical readings should 'move quite radically beyond the strict boundaries of the canonical text'.[25] But O'Kane's contribution, 'The Flight into Egypt: Icon of Refuge for the H(a)unted', focuses less on the Matthean account of the flight into Egypt as something with which contemporary readers can identify, and more on how the story was expanded through its interpretation in medieval and Renaissance paintings (and in Chagall's appropriation of it as a symbol for modern exiles of war). In a similar fashion Edward Kessler considers representations of the *Akedah* in early churches and synagogues, while Larry Kreitzer and Cheryl Exum write on biblical subject matter in popular film.[26] A second entry by Kreitzer unpacks the political background and Christian message of reconciliation in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1553).[27]

O'Kane's *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter* (2007) opens by pointing out criticism's tendency to neglect 'the visual imagery contained in the narrative [itself] and … the way its language is designed to appeal to the reader's imagination'.[28] He then charts some of the areas in which the biblical authors and Church fathers had in fact valued the image for its ability to communicate something

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[25] Martin O'Kane, 'Introduction', in Martin O'Kane (ed.), *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible*, JSOTSS 313 (Sheffield, 2002), 2. He refers to Carroll's posthumously-published paper that opens the collection, 'Removing an Ancient Landmark: Reading the Bible as Cultural Production', 6-14.

[26] See Edward Kessler, 'The Sacrifice of Isaac (the *Akedah*) in Christian and Jewish Tradition: Artistic Representations', in O'Kane, 74-98; Larry J. Kreitzer, '"The Son of God Goes to War": Biblical Imagery in Rudyard Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King"', 99-125; and J. Cheryl Exum, 'Lethal Woman 2: Reflections on Delilah and her Incarnation as Liz Hurley', 254- 73.

[27] Larry Kreitzer, 'Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*: Biblical Reflections on a Renaissance Masterpiece', *op cit.*, 217-28.

[28] Martin O'Kane, *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter* (Sheffield, 2007), 2.

of the divine message, regardless of the deity's invisible status. The body of this study however follows the trajectory laid out in his 2002 work by evaluating paintings that interpret biblical texts. A further edition to come out of Sheffield in 2007 is *Between the Text and Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue*. This publication includes a contribution by Hugh Pyper on representations of the relationship between David and Jonathan, one by Sally Norris on images of Ezekiel's chariot vision as Chagall depicted it, and another by Christopher Rowland on William Blake's New Testament renderings.[29] But although this kind of interdisciplinary work claims to make 'equal conversation partners' of the Bible and art, it still functions according to certain methodological rules by working exclusively with paintings *of* or *about* biblical texts. Exum, *et al.*, stick strictly to paintings that contain biblical subject matter. Almost never does a biblical scholar invoke a work of art that is not directly dependent upon a biblical text. This hardly amounts to a hideous shortfall in critical vision, but the only study I have encountered that mixes the biblical with a non-dependent artwork is Sherwood's treatment of the 'summer fruits' in Amos 8:1-2, in which she draws upon images from Magritte to give fresh perspective to a passing prophetic image;[30] and I wonder why more have not ventured down this creative road of interpretation. I, for one, have read enough articles on paintings about biblical subjects to recognise the safety in the emergent method and to feel all but jaded by the secure direction so much of this discourse takes: here is a picture of Joseph; here is how the painter chose to embellish the text; and here is how that image now colours how we read the text. Furthermore, most treatments of the Bible in painting operate on a somewhat conservative timeline and stop at the very latest with Chagall, whose

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[29] See the ten entries in J. Cheryl Exum and Ela Nutu (eds.), *Between the Text and Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue* (Sheffield, 2007).

[30] Yvonne Sherwood, 'Of Fruit and Corpses and Wordplay Visions: Picturing Amos 8:1-2', in *JSOT* 92 (2001), 5-27.

work I must confess is simply no longer my cup of tea—in part because it has been so overly considered. Perhaps this is because religious subject matter in general appears to occur less frequently in canvases painted in the twentieth century, or perhaps it is because religious inflections are overlooked by historians of Modern art.[31] But to me, this is precisely the point at which we should be asking, 'What happened to the Bible?' Artists such as Barnett Newman give their abstract paintings titles like 'Adam' and 'Noah' while refusing to paint a portrait or depict a biblical scene. This is interesting, as is the way criticism subordinates these biblical references to the context of 'the sublime', but what about images that were never inspired by the Bible in the first place? Can we not, as Sherwood has done, call upon completely unrelated works in order to shed light on the ancient text?

I intend to up the stakes of cultural critical practice to see how the biblical text can be visualised as a Modern image of difficult beauty. I commit an even more transgressive act than Exum and O'Kane by arguing that the ancient text is *like* the completely unrelated Modern painting. In doing so, I chart a course that seeks to prove the Bible is not so old-fashioned as popular culture would think it to be. I find a text that bears the rifts and inconsistencies historians have attributed to redaction can be properly viewed not as a literal document but as an abstract work, and one that speaks directly to our modern ways of seeing.

Visual thinking

The basis for what follows originates in thoughts that came to mind during my undergraduate degree. As a religion major at an American liberal arts college, I was able to take courses in the history of art and encouraged by my department to pursue

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[31] I will return to this subject below, but for now I simply note that I have recognised a common critical relegation of religious reflections in art to the category of 'no longer relevant'.

an interdisciplinary senior thesis.[32]   The legacy of that experience first resulted in several years of indecision as to whether I should apply to graduate programs in art or theology and later in the realisation of my tendency to read the Bible in visual terms. So when I began my Masters in Old Testament Interpretation at Oxford, it was not just my background in Jewish studies but my coursework in Modern Art that framed how I perceived the Bible. There was no place in my vision for the 'Old Testament' as a word-for-word precursor to a New Testament that transcended the dated limitations of 'the Law'. Instead I looked to an appreciation of the Hebrew text as a work of art on its own terms—as one that represented its own life-affirming but critical messages about human failure and the hopes for divine intervention. And when I read textual and historical criticism and learned of the fragmented state of the heavily redacted biblical texts, I saw a final text that had been patched together like a collage. When I read the opening chapters of Genesis, I saw Gauguin's Tahitians in paradise. But as I read on—and the urgency with which the text seemed to convey the importance of lineage and the visceral sensation of covenants that are continually 'cut' (כתב) effectively got under my skin—I began to think more laterally about the German Expressionists. Like the Priestly authors and redactors, these artists retreated into the past in order to salvage what they claimed to be their threatened cultural heritage and to revivify it for the present and future. Their reversion to medieval styles and methods, such as the woodcut, rode on the wave of the *Jugendstijl*,[33] but they transformed and intensified their inherited folk art through expressive colours and the further abstraction of forms. They even called themselves prophets and priests. All of this seemed to provide an uncanny counterpart to the biblical writers

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[32] My 15,000-word senior project at Vassar College examined religious versus national and international forms of identity in Israeli art.

[33] This term for the 'young style' designates the general movement in Germany and throughout Europe at the end of the nineteenth century that employed 'naïve' or handmade methods in art and design as an antidote to what was perceived to be the soul-less production of images for capitalist consumption.

who employed every manner of conceit to sound authentically old, resuscitating older legends and making what often seems like only a half-effort to disguise anachronisms, thereby allowing the reader to witness the human, or handmade, production of text. Addressing contemporary readers and future generations alike, they fused and redacted texts into 'universal' final forms. And yet contrasts between old and new—or one text's texture against another's—are often distinctly stark. In my eyes, awareness of these differences did not destroy anything of the text's literary integrity but rather made me see how like in manner they were to the brutally rendered surfaces of woodcuts by Vassily Kandinsky, Erich Heckel and Emil Nolde.

As my Masters progressed, I produced a paper on the sensational imagery in Lamentations as a form of photomontage,[34] wrote a thesis on the Book of Job that recommended reading it as one does a 'polymorphic' painting by the Israeli artist, Yaacov Agam (1928 –), and began to formulate further resonances between the themes, styles, rhetorical strategies and ideologies of the ancient text and a number of modern images. By the end of my time at Oxford I had devised a doctoral project based on a series of comparisons. In order to enter the project with greater credibility as an art historian, I then completed a Masters in German Art and Cultural Politics (1890-1945) at the Courtauld Institute, where I wrote on Kandinsky's self-understanding as an artist-prophet. It was at this time that I began to see how many art historians are uncomfortable with speaking of modern art and religion in the same breath.

All of which led to the current project under its final title, *The Bible and Its Modern Methods: Interpretation Between Art and Text*. There were many previous attempts to summarise what I was attempting to accomplish, but the idea of 'imaging

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[34] This was later published as Benjamin Morse, 'The Lamentations Project: Biblical Mourning Through Modern Montage', in *JSOT* 28.1 (September 2003), 113-27.

texts' or confessing to an 'aesthetic approach' failed because it did not appeal to me to base a method on a neologism like 'imaging', or because to call my method 'aesthetic' required too selective a definition of the word. To imply it was a rigid and formulaic strategy for reading texts would have been misleading, for something different and idiosyncratic occurs within each unit.

Oliver Sacks has written on his encounter with an autistic professor of animal sciences in his well-known piece, 'An Anthropologist on Mars'. The title borrows the phrase the subject used to describe her perspective on the human race; and what she says regarding her work with cattle, and the more humane route to slaughter for which she fights, deserves a permanent place in the ruminations of my own conceptualisation of seeing the Bible in visual terms. Temple Grandin, who continues to teach at Colorado State University, told Sacks:

> If you're a visual thinker, it's easier to identify with animals… If all your thought processes are in language, how could you imagine that cattle think? But if you think in pictures…[35]

Grandin's ability to identify with how animals experience the world through sight, which in clinical terms might simply determine her lack of empathy with 'normal' human modes of understanding, allows us to rethink how we read the Bible by encouraging us to cross back and forth between the verbal and the visual. For thinking in pictures provides a premise for how we might reconsider our own word-based powers of perception and see the Bible in a different guise.

The Dutch series Word and Image[36] and interdisciplinary compilations such as *Text into Image: Image into Text* (1997)[37] indicate the amount of attention critics

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[35] As quoted in Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales* (London: Picador, 1995), 254.

[36] One title published in 1998 features a broad range of studies on medieval and modern images, as well as reflections on isomorphic structures in Chinese calligraphy, bodily representation in Kafka, and the semiotic implications of a postage stamp, in Martin Heusser, Claus Clüver, Leo Hoek and Lauren Weingarten (eds.), *The Pictured Word*, Word and Image Interactions 2 (Amsterdam, 1998).

today grant the theoretical relationship between verbal and visual media that we have

seen influences criticism of art and the Bible. The work of W.J.T. Mitchell plots the

'erasure of boundaries between art and non-art, or visual and verbal media', and in an

article for the *Journal of Visual Culture* he expresses an interest in 'showing seeing'.[38]

Here Mitchell distinguishes between visual studies and visual culture and promotes

theories of imagery that borrow from Derrida: 'Grammatology challenged the

primacy of language as invisible, authentic speech [but] in the same way … iconology

challenges the primacy of the unique original artifact.'[39] Mitchell asks, 'To what

extent is vision *not* a learned activity, but a genetically determined capacity', but more

relevantly looks beyond the café chatter about the influence of the social experience

on visual perception and towards the realm in which the visual constructs the social

reception of it.[40] He also speaks of the 'pictorial turn' the Israelites made when they

'turn[ed] aside from the invisible god to a visible idol', but let us not forget the turn

they made in following an invisible God/YHWH in the first place!

In Mitchell's earlier *Picture Theory* (1994), he opens with the note of

prophetic despair emoted by the 1988 report from the National Endowment for the

Humanities in Washington that pronounced humanities departments to be hell-bent on

'key questions … about gender, race, and class' and therefore neglectful of the

inherited values of 'the Western tradition'; it dolefully concluded, 'Truth and beauty

and excellence are regarded as irrelevant'.[41] Mitchell examines the tension between

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[37] Like several of the editions mentioned above, this compilation of the Interdisciplinary Bicentenary Conference held at St. Patrick's College Maynooth, Ireland, in September 1995, covers a staggering spectrum of subjects, including Rembrandt, Hans Jean Arp, and Andrew Lloyd Weber, but focuses primarily on literary and philosophical translations of the visual experience; in Jeff Morrison and Florian Krobb (eds.), *Text Into Image: Image Into Text* (Amsterdam, 1997).
[38] He likens this to the 'sounding the idols' proposed by Nietzsche. W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture', in *Journal of Visual Culture* 1.2 (2002), 165.
[39] *Ibid.*, 169.
[40] *Ibid.*, 171, 179.
[41] W.J.T. Mitchell cites the National Endowment for the Humanities' *Humanities in America* (Washington, 1988), in *Picture Theory* (Chicago, 1994), 1.

the visual and the verbal in theoretical terms while maintaining an interest in how the dynamic between them is thoroughly linked 'to issues of power, value, and human interest.'[42] In his third chapter, he writes that while 'the comparative method has seemed like the only systematic way to talk about relations of word and image', he aims to eliminate the distance between the two.[43] My project equally commits itself to eroding such boundaries.

The scholar and artist John Harvey has addressed the relationship between word and image from a different perspective. In *The Pictorial Bible I, Settings of the Psalms* (2000), he relates the development of the verbal image in the Protestant tradition,[44] but the convergence he determines in the Old Testament between the textual, the verbal and the visual is most germane: the word is a light to God's path in Psalm 119.105; God *shows* the word to the Psalmist and to Jeremiah (28.10-14); Isaiah *sees* God's word/will/mind; while the designs for the Tabernacle and Temple and the frequent speaking of God's greatness substantiate arguments that the text communicates *visually*. O'Kane's introduction to *Painting the Text* offers further examples of biblical visuality, noting how Genesis 1 'opens with the image of God surveying all his work with the artisan's eye to detail' and unpacking how the creation of light establishes a visual world.[45] So it is fully legitimate to be approaching the Bible as a visual object and to be strategising methods via its effects on us as viewers.

Mieke Bal has of course written extensively on these issues. In 'Lots of Writing', she reads the Esther scroll through paintings of the biblical queen by Rembrandt—'approaching the text from the perspective of these later interpretations

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[42] *Ibid.*, 5.
[43] *Ibid.*, 85.
[44] 'They asserted that Christ the Word ought to be worshipped through the Word, by reading, praying, preaching, and singing, rather than by seeing, elevating, and kissing images'; in John Harvey, *The Pictorial Bible I, Settings of the Psalms* (Aberystwyth, 2000), 1.
[45] O'Kane (2007), 4, 10.

of it' and thereby accepting that the Master's vision 'has something to add that sheer verbal argumentation might well, so to speak, fail to see.' [46] In *Quoting Carvaggio* (1999), Bal further skews the interpretive direction by developing ideas about the relationship between cause and effect, which she determines to be integral to the Baroque system. The manipulation of pictorial space that occurs in Caravaggio's work blurs the boundaries between the viewer's world and the multi-dimensional realm of the canvas. Techniques such as the dramatic use of drapery even create what one critic describes as 'the almost hallucinatory relationship between past and present that is a hallmark of the period'.[47] So Bal is less concerned with commenting on the biblical text itself and more so with 'developing a preposterous approach to history'[48] that discredits traditional notions of meaning that are rooted in original sources, *à la* the mapping of meaning that accompanies the study of iconography. Just as the Baroque play on perspective thrusts the present into the foreground, her analysis of contemporary works inspired by Caravaggio proposes that we cannot fully understand the Bible unless we understand contemporary art and how we see today.

In his introduction to her collection of essays, *Looking in: the art of viewing*, Norman Bryson summarises Bal's perversion of causality and her re-focalisation of the subject: 'A truly historical art history must have the means to be able to say *je, tu, maintenant*'.[49] In relation to her approach to Caravaggio, he adds: 'If third-person narrative classically proceeds by positing the one-who-is-absent as a referent, Bal's prose undoes that ostensive function. Caravaggio's paintings exist only in the here

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[46] Mieke Bal, 'Lots of Writing', in *Semeia* 54 (1991), 79-80.
[47] Irving Lavin, 'Why Baroque?' in Lisa G. Corrin and Joaneath Spicer (eds.), *Going for Baroque: Eighteen Contemporary Artists Fascinated with the Baroque and Rococo* (Baltimore, 1995), 5; cf. Mieke Bal, *Quoting Caravaggio: Contemporary Art, Preposterous History* (Chicago, 1999), 3.
[48] *Ibid*., 104.
[49] Norman Bryson, 'Introduction', in Mieke Bal, *Looking in: the art of viewing* (Amsterdam, 2001), 2.

and now of viewing, at this one place.'[50] Her subsequent contribution to the *Journal of Visual Culture* speaks further on the 'impurity' of visuality, dismantling the preconception that visual studies might be considered a field somehow separate from language (an essentialist gesture she finds 'treat[s] it like religion' by setting it apart as somehow sacred) and insisting that meaning results from a dialectic intercourse between the verbal and the visual. Ultimately, 'the object co-performs the analysis'.[51]

In the wake of the current of discourse on visuality, I am struck by Bal's reference to what she considers to be the religious orthodoxy of those who attempt to elevate a sacred visual culture above profane verbal systems of thinking. For in attending so rigorously to the dynamics of seeing, Bal, Mitchell, O'Kane and others reveal their fixation with images and how we relate to them. By prioritising representations of the Bible over the text itself and tending so religiously to the rituals of viewership, are we not witnessing a revival of Pater's 'gospel of intensity'? Is the devotion shown to questions of visuality not comparable to a material religion of the kind practiced by the Aesthetics? Surely the emphasis placed on the viewer's experience—and the power occasionally granted to the image-object over historical as well as personal priorities—indicates a fetishism of theory that turns from the gods of universal critical formulas to the 'intellectual luxuries' found in subjective or re-focalised readings. Rejecting what we might call critical realism, critics of art and the Bible place a reverential value on the aesthetic encounter with the art of the text.

In this sense, devotion to images and ways of seeing might be understood as a heterodox faith that not only searches for meaning (or revelation) in the visual object, including the Bible, but also seeks to make visible the things that are otherwise invisible, such as how we perceive and the chaos that lies beneath our ordered

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[50] *Ibid.*, 18.
[51] Mieke Bal, 'Visual essentialism and the object of visual culture', in *Journal of Visual Culture* 2.1 (2003), 6, 25.

assumptions about representation and interpretation. The study of visual culture has shown how perception itself is culturally constructed, how 'local knowledges' inform our ways of seeing, and finally how religious objects and images are integral to cultural construction across the globe.[52] Thinking about the objects of our vision and their effects, David Morgan has written: 'visual artifacts should not be segregated from the experience of ceremony, education, commerce or prayer. Visual practices help fabricate the worlds in which people live and therefore present a promising way of deepening our understanding of how religions work.'[53] In shifting our attention 'from verbal/textual *doctrine* towards the visual and material artifacts of religious *practice*',[54] S. Brent Plate and the contributors to *Religion, Art, and Visual Culture* (2002) reverse the critical bias and treat perception as a more or less sacred mode of understanding. Plate returns to the term 'aesthetics' not as an indicator of style, beauty or taste but as the more fundamental 'sense perception' (from the Greek *aisthesis*) that 'provides a broad setting for the perceptual relationship that exists between the eye and the mind in the activity of seeing'.[55] Finding awareness of the crossover that occurs between the mind and body crucial to aesthetic sensitivity, he draws upon Eagleton's formulation of aesthetics as 'the mixing of "the material and immaterial: between things and thoughts, sensations and ideas."'[56]

Plate has created a further space in which the relationship between vision and thought can be contemplated in the journal he co-founded and edits, *Material Religion*, which looks at material objects that manifest religious values or that have

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[52] See S. Brent Plate (ed.), *Religion, Art, and Visual Culture: A Cross-Cultural Reader* (New York, 2002), 6-10. Plate attributes the term 'local knowledges' to Clifford Geertz.
[53] David Morgan, 'Visual Religion', in *Religion* 30 (2000), 51; cf. Plate, 10.
[54] Plate, 10.
[55] *Ibid.*, 20.
[56] *Ibid.*; cf. Eagleton, 13. In a footnote Plate adds Eagleton's summation of the origins of the field of aesthetics as 'the first stirrings of a primitive materialism—of the body's long inarticulate rebellion against the tyranny of the theoretical'; *ibid.*, cf. 26, n. 1. The mixing of ideas and sensation accords with Merleau-Ponty's conception of the 'aesthesiological body', as he describes it in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Chiasm', in *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, 1967).

been made to fulfil a religious function. The launch issue from March 2005 opens by declaring its editorial vision to address the material practice of religion. Recognising the limits to strictly text-based study, the editors 'believe that the study of texts should be joined to the study of objects, spaces, images, and all the practices that put these items into use…'.[57] Plate's 2002 collection includes an entry that treats Islamic calligraphy as a visual artefact, and the journal has included pieces on the rejected stained glass plans for Heidelberg cathedral (March 2005), the representations of a bi-gendered God in Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy's Boston-area churches (July 2005), the influence of media-rich American Pentacostal preachers in Nigeria (November 2005), and even comedy Jewish Christmas cards (Nov. 2007). However, the biblical text as a material object has yet to be covered in any of these pages.

Harvey appears to stand alone in attempting to envision the text by creating 'visual translations of the Psalms' in *The Pictorial Bible I,* mentioned above, in which he actually produces images of text by assigning colours to letters and translating psalms into grids of dots.[58] He arrives at his method by tracing the complex history of word and image in the Protestant tradition—beginning with the iconoclasts' fierce faith in textual revelation alone and Elizabeth I's order for churches to erect commandment boards 'to give some comely ornament', and following this tradition through to the more elaborate ornamental renderings of scriptural verses in the nineteenth century.[59] His earlier work explores how contrary to the Protestant tradition's general aversion to the image, Welsh Nonconformists interacted with their visual culture by finding in art 'a potent antidote to low sensuality' and by using portraits of Napoleon, for instance, to prove the Son of God's sacrifice of himself far

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[57] *Material Religion* 1.1 (March 2005), 6.
[58] Harvey, 10.
[59] *Ibid*., 2ff. He also relates how the skepticism towards the Word brought about by historical criticism saw many of these Victorian word-pictures painted over by the 1950s.

exceeded the Frenchman's sacrifice of the world 'to his own ambition'.[60] So despite

the Calvinistic Methodist minister David Jones's challenge to Matthew Arnold's

Culture and Anarchy (1869)—'Culture cannot do everything'—and despite his

contemporary Abraham Kuyper refuting the Aesthetic idea that art should be equated

with religious movement, the evangelical theologian Archibald Alexander placed 'the

highest value of life in the realm of the beautiful' and endorsed 'the supreme good of

the individual through devotion to art'.[61] For the preacher James Burns, great ideas

made great art by speaking to the intellect, imagination and heart, rather than by

painting *things* that appealed merely to the senses.[62] David Davies on the other hand

appreciated the material and historical accuracy of biblical illustrations, their

'exquisite power of minute delineation', and the painter's 'gift of imaging that which

is invisible'.[63] In these interpretive events, the art's first or intended meaning can be

trumped by the spiritual significance the preacher ascribes to it,[64] and Davies has no

time for 'prosaic men who never see the poetry in anything, men who speak of the

painter as if he were but a chronicler of events and narrator of incidents, and not also,

like the poet, a creator'.[65] Burns proves equally vocal on the subject:

> the frequent criticism that the interpreter 'puts more into the work than
> the author meant to convey' may be perfectly true, and yet this in no
> way invalidates the truth of interpretation. In the work of those who
> see visions there is always more in the vision than they understand,
> and all of the prophets speak better than they know.[66]

[60] See John Harvey, *The Art of Piety: The Visual Culture of Welsh Nonconformity* (Cardiff, 1995), on
the appropriation of paintings as homiletic illustrations. He cites Evan Williams on William Quiller
Orchardson's *Napoleon on Board the 'Bellerophon'* (1880), in 'Picture Talks to Boys and Girls',
Baptist Record 3.25 (Jan. 1915), 13; 61.
[61] John Harvey cites David Jones, 'Christian Culture—Public and Private', *Monthly Treasury* 5.59
(Nov. 1898), 253-54, in Harvey's additional work, *Image of the Invisible: The Visualization of Religion
in the Welsh Nonconformist Tradition* (Cardiff, 1999), 46.   He refers to Kuyper and quotes Alexander
on the following page; cf. Archibald Alexander, *Christianity and Ethics* (London, 1914), 107.
[62] See the Rev. J. Burns's '*Hope* by G.F. Watts', in *Sermons in Art by the Great Masters* (London,
1908), 3.
[63] David Davies, '*Mors Janua Vitae*—Death the Gate of Life', in David Davies, *Sacred Themes and
Famous Paintings* (London, 1885), 7; and '*Anno Domini*; or *The Flight into Egypt*', *Ibid.*, 7.
[64] Harvey (1995), 61.
[65] Davies, 6.
[66] Burns, 5.

And so a number of these Protestants are not far from the phenomenology of Paul Ricoeur in upholding the creative imagination as 'the quintessential humanizing capacity' and the mediation of feeling as a critical component in 'the metaphoric redescription of human ways of being'.[67]

Harvey elsewhere discusses the place of John Kitto's *The Pictorial Bible* (1847) within the Protestant tradition of imaging the word.[68] I would add to this canon the gloriously decorated editions produced by the author of *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856), Owen Jones. Jones can certainly be counted as one of the Aesthetic patriarchs, and his illuminated manuscripts of the Psalms and Ecclesiastes, entitled *The Psalms of David* (1861) and *The Preacher* (1849), are the kinds of breathtaking publications that make votive objects out of the text and make the Luddite in me mourn the fact that such heavenly (and heavily obsessive) flourishes in method and style ever fell out of fashion. *The Preacher's* cover of super-embossed leather[69] is so thick, the book looks like a box that might contain mystical charms. On the pages within, tendrils spill out from the verses and are filled in with sumptuous shades of pale green, powder blue and softly smoked rose—all highlighted of course in luminous gold. Each double-page spread is consecrated with its own distinctive set of patterns (he never repeats a repeat), and the artist breaks away from rigid symmetries by letting the lines flow off-centre and into the margins where they will. Truly Jones—as well as those of whom Harvey speaks who stencilled and painted

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[67] Kevin Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Cambridge, 1990), 56, 76.

[68] Rather than simply depict text-based scenes, this picture-based Bible published by Charles Knight included 'illustrations…on the customs and material culture of the biblical world' (e.g., images of ancient weaponry and clothing, etc., which Kitto fashioned from his travels throughout the Near East); Harvey (2000)., 9.

[69] An antiquarian bookseller currently offering a copy of *The Preacher* on eBay for $25,000 tells me this is the material. Upon handling an original copy in the British Library, I was convinced the cover was carved from wood, which was clearly the Gothic effect Jones was going for.

more restrained images of the text onto the walls of Welsh churches by simply setting a verse against the background of a gently unfurled scroll—set out to produce adorations of the Word while equally appealing directly to the reader's senses. They sought to capture the beauty of the text and to captivate the viewer/reader's imagination via the reverential unfolding of decorative fantasy.[70] Clearly I feel a volume or two could be written under the allusive title *The Theology of Ornament*, but my point here is to emphasise the earnest attention paid in form and method to the perception of the text that occurred long before our theorists of visuality entered the picture.

Although operating within what strikes us as a thoroughly modern idiom, Harvey's grid-like compositions stand fully within this ornamental tradition and function as critical discourses on the word/image dialectic. Several of his works employ not dots but instead the opposition of bar-code-like forms against a light ground and resemble the glass paintings of Joseph Albers (1888-1976). The art historian Rosalind Krauss mentions Albers along with Piet Mondrian, Agnes Martin and others in her seminal 1979 discussion of grids in the journal *October*. She notes how since the early twentieth century the grid 'has remained emblematic of the modernist ambition' and 'its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse',[71] and how it has thus stood as a signifier of the rejection of traditional representational values as well as outmoded religious ambitions in art. But Krauss argues that the roots of this geometric trope in fact lie within the philosophical interest in Being, Mind and Spirit. Therefore, although it asserts the material integrity of the framed picture, the grid merely represses the modern desire to connect to a universal and

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[70] The designer and 'ornamentist' Christopher Dresser (1834-1904) found that ornamental art engaged the imagination more than pictorial art, 'and was hence superior'. For this insight, see Stuart Durant, *Christopher Dresser* (London, 1993), 47.

[71] Rosalind Krauss, 'Grids', in *October* 9 (Summer 1979), 51.

immaterial reality.[72]   The thrust of Krauss's article is to establish the contradiction that exists at the heart of the modern purist's project, and one passage in particular supports my premise that Modern art is not so a- or anti-religious after all:

> Given the absolute rift that had opened between the sacred and the secular, the modern artist was obviously faced with the necessity to choose between one mode of expression and the other. The curious testimony offered by the grid is that at this juncture he tried to decide for both. In the increasingly de-sacralized space of the nineteenth century, art had become the refuge for religious emotion; it became, as it remained, a secular form of belief. Although this condition could be discussed openly in the late nineteenth century, it is something that is inadmissible in the twentieth, so that by now we find it indescribably embarrassing to mention *art* and *spirit* in the same sentence.[73]

Given the split many have insisted separates modern art from religion, Harvey's grid-like translations of the Psalms seem to me as radical as Mondrian's reductions of form. How unfashionable and therefore boldly transgressive it is to translate the Bible into abstract modern paintings! I raise these issues to justify the comparisons I will make between biblical texts and unrelated works of modern art—not because I ever actually include any works that make use of the grid,[74] but because to correlate ancient and modern modes of expression and meaning would appear to be a groundless and antonymic enterprise. So while my use of modern images to re-read biblical passages first serves to think of the selected texts as visual objects, it also hopes to dissolve the assumed disparity between antiquity and modernity and to postulate that the Bible is a body of work that is consequently full of 'Modern Methods'. All of which leads to the proposition that the biblical text might be re-envisioned as an image, and decorated according to Modern aesthetics.

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[72] Krauss includes a classic example of this conflict in the geometric abstractions of Ad Reinhardt: 'despite his repeated insistence that "Art is art", [he] ended up by painting a series of black nine-square grids in which the motif that inescapably emerges is a Greek cross', 52.

[73] *Ibid*., 54. We will return to this issue of repression at the end of this Introduction.

[74] Duchamp's roulette card in Chapter V is an exception to this rule, but his grid is integrated within a larger image; the geometry of it is not the subject.

Modern/ism

To speak of Modern art and/or modern aesthetics obviously requires clarification, for, as Bernard Yack has shown, the very concept of Modernity as 'a coherent and integrated whole' is highly problematic. The reversion to describing both a period of time and its corresponding developments in art and literature as 'Modern' oversimplifies a complex set of circumstances and 'integrates our experience into precisely the kind of grand historical narratives that postmodernists ordinarily condemn.'[75] Yack questions the common tendency to bracket 'the modern age as the period of time on the current side of some perceived disruption of historical continuity' by noting the arbitrariness of such temporal divisions,[76] and he challenges the substantive conceptions that have been over-associated with this so-called era. He looks at the different philosophic, sociological, political and aesthetic ways in which modernity has been respectively conceived: 1) as 'a conscious break with traditional authority' through the assertion of reason; 2) as a dissolution of social hierarchies brought about by industrialisation and capitalism; 3) as a process of development toward 'more egalitarian and democratic forms of political legitimacy'; and 4) as a stylistic emphasis on the ephemeral and a general opposition 'to the aesthetic orthodoxy of the time, be it classicism, romanticism, historicism, impressionism, or whatever.'[77] Modern life has therefore been characterised by 'what might be called a permanent revolution in our life and thought' to the point that we have fetishized the idea that we are forever divorced from the past and ever in search of new and

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[75] Bernard Yack, *The Fetishisms of Modernities: Epochal Self-Consciousness in Contemporary Social and Political Thought* (Notre Dame, IN, 1997), 4.
[76] 'Where we locate this discontinuity—1492, 1648, 1789, 1914, 1945, 1989—will change as time passes.' *Ibid.*, 25. Yack also points out the use of the concept (to mean 'new') stretches as far back as the fifth century; see 20 and 41.
[77] *Ibid.*, 32-34.

usurping ideologies. The idea that art is meant to *change* us as viewers and *challenge* the status quo falls within this in fact very young set of *avant-garde* expectations; and look at where the adolescent fixation on protest has brought us in art—to the point that the ability to shock, by either flicking on a light-switch or effectively masturbating on canvas, is granted the utmost value (beauty being too passé or bourgeois for words, as if there were still such thing as bourgeois culture).[78] Like Krauss, Yack finds such all-encompassing readings of culture to be blind to the ways in which tradition has continued to be positively incorporated into modernist projects and argues that in order to unburden ourselves from these misinformed constructs of radicalism we must first beware of exaggerating the 'integrity and coherence of both ancient and modern experience'[79] and additionally be open to thinking of both in more nuanced and heterogeneous terms. If any grand statement might be drawn about modernity, it is that it is as hybrid a construction, condition or experience as anything that came before it.

Therefore, when I resort to the term 'modern' and its more formal capitalised form, I speak both cautiously and with a degree of irony, for I do not claim that Modern art can be classified according to a unified series of aesthetic or ideological qualities, no more than the Bible can be described as a coherent and fully integrated collection of texts. It is Modern art's inherent heterogeneity—its aspirations to juxtapose something new against something old and outmoded while continuing to tug at the apron strings of tradition and to repress its religious need to find meaning in the mundane—that I wish to bring to the table, as an analogue to the eclectic creation known as the Hebrew Bible/Tanakh.

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[78] Eagleton's observation warrants a mention here: 'It is just that cultural theory is at present behaving rather like a celebate middle-aged professor who has stumbled absent-mindedly upon sex and is frenetically making up for lost time.' Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London, 2003), 4.

[79] This variation on Yack's catch phrase about the falsehood of modernity as an 'integrated and coherent whole' occurs on p. 50.

Temporally speaking, Modern art has many starting points. Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907) is popular for introducing cubist spatiality as well as its political attack on colonialism and the latent social hypocrisy he foregrounded by representing potentially syphilitic prostitutes.[80] An earlier landmark is Manet's *Olympia* (1863), another prostitute, whose direct stare at the viewer created a scandal at the Salon des Refusés.[81] H.W. Arnason has pointed further back to the Romantic and neo-classical rejection of Renaissance pictorial values that occurred in works such as Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* (1854-55), Turner's loosely brushed landscapes, Constable and Bonnington's direct-colour studies of nature at the 1824 Paris Salon, and before that David's *Oath of Horatii* (1784).[82] To this list I would add the Aesthetic movement and do so with the knowledge that at least one art historian has argued that the Pre-Raphaelites were among the first Modern artists.[83]

But if Modern art is an incoherent body of aesthetic activity that, for the most part, resisted what artists perceived to be the bland and unquestioning values of a consumerist bourgeois society, and if it was the individual's vision and the independence of the work of art from all academic and economic expectation that loosely defines the Modern painter or sculptor's gesture, then the gulf between

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[80] Christos Joachimides is one among many to place *Demoiselles* at the dividing line for the apparent fracture it represents in the pictorial timeline. With this painting, 'Picasso established the crucial principle of the autonomy of the work of art'. See Joachimides's entry, 'The Age of Modernism', in Christos M. Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal (eds.), *The Age of Modernism—Art in the 20th Century* (Stuttgart, 1997), 10. He adds that 'For visual art, Modernism represents the most profound break with the past since Renaissance' and is significant for rupturing 'our notion and our understanding of what art is meant to be'… which to me screams of the conceptual vagueness so many made-for-television documentaries are prone to dabble in (e.g., '*Life* is *art*', and other such nonsense).

[81] John Russell explains her accusatory gaze: '"Here I am," was the message, "and what are you going to do about it?"' See John Russell, *The Meanings of Modern Art* (first published in 1974 by MoMA, New York; London, 1981), 17. Russell also recognises the importance of an unprecedented subject in Monet's *Gare Saint-Lazare* (1877), whose compositional centre is the steam produced by the trains: 'the play of light on something never before recorded—the iridescent cloudscape of steam as it forms and re-forms within a confined space', 20.

[82] See H.W. Arnason, *The History of Modern Art: Painting, Sculpture, Architecture* (London, 1969), opening pages.

[83] Elizabeth Prettejohn claims as much in her Prologue and defends it throughout *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London, 2000), 11.

centuries recent and past need not be seen as so unsurpassable. For the Bible and the history of its construction seem to me to be similarly embroiled in methods of updating and of differentiation in the tidal wave of empires that for centuries threatened to overwhelm Israel's ways of seeing. The authors and editors distinguished their vision of God and the world from the dominant modes of thought and practice that might otherwise have drowned out their record of God's relationship with them. So when I employ the capital letter to speak of Modern art, I make a self-conscious decision to equate a thoroughly disjointed but nonetheless revered body of work with another hotchpotch and capitalized composite, the Bible. Like Pater, I propose to make all styles and schools of taste equal, and stepping beyond what he imagined I dare to place Modern art on the same level as the Bible in terms of cultural significance.

I have remained fascinated by the fact that as much as modernism has been thought of as an aggressive attack on religion, modern criticism's origins in fact lie in biblical scholarship. That Luther's mission to put the Bible in the hands of the people and the rise of hermeneutics that followed are the historical antecedents to modern literary criticism has been widely noted.[84] Each discipline will argue any number of starting points for modernity, but in art history Baudelaire's observations on the centrality of contemporary life can be found cited in many a volume as an indication of the apparent refusal to look at an idealised classicised past for inspiration.[85] Even this seems traceable to Reformation ideals that insisted the present-day Christian's life was important enough to warrant a direct and unmediated relationship with God and

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[84] As Gadamer has written, 'Insofar as scriptural hermeneutics is regarded as the prehistory of the hermeneutics of the modern human sciences, it is based on the scriptural principle of the Reformation', 176.

[85] In 'The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life', he insisted, 'The life of our city is rich in poetic and marvellous subjects.' Charles Baudelaire, 'The Salon of 1846: On the Heroism of Modern Life', in *Art in Paris* (trans. J. Mayne; Phaidon, 1965), 120; cf. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (eds.), *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (London, 1982), 18.

the Bible. The art historian John Russell speaks of the 'new emotions' brought about by modernism's quotidian concerns,[86] but Baudelaire recognised the short-sightedness of thinking that 'newness' defined the shift in pictorial vision by stating: 'Every old master has had his own modernity'.[87] Emile Zola, in writing on Manet, echoed this historical awareness in recognising the 'new and personal vision of Nature' each 'great artist' offered, but then suggesting the one imaginary exhibition that might offer a comprehensive vision of a Hegelian 'fixed element of "reality"' in art: 'I would like all the pictures of all the painters in the world to be assembled in one vast hall where, picture by picture, we would be able to read the epic of human creation.'[88] My abstract gallery would of course include the biblical texts alongside the artworks of every century. So as naïve as it might sound to the critic who insists upon *distinctions* between the work of every era and medium, I propose to think in terms of the *continuity* between modern images and ancient texts as a means of making the Bible more visually readable today.

The topics through which art historians analyse Modern art are after all very much the same as those through which cultural critics view the Bible. Moore's summary of the exegetical menu available today—flavoured by questions about 'gender and sexuality; race and ethnicity; colonialism, postcolonialism, and neo-colonialism; popular culture; and social class'[89]—reads like the parallel courses on

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[86] Other themes of Modern art can be gleaned from Russell's chapter headings, which cover the 'emancipation of color', 'history as a nightmare', 'reality reassembled', 'the cosmopolitan eye', 'an alternative art', and 'the dominion of the dream'; *op cit*.

[87] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' (first published in 1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (trans. J. Mayne; London, 1964), 12; cf. Frascina and Harrison, 23.

[88] Emile Zola, 'Edouard Manet' (first published in the *Revue du XIX Siecle* [1867]), in P. Courthion and P. Cailler (eds.), *Portrait of Manet by Himself and his Contemporaries* (trans. M. Ross; London, 1960); cf. Frascina and Harrison, 31, 30.

[89] Moore (2007), 8. On the next page he adds, 'Biblical studies … has [even] increasingly veered into the "political" in recent decades.'

offer in art criticism, and in criticism in general.[90] Krauss's co-edited volume, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism*, bears no fewer than four introductions to account for the 'broad variety of methodological positions' currently assumed by art historians that have seen previous analytical precision 'lost in an increasingly complex wave of methodological eclecticism.'[91] The multiplicity of directions has resulted in studies that are either psychoanalytical, socio-historical, formalist/structuralist, or poststructural/deconstructive in nature. Four years before Krauss and her colleagues wrote their four introductions, the Professor of Theory at the Art Institute of Chicago James Elkins reflected on the over-application of theory by art historians 'without recognizing how selective and biased they are being.'[92] A year after this he reiterated his resistance to heavy-handed semiotics that 'interpret images as systems of signs'[93] and thus expressed his reservations about the hegemony of certain post-structural methods.

In the midst of this excess of interpretation, the art historian Bernard Smith has questioned whether it is appropriate to refer to such a disparate body of work as 'modern art' but nonetheless recognises the 'inescapable convenience' of historical periodizations and proposes periods of what he calls early, mid-, and high Formalesque, because 'the time has come to periodise the twentieth century'.[94] Going against the grain of postmodern critics and those such as Yack, Smith offers a few ways to think about this most recent era (that may or may not be continuing into the present) without degenerating into endless distinctions. He finds it possible to think

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[90] As Eagleton has stated: 'instead of [the] previously marginalized [issues of] gender, power, sexuality, ethnicity we should look at love, evil, death, morality, metaphysics, religion and revolution'; Eagleton (2003), 4.

[91] Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (eds.), *Art Since 1900: Modernism, antimodernism, postmodernism* (London, 2004), 22.

[92] James Elkins, *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts: Art History as Writing* (first published by Pennsylvania State University, 1997; New York, 2000), xi.

[93] James Elkins, *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge, 1998), xi.

[94] Bernard Smith, *Modernism's History: A study in twentieth-century art and ideas* (New Haven, 1998), 5.

in terms of a broad stroke—'an avant-garde style created during the late nineteenth century that gradually attained an imperial dominance during the first half of the twentieth'.[95] And while there are naturally many exceptions to the rule, he identifies a 'drive towards a universalising abstraction' that resulted from 'an interaction between Europe and the arts of a world over which it then exercised a global suzerainty'.[96] The conclusion to his introduction relates how this movement towards abstraction can hardly be expressed as a homogenous development, but rather as a form of self-critique that used a variety of traditions not to sing praises of the present as Baudelaire did but to spotlight the shortcomings of contemporary culture:

> Modernisms are critiques of Modernity. They draw upon the archaic, the classic, the exotic and the 'primitive' to develop their critiques. Modernism does not feel at home in Modernity. Its creative drive is constructed from components drawn from an idealised past or a utopian future, not from Modernity's present, which it finds banal or life-threatening.[97]

While I agree with Yack's criticism of the overuse of the word and concept 'Modernity' as an integrated and coherent whole, I believe it is possible to substitute it in Smith's assessment with the word 'contemporary' without straying too far from what either intends. In this way, I would formulate a proposal that Modernism, at least in the aesthetic sense, is a critique of the contemporary that appropriates and plays with the wise and proven styles of past art to give hope to a highly flawed present. But is this not what much art and literature of the centuries has done all along? Not that it has always directly challenged political authority or social conditions, but has the aesthetic adventure in painting, sculpture, and in text not commonly addressed the limits of a present generation by raising the lessons of the past so that there might still be a promise of a better future? And is this method of

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[95] *Ibid.*, 8.
[96] *Ibid.*, 11.
[97] *Ibid.*, 12.

critique not fundamental to page after page of biblical literature? Is the modern world

really any more fragmented than the biblical world, and is each biblical passage really

as fixed in a single-minded coherence as traditionalists and secularists alike have

assumed it to be?

I do not mean to say the life in the modern world is not inherently fragmented,

and I remain convinced by Benjamin and another Frankfurt critic, Theodor Adorno,

who characterised modern experience as structured by an 'absence of relation', or 'a

salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings'.[98] Furthermore, I do not

mean to undermine entirely the perception of modernism as an adopted attitude of

opposition, 'marked by aggressive defensiveness, extreme self-consciousness,

prophetic inclination and the stigmata of alienation'.[99] Douglas Mao and Rebecca

Walkowitz elaborate further on the nature of the detachment in their introduction to

Bad Modernisms:

> The history of the modern affront … was shaped by an antagonism
> to certain all-too-positive elements judged characteristic of works
> achieving more immediate public acceptance. These elements
> included uncritical endorsement of traditional forms, uplifting
> sentiments and happy endings, complacency about the course of
> world events, approbation of the social order, and the view that
> instrumentality and moral ability were distinguishing features
> worthwhile of art.[100]

Yet even as it was evolving modernism was inaccurately accused of slamming the

door on the past, and writers such as T.S. Eliot and the New Critics pleaded that,

particularly after the war to end all wars, it was no battle but rather a reconciliation

with tradition. So while I do not wish to deny the impact industrialisation and the

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[98] Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings* (*Einbahnstrasse* first published in 1928; trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter; London, 1973), 251.
[99] Irving Howe, 'Introduction: The Idea of the Modern', in *Literary Modernism,* (Greenwich, CT, 1967), 23-24.
[100] Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, eds., *Bad Modernisms* (Durham, NC, 2006), 3. The title has to do with the naughtiness of Modernist postures, rather than with corrupt forms of Modernism.

acceleration of movement, production and information has had on both individual and collective aesthetic consciousness, I stand alongside Smith in acknowledging that the vision of a complete break with tradition and other 'all-too-positive elements' is illusory.

By breaking down the barrier between Modern art and the aesthetic methods and motivations of the past, I aim to reconcile such anachronous ways of seeing by showing the Bible itself to be either decidedly 'Modern' in how it treats its stories and characters or at the very least capable of being profitably understood by holding Modern images up against it. The comparison of image and text allows us to witness what the Bible has to reveal when it is viewed not as a literal document but as a kind of abstract painting.

An abstract method

Abstraction of course surfaces all over the Old Testament/Tanakh. At the opening to his prophecy, Ezekiel cannot quite find the words to describe his vision of the divine spectacle before him, and the first thing he sets before the reader's eyes is the blinding and translucent glory of '*something like* gleaming amber' (Ezekiel 1.4). The rest of the chapter is replete with this expressive form of simile: he then sees 'something like four living creatures' (whose wings sound 'like the thunder of the Almighty' [vv. 5, 24]), and then something like 'the likeness of a throne' and 'something that seemed like a human form' (v. 26). The mesmerizing repetition of כעין ('like the appearance of') and the prefix כ has a hypnotic effect that transports the reader away from the mundane and the literal. Though Ezekiel goes to considerable lengths to validate this

vision by giving it a precise time and place so that no one ever doubts it really happened, he can only convey the experience in circumlocutory terms.

Biblical metaphor demands that readers surrender to their senses and abandon literal judgment for a moment in order to accept not only the more far-out accounts of God found in Ezekiel and apocalyptic literature but also the classical metaphors for the deity such as a shepherd, father and redeemer. These terms, along with the wealth of other anthropomorphic terminology and poetic imagery the Bible uses for God, are nowadays taken for granted but testify to the need to produce non-literal language for an elusive deity that cannot be described in concrete terms.[101] Given the abstraction to which the authors resorted, it seems a natural though under-developed conclusion that the Bible demands an abstract reception. Intertextual discourse itself functions according to metaphor, as it abstracts matters by establishing relationships between separate bodies of text.

For Ricoeur metaphors are not simple substitutions that deviate from original words or concepts, as Aristotle and Hobbes rendered them in *Poetics* and *Leviathan*. Rather metaphors, whether as words, sentences or hermeneutics, create resemblances that are not inherently there, for 'the metaphorical *twist* is at once an event *and* a meaning, an event that means or signifies, an emerging meaning created by language.'[102] It is, as Émile Benveniste might see it, 'discourse' (*discours*), and not 'speech' (*parole*).[103] Ricoeur elsewhere confirms, 'What is as stake in the metaphorical utterance … is the appearance of kinship where ordinary vision does not

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[101] In *Painting the Text*, O'Kane adds: 'Metaphor, with its capacity to conceal and hide as well as to reveal and disclose, enables the biblical authors to let us "see" what we read, while at the same time shielding important details and characteristics, especially those relating to God, from our gaze, rendering them almost invisible or present to us only in dim and obscure ways.' O'Kane (2007), 4.
[102] Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language* (trans. Robert Czerny; London and Henley, 1978), 99
[103] Ricoeur, 67.

perceive any relationship.'[104]   Tillich's concept of correlation, which we will return to

in the Conclusion, operates according to its own metaphorical twisting of culture and

religion into dialectic tension with one another, while his personal encounter with

them seeks the reconciliation of God, the Christian Word, and wholly human,

existential problems.   Through scriptural metaphors he gives poetic expression to 'the

depth of man's spiritual life usually covered by the dust of our daily life and noise of

secular work'.[105]   Systematic as he claims it to be, Tillich's theology abstracts

metaphors by balancing reason and revelation, and subjective experience with an

awareness of the social factors that cause people to imagine God.[106] The project that

follows abstracts metaphors for this theological and artistic encounter and thus

produces events of verbal and visual meaning.   It introduces a new process of

interpretation and style to the canon of Modern liberal theology.

As we have seen, abstraction was central to the Modern aesthetic enterprise

and fraught with its own contradictions.   Its end point was the absence of

representation, but many portraits and still-lifes are fittingly described as abstract.[107]

Briony Fer summarises the term's further inconsistencies as follows:

> As a label, the term 'abstract' is on the one hand too all-inclusive; it
> covers a diversity of art and different historical moments that really
> hold nothing in common except a refusal to figure objects. On the
> other hand, 'abstract' is too exclusive, imagining a world of family
> resemblances (geometric, biomorphic or whatever …) which is
> hermetically sealed from a world of representation outside it.[108]

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[104] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, 1976), 51.

[105] Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (ed. Robert Kimball; Oxford, 1959; 1975 reprint), 9.

[106] He discusses the legacy of Feuerbach and Marx in Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th
Century Protestant Theology* (ed., Carl E. Braaten; London, 1967), 139-40.

[107] 'The two terms "Cubism" and "abstract art" have been treated as symbiotic in prevailing accounts of
the evolution of modern art. … The Cubist abandonment of the depiction of objects within a coherent
illusionistic space has been understood as the key to the logic of the progression to abstraction.
Although the Cubists never went as far as to exclude the object, it was Cubism's example which made
that move possible.' Briony Fer, *On Abstract Art* (New Haven, 1997), 17.

[108] *Ibid*., 5.

In short, abstraction 'stands for a type of art which does not allow us to interpret it with reference to what is depicted, as a figure painting or still life might.'[109] In other words, it signifies a type of art that refuses to be literal and demands that we use our imaginations and intuitions to understand it. It occasionally asks us to move beyond particularism and embrace the idea of universal forms as they might be shown, for example, through grids and other geometric shapes, and it occasionally wages a political or social critique. But it is equally concerned with 'higher' truths outside the physical world and with searching for what lies beyond and behind language. Abstraction involves and invites substitution and association. It might expect to be properly understood only by people who know how to read it, but its obscurity tempts even the uninformed to interpret, to think laterally, and to establish correspondences[110] between images, thoughts, and even texts.

This doctoral study therefore treats the Bible to an abstract process by blending together biblical texts and Modern images. It says the Bible is *something like* a series of Modern artworks and operates according to *something like* Modern methods of abstraction. It expands the intertextual web to include additional literary and critical texts and appeals to intuition in order to reread and even suggest a *unity* between different media and eras. Each section that follows poses a comparison between a biblical text and an unrelated artwork from modern western culture. Just as my art history lecturers once took us on tours by projecting slides opposite one another in the lecture theatre, the reader is asked to imagine the opening plate and biblical translation at the beginning of each chapter as images juxtaposed in a dimmed auditorium.

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[109] *Ibid*.

[110] Baudelaire figures heavily in histories of English Aestheticism and modern aesthetics in general (art in France bearing a huge influence on both). His understanding of *synaesthesia* as 'the blending of differing senses and emotions' proposes interrelationships described by him as '*correspondences*'; see Lionel Lambourne, *The Aesthetic Movement* (London, 1996), 11-12.

Beyond this heuristic mode, my use of comparison stems from the biblical concept of *mashal* (משל). Its normative meaning of to 'be like' or 'become like'[111] relates to what we now call metaphor (allowing one thing to speak for another). Appropriating common phenomena in order to communicate things that cannot otherwise be adequately verbalized, *mashal* often relies on analogy: 'As a door turns on its hinges, / So does a sluggard on his bed' (Proverbs 26.14). *Mashal* additionally functions as a proverb, fable, or parable, as when Job draws an aphorism from the natural world in order to illuminate the debilitating effect of his friends' blind certitude: '[As] a mountain falls and crumbles away, and…the waters wear away the stones…so you destroy the hope of mortals' (Job 14.18-19). Beyond these meanings, *mashal* can be a 'byword', as in Ezekiel 14.8: 'I will set My face against that man, / And make him an example (לאות) and as bywords (ולמשלים).' Here and in Jeremiah 24.9, the 'object-lesson…of this kind [can even] be thought of as furnishing occasion for a curse.'[112] So it is a broad-ranging term, but one defined by the theoretical alternation between unrelated situations. By juxtaposing two separate subjects and appropriating one to complement the other, *mashal* signals meanings that are not overtly written. It asks us to accept the abstraction behind describing a sluggard as a swinging door and the effects of bad friendship like an eroding mountainside. It asks us to establish affinities between disparate bodies.

With the lights down and slides projected, and invoking the spirit of *mashal*, the comparisons made below are done so not in the name of causal links but rather with the hope of creating conceptual commonalities. Each comparison shifts

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[111] BDB, 605.
[112] A.R. Johnson, *'Mashal,' Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Leiden, 1955), 167. George M. Landes has even argued that the Book of Jonah is a form of *mashal* and traces the variations on this genre in 'Jonah: A *Māšāl*', in John Gammie, Walter Bruggemann, W. Lee Humphreys and James Ward (eds.), *Israelite Wisdom* (New York, 1978), 137-58.

deliberately away from linear textual analysis and into an art of interpretation. The author admits that the parallels were drawn up in part with an insouciant sense of art for art's sake, but he also professes to conduct the analysis with something like the 'sacred seriousness' that Gadamer attributed to play.[113] Robert Alter has asserted 'the essential aim of the innovative technique of fiction worked out by the ancient Hebrew writers was to produce a certain indeterminacy of meaning, especially in regard to motive, moral character, and psychology.'[114] Such abstract indeterminacy requires 'continual revision … the seeing again—continual suspension of judgment, weighing of multiple possibilities, [and] brooding over gaps'.[115] This is the mode in which modern critics—and authors and artists for centuries before them—have situated themselves: the shifting between different ideas, conventions, syntaxes, and narrative and critical viewpoints.

As a descriptive and discursive Aesthetic pursuit, this project moves beyond 'intertextuality' and departs from the concern for dependency between works. While readings by Bal engage with illustrations of biblical texts, the painting by William Morris I choose to work with has nothing to do with the subject in 2 Samuel to which I relate it. Mine is a more abstract comparison that *invents* relationships and experiments further with descriptive strategies. As a creative interpretation, the inquiry employs 'something like' the artistic-instinctive induction Gadamer advocated as valid in the human sciences and allows comparisons to be developed along non-empirical lines. Though comparison itself is a binary construction and a staple of rational and pre-rational language and literature, here it can be categorized as 'an interdisciplinary approach that follows a discursive, rather than dialectic, model', to

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[113] See his extended discussion of this concept on pp. 102-19, and his quotation of Schlegel on p. 105.
[114] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1981), 12.
[115] *Ibid*.

recall Bryson's description of Bal's method.[116] Derrida determines that the tower of Babel 'exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating'[117] as a way of providing a metaphor for the problem of translation. The greater issue of how to 'translate' the Bible today could benefit from a search for communion between ancient and modern modes of religious and artistic expressions, all the while upholding and honouring the distinctive integrity of, and difference between, scripture and art. But the incompletion exhibited by Babel allows us to continue to re-envision scripture and even imagine it as a Modern painting.

I aim to instigate a scandal in the methodological salon, because my method is in one sense *no method* and rather an entirely Modern individual expression. I conspicuously break the Reformation rules for reasonable readings and thus free myself of the tight leash that Moore thought could control processes of reading, for at times my aestheticization of the text consists of a deliberate manipulation of it. So if I initially claim to be looking for a common element via an abstract correspondence, at times I am merely using a Modern image in order to fill in the white space of a biblical text. On one level I am following what Moore describes as 'the post-methodological swerve in literary studies' by contravening the laws of methodology, which are 'meant to keep our discourse on the Bible from being subjective, personal, private, pietistic, pastoral, devotional, or homiletical.'[118] As with practices in feminist, postcolonial and cultural studies, I intend to bring 'previously unperceived or disavowed data into focus'.[119] But in another light I resist metaphors of

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[116] Introduction to *Ways of Seeing*, vi.
[117] Jacques Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', in *Semeia* 54 (trans. Joseph F. Graham; 1991), 3.
[118] Moore (2007), 23
[119] *Ibid*.; for this summation of direction found in feminist criticism, he acknowledges Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook (eds.), *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* Bloomington, 1991).

substitution in favour of metaphors of comparison, hoping 'to bring an ancient text into meaningful and explicit dialogue with a contemporary context.'[120]

And so my café-cultural practice proposes a variety of abstractions in reading the Bible: like an anthropologist on Mars, to think in pictures; like an artist-theologian, to suggest the Modern image as a metaphor for the biblical text; and like Pater and his fellow Aesthetes, to express the beauty it conveys to me, 'To find, not a universal formula for it, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it'.[121]   And yet in speaking broadly of the text's aesthetic qualities in such an individualistic, idiosyncratic and therefore Modern manner, my ultimate desire is to intimate *something like* a universal manifestation of truth, whether that be a sympathy, style, attitude or situation.

Project synopsis

My forays into art and the Bible led to the current project under its final title, *The Bible and Its Modern Methods: Interpretation Between Art and Text.* As much as I frame this project according to a scandalous structure, I do however regulate the chaos by organising my selections according to some of the traditional genres of biblical literature: historical narrative, patriarchal narrative, prophecy, psalms, and wisdom. This is in order to cover a broad range of styles and affect the manner of a survey.

The overall structure of the study can thus be charted accordingly:

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[120] Therefore I wish to separate my work from the 'mountainous excess of dull and dreary books, essays, and articles [that say]: here, first, in numbing dry detail is my method; now watch and be amazed while I apply it woodenly to this unsuspecting biblical text.' *Ibid*., 24.
[121] See opening quote.

GENRE AND TEXT	THEME AND IMAGE
CHAPTER I *Historical narrative:* Portrait of Michal 2 Samuel 6	*Pre-Raphaelite sympathy:* Portrait of Guenevere by William Morris
CHAPTER II *Patriarchal narrative:* Portrait of Abraham Genesis 23	*Expressionist aspirations:* Portrait of Nietzsche by Erich Heckel
CHAPTER III *Prophecy:* Exilic collage and performance Isaiah 44	*Montage and disintegration:* *Merzbild* by Kurt Schwitters and earthwork by Ana Mendieta
CHAPTER IV *Psalm:* Self and worship Psalm 13	*Emotionally poured paint:* A Modern *Cathedral* by Jackson Pollock
CHAPTER V *Wisdom writing:* Portrait of a biblical dandy Qoheleth 1-3	*Conceptual roulette:* Portrait on Monte Carlo card by Marcel Duchamp

Moving down the list of artists on the right the reader is given an itinerary that begins in England and heads through Germany, the Americas and France, reflecting my attempt to select a geographical cross-section of western artists, as well as both figurative and utterly abstract works. In the column on the left appear the ports of call on the tour of biblical genres. The fact that all but one of the artists chosen are men is hopefully compensated for in the feminist flavour of much of my analysis. I spent a

great many hours researching the work of artists such as Liubov Popova, Niki de Saint Phalle and Doris Salcedo, but eventually I found the paintings I have ended up using had a way of choosing me, rather than the other way around. Also, since most of us accept that the Bible was written primarily by men, and since Modern art has equally been dominated by men, it makes sense to parallel the entities as products of men.

The opening chapter chooses a moment in the Deuteronomistic History in which Michal, according to most critics, is effectively written out of the narrative and condemned to a life without offspring. By allowing the sympathetic rendering William Morris lent Guenevere—his subject in both an 1858 painting and collection of poetry—to be positioned next to the portrait of Michal in 2 Samuel 6, this text, commonly classified as having to do with mere matters of propriety, is envisioned as a more challenging portrait. As this particular chapter is not of interest for any textual quirks, most commentary centres around the difference between Michal and David and in so doing makes an aesthetic judgment on both of their characters. So although the comparison does not scrutinize the linguistic aspects of the text in order to make qualitative claims about the language itself, it rather devises a strategy of 'Pre-Raphaelite persuasion' to re-sit Michal in a position of greater dignity and in more empowering hues than most critics have portrayed her.

In Chapter II, Genesis 23 serves as the sample of patriarchal narrative that is juxtaposed against the stark woodcut portrait of Nietzsche by Heckel. Abraham's insistence that he bury his dead on land that he exclusively owns has been overlooked by critics more concerned with the flavour of his negotiations with the Hittites and the fact that his purchase of the land at Hebron acquires a 'downpayment' on a portion of the promised land. So the comparison is once again between two portraits, only this

time a third voice interrupts the simple two-way dialogue as Luce Irigaray's poetic address to Nietzsche in her work *Amante Marine* (a.k.a. *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* [1983]) is allowed to speak to Abraham and thereby conjure the voice of the dead, the voice of Sarah. This voice helps to visualize the difference between the pious perceptions of Abraham as an earnest and grieving widower and the darker shades of his character suggested beyond the outlines of traditional commentary. His contours carved into the surface of the biblical text become a two-toned image of him in woodcut—his more sinister impulses for wanting to get Sarah's corpse out of his sight encoded within the shadows of the print. Poised in black and white as an 'Overman', who knows no master but himself, Abraham is memorialized as the heroic father of the patriarchs, while the shadows of the cave at Machpelah create a dark backdrop to the Nietzschean portrait.

Chapter III considers a rather generic portion of exilic prophecy, a selection from Deutero-Isaiah, in two new lights: first, for the forms it contains, which generate the 'seam'-liness of a *Merzbild* by Kurt Schwitters; and second, for its performative origins, which are developed according to earth sculptures by the Cuban-American artist, Ana Mendieta. The analysis of Isaiah 44 registers the textual diversity of the biblical chapter as an integral feature of exile, conflating Schwitters' less than traumatic experience as a voluntary refugee with the relative safety many descendants in Babylon might have felt generations after the Exile. But while the splicing together of disparate forms expressed itself in more chaotic and shocking ways in the world of photomontage, Schwitters' relative ease in exile meant his 'built painting', like the Isaianic collage, has less of an edge and none of the shocking dismemberment one finds in something by Max Ernst or Hannah Hoch. Taking note of the performative origins of the text, the study then projects a Mendieta image to consider the chapter as

a work of art more appropriately addressed to a group that can better be described not as living in exile but in diaspora. Mendieta's sand-sculpture of a female form washes up against the water and shores of Isaiah's ode to the sons of Jacob, and the restaging comments on identity that can be configured far away from Jerusalem.

Chapter IV appropriates a 'drip-painting' by Jackson Pollock as a metaphorical tool for examining the individual lament as a vessel for self-reflection. Psalm 13 is again not at all a highly vexed piece of poetry in terms of its construction, but its typical-ness nonetheless unleashes a violent array of colours as parallelisms are shown strewn across the canvas like poured paint. The generalized lament splatters emotion about so that anyone can relate to it, and the chaotic world of turmoil becomes a space onto which personal experience is projected. The comparison plays with concepts of the self and strives to plot an individual lament 'by David' as the self-indulgent outpouring of the veritable king of Modern American painters.

Rounding off the selection of genres, the choice of Marcel Duchamp in Chapter V for the figure of Qoheleth seemed obvious to me. The wry Frenchman practices all of the contrivances found in the work of the Bible's most sardonic and disaffectedly conflicted conversant, and the comparison toys with similar visions of chance, class and labour that seem to coalesce between them. Irony is of course not a modern invention but is perhaps its natural inclination, and the proclivity of it to Qoheleth's self-introduction allows the author and his alter-ego to bend in a Duchamp-shaped direction. Saving the best for last, the closing chapter flies in the face of cautions given against psychologizing biblical characters in expectant biographies of them and conspicuously fashions Qoheleth as a dandy—as a self-conscious and witty subject who can be rendered in portrait as a counterpart to the likes of Beau Brummell, Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde and Duchamp.

The interposed cross-section of art and text proves that the Bible functions like a series of Modern paintings that demand to be viewed as abstract entities, rather than as uncomplicated literal documents. It plays with an entirely subjective but nonetheless 'historically effected' view of a Bible that I feel continues to be simplified and viewed according to scientific registers, no matter how *post*modern many critics might claim themselves to be in their approaches.

The religion of Modern art

Walter Benjamin might have acknowledged art's origins in the cult, but as Krauss has said art historians have been loath to mention the two phenomena in the same sentence. And yet art criticism is flooded with scandalous and unsuccessfully repressed biblical and religious references. It is commonplace for critics to slip in a phrase or two to explain a moment of aesthetic achievement in terms they can only describe via the language of the religious experience. Joachimides for instance speaks of the form of idolatry that accompanies the historicization of Modern painting and sculpture: 'To focus on masterpieces, to worship gods, is not enough: only surprising juxtapositions … can shock visitors into finding their own angle on the century.'[122] Kandinsky's apocalypses have been evaluated according to 'pagan' and Russian models of religious philosophy, but critics are more comfortable intoning on his interest in the theosophy of Rudolph Steiner than they are with unpacking his mixed biblical metaphors and the biblical allusions that appear throughout his personal letters and published writings. Here is how the critic Harold Rosenberg described post-war American painters as they abandoned the figure in favour of abstract expression:

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[122] Joachimides, 10.

> Based on the phenomenon of conversion the new movement was, with the majority of painters, essentially a religious movement. In every case, however, the conversion has been experienced in secular terms. The result has been the creation of private myths.[123]

Even sales catalogues cannot help but speak in tones that recall the sanctuary. The 2000-2001 Sotheby's auction list includes a photograph of Pollock's *One: Number 31* by Andreas Gursky that was once described as 'a shrine for ornament'.[124] With museums functioning as the temples of Modern Art, art might have been kidnapped from its original religious context, but it is still worshipped.

A recent editorial in *The Guardian* encapsulates how the kind of denial I have witnessed in art criticism has occurred especially in Britain and at the level of public opinion. Mark Ravenhill observes how people even like to think their way around overtly religious painting by searching for signs of the artist's resistance:

> We often have a revisionist view of this great legacy of paintings, music and literature. Of course, we can't help denying the beauty and resonance of the Sistine Chapel, Handel's Messiah, Milton's Paradise Lost or the York mystery plays. But we like to tell ourselves that their creators were covert humanists, who wanted to make art and had no choice other than to make it within the confines of a church that held all the power and money.

> This idea that all artists are essentially humanists is a comforting myth for an agnostic age. It is, if you like, the agnostic's delusion— because the very opposite is true.[125]

I am taking Ravenhill's observation a step further by proposing that even art that admits to being 'humanist' can be religious. Even an artist who fails to speak about the spiritual experience of creating or observing a painting can behave religiously. It all depends on how one defines religion, and I prefer to think in anthropological terms

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[123] Harold Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters', *Art News* (December 1952); cf. David and Cecile Shapiro (eds.), *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge, 1990), 80.
[124] *Sotheby's: Art at Auction 2000-2001* (London, 2000), 96.
[125] Mark Ravenhill, 'ArtsComment' in 'G2', *The Guardian* (14 April 2008), 28. Ravenhill alludes here to the book consumers cannot currently get enough of, *The God Delusion* (2006) by Richard Dawkins, and thus brilliantly subverts the limits of its polemical absolutism.

and cast a net beyond the institutional setting to include the myriad things humans do to give their lives meaning and come to terms with death. Secular fundamentalism cannot tolerate God-talk, but scholars such as Gordon Lynch have convincingly studied how everyday activities like going to the movies can also be understood as religious practices. 'Generation X' might no longer go to church, but they find meaning in spirituality and even in dancing to house music.[126]

Yet the delusions of those who think religion can be surgically removed from culture die hard, and the contemporary art market appears to indulge in them as well. I have known of a number of artists whose work in my opinion reflects far more depth and skill than that of any Turner Prize winner but who find themselves consistently rejected by galleries due to their devotion to religious themes. If a painting is not somehow dragging down concepts of God and religion—or if it does not ruminate on issues of the body or express postcolonial anxieties in ways that 'challenge our expectations' of what art should be by presuming to reflect upon 'space' and other concepts that are apparently divorced from theology—contemporary galleries do not seem to hang it. My reaction to the contemporary clearly resists my own contradictions of viewing, for while I claim to shock biblical scholarship with my *avant-garde* non-method I choose to work with images that are confessionally 'retro'; I am wary of what is fashionable in the galleries today and prefer the work of less fashionable, more dated artists. And yet the very obscurity of so much of what *does* get shown in Whitechapel and at the ICA imbues the objects we choose to contemplate with nothing short of a religious aura. As Benjamin wrote,

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[126] See Gordon Lynch, *After Religion: 'Generation X' and the search for meaning* (London, 2002).

'Unapproachability is indeed a major quality of the cult image. True to its nature, it remains "distant, however close it may be."'[127]

Modern abstract art is largely responsible for the distance we experience when we look at much of the work of artists today, and while we grapple with what they are attempting to say we are asked to accept that art cannot always be understood in an instant. We speculate about it, let it affect our senses and intellects, project our emotions onto it, and sometimes get angry with it. When we are in doubt, we consult the gallery guide or catalogue, only this can often leave us feeling more lost for words. In any event, as Gadamer reflected, we can only experience it if we forget momentarily about our egos and lose ourselves in it, if we keep silence and let its meaning be revealed to us.

There is of course another object that continues to baffle us and that forces us to speculate and project, and that makes many people very angry. And if Modern art has taught us to step back and be quiet for a moment, can it not teach us to do the same with the Bible? I ask the reader to indulge me while I play fast and loose with scripture and some sacred Modern images. I make extremely free use of historical and aesthetic objects to talk about the Bible in what some might determine to be an utterly arbitrary manner. But by organising my comparisons around the 'something like' phenomenon, I submit a vision of the Bible that I hope will restore something of its aura and even, dare I say it, make it fashionable again.

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[127] Benjamin, 'Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 237, n. 5. He is quoting himself.

I

HISTORICAL PORTRAITS

IMAGE

I. *Queen Guenevere*, William Morris, 1857-1858,
Tate Gallery, London

¹⁴ And David whirled with all his might before the LORD; and David was girded with a linen ephod. ¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

¹⁶ As the ark of the LORD entered the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul was looking out of her window. When she saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD, she despised him in her heart…

²⁰ When David went home to greet his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, 'How the king of Israel glorified himself today, when he exposed himself today before the slave girls of his servants, disrobing like some vulgar dancer!'

²¹ David answered Michal, 'It was before the LORD who chose me instead of your father and all his family and appointed me prince over the LORD's people Israel. It was before the LORD that I danced. ²² And if I humiliate myself more than this, so that I will be vulgar in my [own] eyes, [even then] among the slave girls that you speak of, among them I will be glorified.'

²³ And Michal had no children to the day of her death.

2 Samuel 6

THE DEFENCE OF MICHAL:
PRE-RAPHAELITE PERSUASION IN 2 SAMUEL 6

> I cannot paint you, but I love you.
> (William Morris to his future wife Jane Burden, 1858)

The daughter of Saul and wife of David has been traditionally defined as a bad wife who scorns her husband's sincere religious fervour because she is blind to the blessing God has bestowed upon him. Contemporary feminist perspectives might applaud her bravery in defying her father and helping David escape out of her window, but they plot her in a network of relations in which she ultimately plays the role of a tragic and passive victim. Though never specifically labelled a queen by the biblical texts, Michal's words and actions in 2 Samuel 6 have been interpreted to indicate a royal disapproval—a resentment that her courtly consort has not been behaving according to the established codes of decorum. Porter's suggestion (1954) that the incident reflects her failure to participate in the ritual consummation of a sacred marriage—and the sexual threat presented by the maidservants who have been watching David whirl about—has resulted in interpretive narratives that culminate in the 'sexual tragedy'[1] of her ultimate barrenness. Those bent on proving the text's fidelity to the Davidic line argue that Michal's childlessness (in addition to Mephibosheth's apparent impotence) severs the possibility of progeny to Saul at the moment before David's house is blessed and his legitimate successor, Solomon, is to emerge.

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[1] Jo Ann Hackett, '1 and 2 Samuel', in Carol Newsom and Sharon Ringe (eds.) *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, 1992), 91; cf. J.R. Porter, 'The Interpretation of 2 Samuel VI and Psalm CXXXII', *JTS* V (1954), 161-73.

Given the bleak prospects a woman with no children faced in the ancient world,[2] it is no wonder that the final words on Michal have been perceived to be a punishment either for shaming David before the household or for her own insufficient reverence for the ark. Critics who have claimed that this 'punishment' was meted out by YHWH include Ginzberg (1913), Carlson (1963), Herzberg (1964), and Ackroyd (1977). Certainly the Deuteronomistic History progresses according to an established pattern of divine punishment and forbearance, so the significance of the scene is on one level imbued with a purpose beyond what the characters themselves can see. Nevertheless, I cannot fully trust Ackroyd's certitude in claiming, '…the text leaves no doubt that it is to be understood as a divine decision.'[3] By claiming, 'Michal is barren, a sign of divine displeasure', Ackroyd seems to be following Herzberg's lead. As a means of explaining the event as God's way of steering 'the blood of the house of Saul' clear of the throne of Israel, Herzberg advances a metaphor and an intertextual twist that essentially close the text from any further interpretive possibilities:

> [Verse 23] is hardly meant to imply that David avoided her from then on as punishment. Her childlessness means rather that the Lord himself takes up the gauntlet that she has thrown down. To alter the saying in I. 8.7 slightly, Michal has rejected not David, but Yahweh.[4]

This rephrasing seems to me both presumptuous and manipulative, since that particular the chapter is committed to spelling out the all too flawed and human nature of kingship. Herzberg's logic accepts David's innocence and Michal's unqualified guilt. God after all tells Samuel: 'They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them,' and Samuel then tells the people that kings will only

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[2] Athalya Brenner illustrates how, 'unless they become mothers, [women] are not accorded meaningful membership of the ongoing movement of biblical historiography', in her Introduction to *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (Sheffield, 1994), 17.

[3] Peter Ackroyd, *The Second Book of Samuel* (Cambridge, 1977), 71.

[4] Hans Herzberg, *I &II Samuuel* (London, 1964), 281.

turn them into slaves (1 Sam. 8.6-8). So what theological sense would it make for God to punish a woman who refused to bow down to a human king?

Ackroyd's citation of 1 Sam. 1.5 as proof that barrenness results from divine displeasure[5] is equally flawed. In Hannah's case, it is her *husband* who determines only to give her one portion of the sacrificial feast, as opposed to the cornucopia he gives to Peninnah and her brood. Elkanah's decision and Peninnah's accompanying taunts are reactions to the twice-repeated proviso, 'because YHWH had closed her womb' (vv. 5, 6), but there is nothing in the chapter to indicate that YHWH has *punished* Hannah by closing her womb. The punishment she receives comes from the members of her household, causing her to seek 'favour' in the eyes of Eli. Hannah's barrenness, therefore, does not correlate in God punishing Michal.[6]

Others have been more cautious in apportioning blame. McCarter 'assume[s]' that YHWH 'made her barren' but confesses it is 'not clear' whether she might have been 'excluded from David's bed'.[7] Porter, McKane (1963), and Halpern (2001) are among those who claim it was David who retaliated further against his wife's barbs by refusing to sleep with her, while Clines (1972), Payne (1982), and Hackett (1992) simply identify Michal's barren years as a punishment for her opposition, without mentioning who specifically determined the punishment. Within the patriarchal system of ancient Israel, Exum explains: 'Submission is rewarded; opposition, punished.' And the nature of Michal's punishment is that she is 'denied her function

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[5] Carlson earlier suggested that the 'D group' apparently responsible for including Hannah's prayer, would 'likely' have viewed barrenness as a punishment. R.A. Carlson, *David the Chosen King* (Stockholm, 1964), 94. I fail to see how her prayer indicates that she had previously been serving some sort of punitive sentence. Although the prayer alludes to the reversal of divine favour throughout, there is no element of repentance to suggest Hannah has been doing time for her sins.

[6] It is also worthwhile noting that Rachel, the mother of Benjamin from whom Saul and Michal are descended, was also not made barren as a punishment. YHWH opens Leah's womb because she was 'hated' (Gen. 29.31, 33), but he leaves Rachel barren, without explanation, until he 'remembers' her several years later (30.22).

[7] P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel* (New York, 1984), 187.

as a mother', she 'loses her status as "David's wife"', and she 'is reduced to being a daughter'.[8]

Although Exum's deconstruction aims to expose the misogynistic manipulations of biblical women—and is no doubt an important step towards 'discern[ing] the submerged strains of Michal's voice'[9]—it seems unfortunate that Exum only passes over an interpretive possibility that would allow Michal's voice to echo longer and louder. She alerts us to a gap in interpretive vision, but commits only two sentences towards attempting to fill that gap: 'No one to my knowledge has proposed that Michal refuses to have sexual relations with David, yet it would not be out of character for her. The very ambiguity hints at the text's unease about locating the responsibility.'[10] To push the suggestion any further would seem to risk speculation that apparently cannot be justified by the text, but the inherent ambiguity and nature of Michal's character certainly allow for such a possibility. By so tersely dismissing that option, however, Exum seems to accept the narrative's patriarchal function and to abandon the premise I plan to promote—that beneath the surface of a text in which Michal is passed around by men and to men, lies a character whom the text allows to be self-actualising, self-critical, and, most important perhaps, defiant in a way that is more consistent with YHWH's will than has previously been thought.

These are, I confess, modern terms—historically specific psychoanalytic constructs—that the conservative critic will warn should not be applied to biblical subjects and objects. Yet I propose them in an age when the critical jury continues to judge against Michal in her final episode. No matter how much credit is granted to

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[8] J. Cheryl Exum, 'Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 43 (1989), 32. The article also appears in Alice Bach (ed.), *The Pleasure of Her Text* (Philadelphia, 1990), 45-68, and in David Clines and Tamara Eskenazi (eds.), *Telling Queen Michal's Story* (Sheffield, 1991), 176-98.
[9] *Ibid.*, 20.
[10] *Ibid.*, 26.

her testimony against David and no matter how many apologies are written for her bitterness, the gavel is consistently hammered hard on the subject of her childlessness. She has been punished, with no chance of an appeal.

Michal's sentence has partly been determined by critical language that attempts to elucidate the injustice done to her. Words can be weapons, as Exum has pointed out, and the biblical narrator has been guilty of 'use[ing]…women's own words against them.'[11] But what of the critics who proliferate the notion of Michal's powerlessness by framing her in rhetorical discourses of passivity and helplessness? Steinsalz, for instance, describes the defeatist resignation of a 'princess' as she is transferred from Palti back to David: 'From this point onward, Michal responded to everything that happened with total passivity, the passivity of one who is past caring.'[12] Bowman minimizes the significance of her tirade by calling it 'her only protest against victimization' and by emphasizing that Michal is 'ever victimized but never vindicated.'[13]

Elsewhere, critics have been more creative in their descriptive language: Bach's Michal is 'essentially *erased* from David's life when Abigail is inserted into it';[14] Exum says Michal 'is *silenced*' by a narrator who '*robs her of her voice*';[15] while Halpern says she is '*sequestered* for life'[16] (all italics are my own). By

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[11] *Ibid.*, 72.

[12] Adin Steinsaltz, 'The Princess and the Shepherd', *Biblical Images: Men and Women of the Book* (New York, 1984), 149. Cf. Clines and Eskenazi, 283.

[13] Richard Bowman, 'The Fortune of King David/The Fate of Queen Michal: A Literary Critical Study of 2 Samuel 1-8', in Clines and Eskenazi, 119, 99. First presented to the Narrative Research on the Hebrew Bible Group, Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago, November 1988.

[14] Alice Bach, 'The Pleasure of Her Text', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 43 (1989), 46. The article subsequently appeared in the author's own *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (Philadelphia, 1990), 25-44, and in Brenner, 106-28.

[15] Exum, 32, 34.

[16] Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids, 2001), 398. Halpern is fond of fashioning Michal's appearance at the window as an imprisonment, part of a 'policy of systematic extermination toward the house of Saul' (86). 'Condemn[ed]…to celibacy' (86) and 'consign[ed]…to chastity thereafter, in the harem' (33), Michal is 'sequestered' like the defiled concubines in 2 Sam. 20.3 'to the day of [her] death in living widowhood' (51), and the entry of the ark into Jerusalem is 'the occasion for her lifelong sequestration' (313).

conflating the image of Michal at the window in 2 Sam. 6.16 with the mention of her childless future in v. 23, critics collude in an eternal confinement that is not specifically stated in the text. Flanagan defines her destiny as being 'confined childless to the Jerusalem palace'[17]—a description that is confirmed once again by Exum's contrasting of Michal's 'isolation' to the solidarity associated with the memory of Jephthah's daughter.[18] The historical likelihood, we imagine, is that Michal would not have had the freedom to saunter about town and country according to her own volition. Yet the text does not demand that we read her as a Lady of Shallot, but rather ends with an ambiguous statement concerning her childlessness: 'And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death' (v. 23). Bowman is therefore correct to observe: 'The emphasis rests on the fact that she was childless, not the reason for it.'[19]

The last words on Michal (assuming, as most do, that her name in the Masoretic text's version of 2 Sam. 21.8 is due to a scribal error) inform the reader of her eventual death. This has sparked some of the most sensationalist rhetoric on her destiny to date. For Steinsaltz, she is dead before she even confronts David before the household: 'She had undergone not so much a personality change as a kind of death.'[20] Shargent considers her as one of the biblical daughters who, faced with the stark choice of 'Motherhood or death', are 'killed off' by means of the 'death-in-life'

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[17] James Flanagan, 'Succession and Genealogy in the Davidic Dynasty', in H.B. Huffman, F.A. Spina, and A.R.W. Green (eds.), *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George F. Mendenhall* (Winona Lake, 1983), 37.

[18] Exum, 36. As a means of clarifying the code Michal breaks in 2 Sam. 6, Exum earlier states, 'Michal occupies the private sphere of the home, safe, but excluded', 29.

[19] Bowman, 116. Anderson repeats this point, though reverting to a punitive portrait, in A.A., Anderson, *2 Samuel,* World Bible Commentary 11 (Dallas, 1989), 107. Alter adds that the ambiguity is due to the power of the *waw*-consecutive, which 'avoids…a clear causal connection between the fact stated and the dialogue that precedes it', in *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London, 1981), 125. Alter's excerpt, entitled 'Characterization and the Art of Reticence', also appears in Clines and Eskenazi, 64-73.

[20] Steinsaltz, 149.

they experience.[21] But it is Exum's post-mortem which determines the most possible scenarios: like Jephthah's daughter, she meets her 'untimely "death" when [she] leave[s] the security of the house to meet the man who will be instrumental in [her] murder'; she is 'kill[ed] off' through being denied a reply to David; and likewise, 'By representing her as challenging the king from a position of weakness, the narrator has Michal essentially commit suicide.' In short, 'She goes to her literary death screaming'.[22]

I do not mean to quibble with the exegete's right to employ metaphors when unpacking the functions of biblical narratives and the codes that underpin them. How dull biblical studies would be without them! But the proliferation of commentary that 'confines', 'erases', and 'murders' Michal does not seem to do justice to the legacy of her character. Furthermore, it means that she does not fare well when compared to the other women in David's life, which only seems to underscore the idea that her final speech was a failure. Of David's wives, 'Only Bathsheba, the wife of sexual intimacy, participates in the ongoing story of David's strength', and 'only Abigail actively opposes David's violence', which means Michal merely 'remains a transitional figure'.[23] Celebrating Bathsheba's political savvy, Miscall determines her not to be 'the powerless pawn that Michal was.'[24]

Where Michal does receive her badge of distinction is when critics note that she is the only woman in the biblical Hebrew narrative who is said to love a man (1 Sam. 18.20). But even the workings of her heart, as we shall see below, are trivialised or explained away in ways that deny her a three-dimensionality that, to me, seems to burst off the page. Clines has asked a neglected question: '…is not her dignity and

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[21] Karla Shargent, 'Living on the Edge: The Liminality of Daughters in Genesis to 2 Samuel', in Brenner, 35.
[22] Exum, 56, 55, 55, 61.
[23] Bach, 51, 51, 53.
[24] Peter Miscall, 'Michal and Her Sisters', in Clines and Eskenazi, 258.

her sarcasm sufficient vindication, in the eyes of the readers at least?'[25] Rather than write her off as barren and bitter, and rather than confine and kill her off with all of the other victimized women of the Hebrew Bible, surely one can grant her a fairer hearing. By comparing her visage in 1 Sam. 6 to the unlikely portrait of a king's wife from quite a different era, it is possible to take her out of her prison cell and to give her a full acquittal.

The first slides please…

We first imagine the text of 2 Sam. 6.16-23 projected on the left screen of the seminar room. The projectionist takes a few attempts to ensure the letters are in focus and the text is legible. On the screen to the right now appears the image of *Queen Guenevere* (1857/8) by William Morris.[26] The students expect to be told that the biblical text somehow informed the Pre-Raphaelite portrait or perhaps that Morris painted the Arthurian queen because of a fear of bad wives, of which he found Michal to be an archetype. Jane Burden, the model for Guenevere who would marry the artist and sporadically leave him for Dante Gabriel Rossetti, had only just met the two men during their months painting the murals for the Oxford Union. So it is unlikely, or beyond our ken, that Morris considered the woman he at first sight called 'a stunner' to embody conjugally threatening characteristics so early on. The lecturer discourages the search for dependence with a touch of impatient disdain: 'It's nothing so prosaic as that.'

The lesson in comparing and contrasting evolves by establishing commonalities, perhaps in subject matter or composition, so that the viewer can better

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[25] David Clines, 'The Story of Michal, Wife of David, in Its Sequential Unfolding', in Clines and Eskenazi, 140. First presented at the Narrative Research on the Hebrew Bible Group, SBL, Chicago, 1988.

[26] The optional title for this painting will be discussed below.

distinguish between stylistic methods that give form to particular ideological aims. But before the comparison commences, we identify not just each work and its artist, but the date and circumstances of composition. William Morris is our painter, but the excerpt from Samuel is unsigned. Though it has been suggested that the verses in which Michal appears may have originally belonged to the portions of the Samuel material that are said to have comprised the Succession Narrative, the primary subject, the arrival of the ark in Jerusalem, suggests 2 Sam. 6 is a direct continuation of the events in 1 Sam. 4-7, thus making it a part of the so-called Ark Narrative.[27] Both of these 'original documents' attempted to legitimise the Davidic inheritance of the throne and the establishment of Jerusalem as the political and religious capital.[28] Therefore, as Halpern and others argue, they were probably composed at least at the time of Solomon's succession. But by the time our selected verses appeared in the greater narrative which we know as the Deuteronomistic History, they had survived at least two phases of revision—one conducted under Josiah's reign when past kingship was criticised but present and future kingship was promoted with much promise, and one conducted during or after the Exile when redactors appear to have been more critical of those leaders who failed to walk in the ways of the Lord. It is the Deuteronomistic appropriation of earlier narrative material that most resembles Pre-

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[27] There are several potential glosses within the chapter as a whole, but the most commonly cited reconstructive suggestions are as follows: rejecting Noth's (1943) single-author hypothesis and eventually acknowledging redaction theories by those such as Dietrich (1972), Viejola (1975; 1977), and Nelson (1981), many agree that the Deuteronomistic Historian(s) found sources such as the Ark Narrative almost in their entirety; Fohrer (1971) argues that 2 Sam. 6:3-8, the Perez-uzzah etiology, is an expansion; Rupprecht (1977) reverses Mowinckel's (1962) suggestion that the historical event of the entry of the ark resulted in Pslam 132, and determines instead that the psalm's liturgy influenced the description recorded in 2 Sam. 6; Rost (1982) proposes that the Michal material previously belonged to the Succession Narrative; finding the literary schematics in the chapter too coherent to have been the product of separate, synthesised units, Fokkelman (1990) disagrees with Rost.

[28] Kaiser thus asserts that the Ark Narrative was composed to memorialise 'the arbitrary transfer of the ancient Israelite sanctuary to Jerusalem by David as having taken place in accordance with the will of [YHWH].' Otto Kaiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1975), 155.

Raphaelite aesthetic practice, and it is in this final sixth-century context that we position our text alongside *Guenevere*.

The general circumstances within which Morris painted his portrait can be tentatively summarised according to a few general historical trends: the burning of the Houses of Parliament in 1836 had created a significant opportunity for Augustus Pugin and Charles Barry to revive a Gothic aesthetic which hovered precariously between Catholic and Anglican aesthetic expectations; the popularity of Walter Scott's novels and, somewhat later, Tennyson's poetry had whetted the Victorian public's appetite for all things medieval; but reactions to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (of which Morris would never be an official member) in the late 1840s and early 1850s were mixed, as many critics including Dickens associated the angularity and sickly appearance of the biblical and literary subjects with Catholicism. Morris and Burne-Jones would become disciples of the group well after its aesthetic had achieved greater popularity having been championed by Ruskin.

Morris's interest in the medieval was highly politicised, believing as he did that pre-industrial methods of production could enliven workers' lives, redistribute wealth, and heal an ailing society.[29] Within a year of finishing our painting, he would publish a collection entitled *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems.* Disappointed as he was in Tennyson's retelling of the Arthurian legends, in 1855 Morris had gone back to Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, itself a fifteenth-century composition (c. 1485) inspired by French sources no longer known to us. Both his painting and his poems reveal not just a subtle sympathy for the woman accused of treason, but also a concern for the revivification of an earlier version of her story.

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[29] Other Pre-Raphaelites proved themselves to be civic-minded, critiquing the class structure (as in Ford Madox Brown's *Work* [1852-63]) and painting murals in town halls.

Thus, we have our first point of comparison. Both portraits translate or appropriate earlier texts that had already belonged to translated or compiled contexts, and both address an audience that the artist thought needed reminding of a signifying story from the remote past. Both are themselves atypical texts for the genres within which they are classified here—Morris's because it lacks the hyper-realist precision that commonly defines the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic, and the biblical text for the absence of sermonic punctuation normally associated with Deuteronomistic redaction. Furthermore, in each case a king's wife appears beside a window but ultimately crosses the barrier defined by that window and poses a threat to the masculine order through future speech. Guenevere will spend the final years of her life in the nunnery at Almesbury, so the two subjects also share the prospect of a childless future. It will be shown how the position of each woman within her given historical sequence and within her relation to men actually situates her where she functions as a snag in a surface on which men have previously been configured to be morally superior.

There are of course some obvious differences between the two works, not the least of which are the disparities in contexts and in media. Morris's easel painting—the only one he would ever complete[30]—is not strictly a religious text, although it is indeed concerned with religious hypocrisy that condemns, before loving, the adulterer. Whatever traumas Morris might have felt were afflicting Victorian society,[31] one cannot simply equate them with the impact the Exile and destruction of Jerusalem had on the nation of Israel. And while men and the community are prominent features of 2 Sam. 6, there are, technically speaking, no men in the

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[30] John Christian, 'Queen Guenevere', *The Pre-Raphaelites,* Tate exhibition guide (Leslie Parris, ed.; London, 1984), 169.
[31] The hit list of the Pre-Raphaelite social conscience includes concerns regarding class and gender divisions, cholera, venereal diseases, religious antagonism and hypocrisy, spiritual isolation, prostitution, child labour, emigration, and the encroachment of the urban landscape into the countryside.

Guenevere portrait. I would argue however that they are present in the way they frame the moment: Launcelot has just left, and the poem which serves as the literary subtext of the painting presents the subsequent trial of the queen before Gawaine and his jury of self-righteous knights.

The tendency for Pre-Raphaelites to depict scenes from Britain's literary heritage and to recreate historical scenarios in order to memorialise achievements they feared might be forgotten[32] also mirrors the editorial work of Israel's historians. Several art historians have commented upon the sermonic nature of Pre-Raphaelite paintings[33]—a tone prolifically placed in the Hebrew historical narrative's prophetic structure. So Morris and the prophetically inclined Deuteronimist both produce works that question humanly constructed value systems (royalty, morality, marriage) and that edit and preserve earlier histories to provide critiques of the present. Pater once wrote that Morris's vision of the Aesthetic mingles the sacred and the profane. By revealing the dignity Morris bestows upon his subject and by disrupting the presumed wide-eyed innocence of David, a similarly Modern sympathy may evolve in our reading of the Deuteronomist's casting of Michal.

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[32] The artists elected Shakespeare and Tennyson, alongside Jesus, into their 'List of Immortals' and translated their subjects onto the walls of the Royal Academy. An early work by Ford Madox Brown, *The Seeds and Fruits of English Poetry* (1845-51; 1853)*, exemplifies the exhibited insistence that the visual arts can connect back to literary traditions integral to the nation's identity. The central scene of Chaucer reciting before Edward III's court is flanked by portraits and the inscribed names of the patriarchs of English literature. Though he has crowned his heroes with laurels, he situates them beneath Gothic arches and suggests an almost apostolic lineage that begins with Chaucer and continues into the nineteenth century. The painting thus confirms the legitimacy of this lineage and its independence from Classical or European Renaissance traditions.

[33] For a relevant discussion of this in relation to the work of John Brett, see Michael Hickox and Christiana Payne, '"Sermons in Stone": John Brett's *The Stonebreaker* Reconsidered', in Ellen Harding (ed.), *Reframing the Pre-Raphaelites: Historical and Theoretical Essays* (Aldershot, 1996). For a more comprehensive analysis of the religious inclinations of the painters, see Lindsay Errington, *Social and Religious Themes in English Art, 1840-1860* (London, 1984). Charlotte Oberg explores the prophetic nature of Morris's career in *The Pagan Prophet: William Morris* (Charlottesville, 1978).

The woman by the window

Michal looks out of her window and 'despises [King David] in her heart' (v. 16).[34] Knowing that Michal once loved David and lied to her father to save his life, critics have delineated Michal's resentment as either formed by a broken heart or fuelled by crushed pride. Her looking out the window and down at the king proves, for some, that she disapproves of either the pagan or the Yahwistic overtones of the dancing, that she looks down on his humble upbringing, or that she is simply too uptight to let herself enjoy the party. Fokkelman's diagnosis of her frigidity assigns her an emotionally juvenile helplessness: 'She really cannot open her heart and take part in the celebration.'[35] Though it is the narrator who calls David 'king', the mention of his royal name in the verse and her subsequent use of the term in her speech suggest that she thinks of him as the king here. Perhaps 'King David' echoes menacingly in her head; she likely hears people shouting it outside. Perhaps she repeats it quietly to herself while staring at 'the king' from her window.

Because she was willing to help David escape an assassination arranged by her father, Clines finds that by the time she lets loose on David for his performance in front of the ark, she does not resent his succession to the throne; she knew him to be ambitious in 1 Sam. 19, and helped him anyway, so dynastic bitterness is not the crux of her resentment. [36] There are other more complex reasons she might have to hate her husband, but I see no reason to ignore the possibility of her despising David at this point for the role he has played in the demise of her father. It might also be that Palti's tears over her enforced return to David are significant for the counterpart they have in the absence of any shed by Michal. Maybe Michal has no attachment to Palti

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[34] Fokkelman prefers to translate, 'despised him deeply', in J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 3 (Assen, 1990), 196.
[35] *Ibid.*, 204.
[36] Clines, 53.

or prefers the house of David, or maybe she loved this second husband more than herself. The suppression of anything that might reveal her feelings prevents us from knowing what is happening inside her head. As Exum writes, 'Michal's reunion with David is not reported, a highly significant textual silence that suggests a volatile subtext.'[37]

The image of the woman in a window is an ANE trope[38] that appears again in 2 Kings 9.30 and in Proverbs 7.6; Jezebel and the loose woman are portrayed respectively as a fully made-up mistress of Baal and as 'an adventuress with…smooth words'. It may be that Michal, like these women, is positioned looking through her window as a caricature of the demonised female. But no reference is made to adorning herself or to the threat of seduction, so nothing about Michal at the window (other than the fact that she hates her husband) immediately strikes the reader as subversive or unflattering. In the motif's cultic context in which the bride awaits her bridegroom, McCarter suggests the scenario also embodies the anxiety of waiting, the fear that the bridegroom will not show up, and a woman's fear over the return of her husband or son from battle.[39] The writer may have consciously exploited the varied implications of this trope, but the conventional depiction proves her to have 'more in common with Sisera's poor mother than with the harlot of Prov. 7.6 (LXX) or the painted queen of II Kings'.[40] But the conventional application may also bear the mark of irony.

Guenevere, of course, does not look out of her window, but she stands directly between it and the viewer nonetheless. The open window now exposes the dawn of

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[37] Exum, 24.
[38] The woman at the window appears in ANE sculptures and in the literature of Babylonian and Cypriote goddess cults (see Aharoni [1967], Dahood [1952], and McKane [1970]). For the occurrence of the motif in Hebrew literature see Abramsky (1980), and for Michal's depiction as a hierodule, see Porter's 1954 work.
[39] McCarter, 172.
[40] *Ibid.*

the day and the world in which men will bring her to trial. Morris no doubt knew the literary connotations of windows—the damsel pining for her love, the romantic heroine dreaming of men she knows in books, the entrapment. As with the Lady of Shallot, Guenevere's window shows her to be at the mercy of the male order that lies outside it. But without pouring too much symbolism onto a textile, perhaps her curtains are depicted in a way that invites the viewer's sympathy. On the one side it hangs between the bed and the window. On the other side it is drawn back, as a stage curtain onto her drama. The curtain at the foot of the bed is hung up and twisted, the bottom pulled up and draped over the wire or rail above, perhaps a comment on her state of mind. Regardless of how one might iron out the curtains, there is only one way to make the bed. Its disarray alludes to the previous night's encounter and to the complications in her heart. Linens, like the window, are details that frame the boundaries and the extent of Guenevere's inner torment. Morris creates a context through which his queen's thoughts and emotions are not simplified or dismissed but understood to be fraught and complex.

Michal's text also envisions a space in which the reader can appreciate the dynamics of her position. She sees David leaping and dancing before YHWH, but we are not told how long she has been waiting or why she is not in the procession herself. We are not told if she sees the sacrificial celebration that ensues, which might have enraged her further, but we know that the sight of David has tormented her deeply. David's ephod fails to conceal everything in his ecstasy, and we wonder if Michal is offended by the disrespectful wearing of the priestly garment.

The fact that Samuel wore an ephod in 1 Sam. 2.18 usually supports the theory that David is being aligned with Samuel, but is it also possible that David is being contrasted to the *real* hero of the Deuteronimistic History? Samuel's linen ephod is

first worn with the 'little robe' his mother makes and brings him every year (v. 19), whereas Michal accuses David of wearing little else. Perhaps her perception and reaction hark back to Samuel's critique of kings ('whom you have chosen for yourself') in 1 Sam. 8.10-18. Has Michal seen first her father and then her husband take the daughters and sons of Israel for their servants and turn them into slaves by taxing them up to ten percent of everything they own? Does she hate kingship altogether and hate David for buying into the celebrity cult of it, or does her problem have to do with expecting a king to show propriety before the people and humility before God? The scene may or may not still have had foreign cultic overtones for the historical participants or the Deuteronomist's readers, but the text never overtly questions her piety or the purity of her Yahwism. Therefore, we need not agree with exegetes who find her faith to be corrupt or incomplete. Lofts's psychological portrait of Michal could thus be edited of the logic: 'Subject to no such spiritual afflatus herself, she looked down at him dispassionately and thought that he looked like a drunken clown.'[41]

The sight of her watching the celebration from her window—like that of Guenevere before her window and her unmade bed—invites the reader to understand and empathise with her torment. It presents a king-centered world, which from the window appears shambolic. Fokkelman's description of the contrast between 'the darkness of [her] numinous violence…the chill of isolation' and 'the light shed by the paragraphs on procession and music'[42] correctly highlights the heightened tension between the carefree festivities down below and what is brewing upstairs in Michal's head. The reader watches the festivities from her side of the window and watches them from a position of suspicion. The centre of the festivities is viewed from a

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[41] Norah Lofts, 'Michal', *Women in the Old Testament: Twenty Psychological Portraits* (London, 1950), 120. Cf. Clines and Eskenazi, 244.
[42] Fokkelman, 205.

height from which David appears foolish, not blameless. Could this be posited as a prophetic position?

What the king said

After reviewing the initial commonalities in situation and composition, we read other symbolic details that disrupt the simplicity of first impressions.   In order to restore dignity to Michal's famous last words, we will first focus on the duplicitous nature of David's mortified indignation via a paradigm of the words of men in Guenevere's world. Two close-ups are now shown—one of the opened book beside Guenevere's bed and the other of David's speech (vv. 21b-22).

Like David's speech, Guenevere's book might be read as a male text. Words were primarily the property of men, and the idea of a woman reading had only recently been incorporated into the English psyche as a cultural pursuit that could benefit domesticity. Previously, the woman reading could signify a threat to the male order, hence the tragic nature of her plight at the window: she can read and imagine but has no power in the world outside books and windows. So the men's words in the book may have empowered her or enriched her imagination (or, the conservative Victorian might have deduced, corrupted her), but they also define the system that forbids her emotional freedom.

Through her own words, Guenevere upstages her accusers and reclaims her autonomy. In 'The Defence of Guenevere' and 'King Arthur's Tomb', the only man Morris allows to speak is Launcelot. If Guenevere ever exchanged words with Arthur privately before her trial, no one speaks of it in the poems.[43] On his journey to the tomb, Launcelot recalls moments of their past love, while Guenevere begs God for

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[43] The same is true in Malory.

forgiveness but insists she 'cannot keep / From loving Launcelot'.[44] In 'The Defence of Guenevere', Guenevere quotes Launcelot, but his words are only heard through her. The narrator gives her the floor for almost the entire poem, and she uses her time in the witness-stand to undermine the authority of masculine speech: she discloses the self-righteous rage of Gawaine by asking him to 'speak…lovingly' to her, and she challenges him to 'See me hew down your proofs'.[45] She also implies that Gawaine might have admitted the discovery of blood (Launcelot's) on her sheets was inadmissible as evidence: '…is there any law / To make a queen say why some spots of red lie on her coverlet?' Morris only allows the woman and the man who is most at odds with the male order to speak. He does not intrude upon the integrity of her speech by recording the words of her accusers. The integrity of Arthur's kingdom has been degraded through the exposed lies, schemes, and gullibility of his subjects, and it is Guenevere's voice through which the truth is told.

The irony of course is that Arthur's knightly code, so valiantly upheld by Launcelot, is also a system that provides malice its loophole. Guenevere attacks the lies of men and confesses the truth 'by Christ's dear tears', and she absolves Launcelot of any guilt by saying she commanded him to come to her—'that [they] may be / Like children once again, free from all wrongs.' And no man may refuse the queen. She undermines the authority of the court by swearing by God and Christ and by calling attention to the true judge of the trial:

> …so must I defend
> The honour of the lady Guenevere?
> Not so, fair lords, even if the world should end
>
> This very day, and you were judges here
> Instead of God…[46]

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[44] Williliam Morris, 'King Arthur's Tomb' (1858), in *William Morris, Selected Poems* (Peter Faulkner, ed.; Manchester, 1992), 38.

[45] 'Defence of Guenevere', in Faulkner, 27.

[46] Morris, , 28.

Guenevere's relationship to the words of men shows her to have the moral high ground over them. Men may speak in the name of righteousness, but what they say is in fact disproven by their human foibles.

David's speech, deemed by several to be quite the ultimate in biblical putdowns, actually raises questions about his character that have already surfaced in the Samuel narrative.[47] Fokkelman applauds David's 'brilliant rhetoric' and the 'eloquent' venom of his 'goaded ego' in his retort.[48] David's verb forms 'ingeneous[ly] echo' those of Michal, sometimes 'stand[ing] his wife's inclusio on its head.' Elsewhere, 'the style effectively shows that David parries [his wife's] assertion that he has degraded himself.' As a speaker, David 'mirrors the narrator, and vice versa'. He 'recovers himself' after temporarily being unable to 'resist the temptation to contrast his being chosen with the fate of his predecessor'. And his syntax is worthy of Fokkleman's encomium for the whole of v. 21—'a remarkable profile which is the expression of great emotionality.'[49]

Fokkelman's linguistic analysis convinces us of the literary integrity of the chapter as a whole but fails to see how David's character compels the reader to question his assumed sincerity. Halpern has been particularly vocal on the subject of David's duplicity, and his characterisation penetrates well beyond the press smile. Halpern's David 'consistently misses the significance of his own behavior',[50] makes a huge display of his mourning of Saul and Jonathan in order to win Saulide support, fails to punish Amnon for raping Tamar, and 'precipitates divine intervention'[51] through his own sins. The David Halpern sees thinks deep down that he can

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[47] See especially Robert Polzin's characterization of him in *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History,* Part Two (San Francisco, 1989).
[48] Fokkelman, 203.
[49] *Ibid.,* 203, 200, 201, 202, 203, 202.
[50] Halpern, 31.
[51] *Ibid.,* 48.

manipulate God: he mourns his child with Bathsheba only when it is still alive, for he sees nothing to gain from praying or grieving once it is dead. When Absalom dies, David's mourning is less politically constructive than socially tactless: 'His ululation demoralized the army and dismayed all his partisans.'[52] So frequently his 'great emotionality' is far from captured in anything like the 'remarkable profile' that Fokkelman has sketched.

The profile David's previous speeches have rendered in fact indicate his arrogance. When his eldest brother Eliab reprimands him for loitering on the sidelines of the battle, we know that Jesse has only sent David to deliver grain and loaves to his brothers. So Eliab is right in his knowledge of David's ambitions, and the rumours of David's challenges to Goliath confirm it: 'I know your presumption', he observes, 'and the evil of your heart; for you have come down to see the battle' (1 Sam. 17.28). David simply cannot *imagine* what has gotten into his brother and shiftily deflects his criticism: 'What have I done now? Was it not but a word?' (v. 29). In a tremendous show of bravery, David subsequently tells Saul he will not be needing his lordship's armour, but the reader learns that David will not have needed the armour for his clever but underhanded method of defeating the Philistine champion. David tweaks his performance by saying that he never fights with armour, enhancing his rugged appeal.

His reply to Goliath takes his enemy's words and turns them back at him, like the strategy he employs with Michal.[53] But it also betrays something perhaps more childishly defensive than his professed theological piety lets on. David returns the Philistine's threat—that he is going to give David's flesh to the birds—by saying *he*

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[52] *Ibid.,* 38.
[53] Goliath, like Michal, is granted fewer words than David, and David turns his words against him in several ways: the Philistine taunts, 'Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field' (1 Sam. 17:44), and David fires back: 'you come to me with a spear…but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts' (v. 45).

will do the *same* to the dead bodies of the Philistines *first*. And by the way, adds David at the end, '…the battle is YHWH's and he will "*give you*" into *our* hand' (v. 47). Is this an example of a goaded ego at its most eloquent? It is loaded with attitude, but it strikes me as rather knee-jerk and the kind of thing one hears on the playground. All that is missing is an added 'Take *that*' and snap of his fingers.

These moments betray an underlying anxiety that relates to the ideal world created by men's words in the Guenevere portrait. Halpern maintains that Michal's initial betrothal to David gave him a legitimate link to Saul's court but, like his camaraderie with Jonathan, it is part of a 'whole presentation [which] is factitious.'[54] Like Guenevere, Michal sees through the impeccable surface of men. She knows David is enjoying being ogled by legions of young women, and she probably knows David will deny it. As Clines puts it, 'David finds religious ecstasy a good way of impressing women, and it matters very much to him whether they admire him or not.'[55] So like Eliab, Michal is accurate in isolating David's arrogance as his most vulnerable Achilles' heel. Moses tells the people of Israel that they will possess the land 'not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart' (Deut. 9:5), and both Guenevere and Michal are in their own ways calling out the swollen state of men's professed virtuousness. David's is the last word, but Michal's barb lingers.

One neglected fact is that the pious words that comprise David's ecstatic self-justification are the last he speaks before telling Nathan he is going to build the Lord a house, a speech which warrants immediate correction from YHWH. Nathan is told to pass on the following message to the young David: '[So you think *you* are the one to] build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my

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[54] Halpern, 284.
[55] Clines, 139.

dwelling' (2 Sam. 7.5b-6). The Deuteronomistic language issues a slap on the wrist to the king, who needs to learn it will not be his decision to determine where the deity dwells. The reader comes to this disciplinary moment and wonders if Michal was partly right about David's provocative performance.

The remainder of 2 Sam. 7 consists of YHWH's blessing of David and his acceptance of it. God promises not to take his steadfast love away from him, 'as I took it from Saul' (v. 15), and he seems to make good on his promise by apparently helping David defeat so many Philistines, Moabites, and other hostile neighbours. Nevertheless, the king who boasts, 'What other nation on earth is like thy people Israel?' soon falls from favour and grace through his sin with Bathsheba. When the king starts boasting, fallout follows. David is also prone to showmanship, winning twice as many foreskins to impress Saul in 1 Sam. 18. Yet his words and actions, often confessed to be done utterly in the name of the Lord, result in conspicuous political gain. Calling the sincerity of David's mourning rituals into question, Halpern admits, 'One is certainly tempted…to take [the incidents], along with the mourning of Absalom, to be matters of practical political necessity, of public relations work.'[56] Bach mentions a function Abigail fulfils in a way that sheds light on Michal as the daughter of Saul: '…permitting a woman to pronounce a crucial prophecy remains well within the Deuteronomistic Historian's narrative program.'[57]

Michal is not just the daughter of a king, she is the daughter of a prophet, albeit a prophet who raised eyebrows. The author's sympathies are ever concealed, but the text is open enough to suggest a potentially prophetic strategy at work in having David's showdown speech as an inflated reply to Michal's more memorable one-liner. True he has been chosen, but his wives know him well and can even

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[56] Halpern, 38.
[57] Bach, 44.

compare him to their other husbands. Thus Crüseman identifies the episode as an ironic remark about David's honour and his troubled relationships with his wives.[58] Michal's speech is a veiled prophetic comment about David's hubris which resembles not the meek repentance of Tennyson's Guenevere, but the declamatory and vindicated ire of Morris's. Men's words are problematized by women's speeches, regardless of what happens in the aftermath.

Defending her speech

Having dismantled the perceived power of men's words and social codes, we proceed to the next items on the slide list: details of Guenevere's face and Michal's speech. On the back of the canvas, Morris desperately wrote, 'I cannot paint you, but I love you.'[59] The fact that she later left him a number of times for Rossetti and probably only ever married him to relieve herself of working-class drudgery (she claimed never to have loved him) makes this note of unrequited love all the more heart-breaking to the historian. Rossetti's drawing of her (fig. 1), produced three years later, attests to his greater skill in depicting her but also informs the profile we have before us. She does not confront the viewer with a direct stare but focuses on her reflection in the mirror. Feminist critics have explored how this introspective motif resists ownership by the male gaze,[60] and thinking for a moment about the model it also reflects something of Jane's independence from the painter's passions. Posing as Guenevere, her sombre face and pointed lips indicate inner defiance. In this morning-after moment, she looks herself up and down, possibly wondering what she was thinking,

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[58] F. Crüseman, 'Zwei alttestamentliche Witze. I Sam 21: 11-15 und II Sam 6:16, 20-23, *ZAW* 92 (1980), 223-27. Cf. McCarter, 188.
[59] Christian, 170.
[60] See especially J.B. Bullen's discussion of Rossetti in *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Oxford, 1998), Chapters I and II.

or contemplating what she will say should she be found out. Her stare directs the viewer again to her poetic defence.

Figure 1. Study for *The Seed of David*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1861
Reprinted from Surtees, no. 143

Like Michal, Guenevere goes against what men would have her say and throws their false propriety back at them:

> God wot I ought to say, I have done ill,
> And pray you all forgiveness heartily!
> Because you must be right, such great lords…

She describes the impossibility of being able to see how her love for Launcelot could really violate divine will. She challenges her jurors to imagine themselves on the day of their death being made to choose when an angel whispers: 'One of these cloths is heaven, and one is hell'. They need to pick one, but 'No man [can] tell the better of the two.' Blue does not turn out to be 'heaven's colour', but hell's, so Guenevere

illustrates it is sometimes impossible to determine which is which. Morris vindicates her crisis by allowing her to swear by her truth:

> Nevertheless you, O Sir Gawaine, lie,
> Whatever may have happened through these years,
> God knows I speak truth, saying that you lie.[61]

Morris's rendering of Guenevere's face is sympathetic and gently sermonic. It contains an intelligent determination, while the isolation it evokes suggests her as tragic sacrifice in a series of systems clashing within her world. In her conflict with men, God, and religious doctrine, she is nothing short of a martyr if not an icon for Morris.

Morris gives Guenevere more of a defence than the Deuteronimist gives Michal. But is it not significant that Michal is allowed to speak at all, and does her one line in her last act not say a great deal? Rather than take Exum's view that the 'narrator…allow[s] her no reply to David and no further speech',[62] we will accept that Michal's speech should be read as a form of biblical shorthand. Like Guenevere's three-quarter profile, it is a view into more of what she might be thinking and more of what she has already said.

The Hebrew of v. 20b is compressed enough to have spawned a small variety of translations:

מה־נכבד היום מלך ישראל אשר נגלה היום
לעיני אמהות עבדיו כהגלות נגלות אחד הרקים

Smith and Ackroyd maintain the reverberating effect נכבד has in relation to the כבד that has made its way to Jerusalem in the ark; 'glorified himself' would preserve the verbal sense that is lost in Ackroyd's 'glorious' day and Smith's 'glorious' kingdom. The *Revised Standard Version* here has, 'How the king…has honoured himself',

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[61] 'Defence of Guenevere', 23.
[62] Exum, 34.

while other versions opt for 'distinguished'. Though Hammond (1992) has shown translations in the *Revised English Bible* to be more prudish than those in the earlier *Authorised Version*,[63] modern translators tend to capture the explicit sense that David has 'exposed' himself by 'uncovering' himself. Appropriating language from such sources, I propose translating Michal's line as follows: 'How the king of Israel glorified himself today, when he exposed himself today before the slave girls of his servants, disrobing like some vulgar dancer!'

McCarter's choice to have David 'flaunting himself before the eyes of his servants' wenches like some dancer!' adds a connotation perhaps more stinging than if David is just dancing as a 'fellow' (RSV and NIV) or 'as riffraff' (Anderson). The dancer has cultic and sexual implications, as it does in particular niches of Modern art. Michal knows that while he has been dancing about with no shirt on David has thought about sexual encounters with the slave girls, and she lets him know he is acting like a temple stripper. In order to retain the echoing of 'exposed' and 'disrobing', I lose the sense of flaunting found in McCarter but which I attempt to reintroduce in the image of the vulgar dancer undressing. McCarter's choice of the dancer image is particularly strong script-wise, as it elicits David's melodramatic response (close-up on his conviction): 'In [YHWH's] presence, I *am* a dancer!' (italics McCarter's).

Before proving the authority of David's reprisal, Fokkelman commends Michal's speech as 'one long, well-formed period which administers in three clauses the selfsame number of lashes.'[64] The 'systematic selection of niph'al forms creates [an] effective alliteration of *nikbad…niglā…niglōt*'; she 'reinforces [her] point' through 'a unique combination of construct infinitives plus absolute in the simile';

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[63] The *AV*'s Michal taunts the king, 'who uncovered himself', whereas the *NEB* more coyly puts it: '[he] made an exhibition of himself'.
[64] Fokkelman, 199.

and her trio of subjects consists of people who 'decrease in merit' with each mention (king, slave girl, vulgar fool). [65]

Like Guenevere, Michal speaks in her own voice, but where Guenevere addresses Gawaine and the court in the second person, Michal will not deign to be so direct. She calls David's bluff by speaking of him in the third person. Instead she speaks removedly: 'How the king of Israel has glorified himself today'. Having the disadvantage in this case of coming first, Michal knows David will not be able to resist something excessive in reply. She aims and hits the heart of the king's ego.

By calling him 'king' she parallels the narrator's designation of him in v. 16, but her use of 'king of Israel' as opposed to the narrator's 'King David' shows her to target a specific element of his kingship. Mocking the king of Israel, Michal does more than comment on royal etiquette: she alludes to the people in the north who remain unconvinced by his succession; she refers back to Jacob, the Israel without a king; and she designates David as a trivial figure on the world stage by possibly implying the smallness of Israel in relation to other nations. David calls himself 'prince', proving to some that he has a humbler perception of his royal status, but Michal's invective confirms that he certainly thinks of himself as a king.

The Chronicler omits Michal's speech from the accounts of the day's events in 1 Chronicles 15-17. This is one way to suppress a disruptive voice. The Deuteronomistic redactor and Morris, however, let their women speak. Michal is not initially silent at all, though by speaking out she is subsequently silenced by someone louder and more powerful. Women assert power through their speech, but when they do not speak, do we need to say that they have been deprived of their autonomy? Esther, another biblical queen who uses men's words against them, after all uses

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[65] *Ibid.*

silence to great effect. The men in her life attempt to write women out of power, but for a variety of reasons, including the instability of language itself, their plans backfire. It is by written decrees that Haman attempts the massacre of the Jews, who themselves are defined by having different laws (Esther 3.8), but the man's dependence on language to secure his authority does not ultimately sustain him. Esther on the other hand is silent in her ascent in the harem and silent to the king about how the humiliated Haman ended up at her feet.[66] So it is not just through ordering the writing of laws that she revokes Haman's plans but through choosing when to keep her mouth shut that she is able to exercise her autonomy and secure the future of her people.

Let us apply this positive assessment of silence to Michal and Guenevere. Guenevere's shut lips in the painting speak no words in the quiet morning room. If Michal said anything else to David that day, it has not been recorded here.[67] But rather than think that David leaves Michal speechless, can we not imagine her silence as a matter of her own choice? By resisting any further discussion, she foregoes a graceless palaver and maintains her dignity. The writer preserves her words, which impart a prophetic critique on overabundance in the adoration of kings. Her refusal to reply to David's overblown retort, alongside Guenevere's silence in the painting and testimony in the poem, becomes an image of wise restraint.

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[66] Had she explained that Haman was not in fact 'assaulting the queen in [his] presence' (7:8), perhaps he would not have been sent to the gallows and could have posed a future threat.

[67] The staircase parallelism indicates that the dialogue in 2 Sam. 6 was written as a discrete unit.

Towards her truer self

Other details in the painting and text lead towards a greater sympathy with our two queens—details that clarify the royal nature of the sitter. Michal's aristocratic position is defined through her repeated designation as the daughter of Saul. Guenevere wears a similar crown of thorns, a pretend crown made from holly and rosemary. Though it signifies her infidelity (presumably either she or Launcelot made it the night before), it also marks her as a queen of passion; the adulteress is a mock-Gothic Jesus crowned before Pontius Pilate. Michal's crown of thorns is woven from her roots in her father's house and the strands of criticism that entangle her in a web of 'pagan' overtones.

Though D. Harvey proposed that Michal objected to the Canaanite flavour of the celebrations, her actions in 1 Sam. 19 have implicated her in an offence against orthodox Yahwism.[68] Clines cites three interpretations in 'Michal Observed: An Introduction' that do no honour to her religious character:

> For her there were no pious and affectionate feelings at the return of the Ark to Zion. Like her father, Saul, she had no regard for the Ark of God.[69]

> As a Jewess, she had, perhaps, prayed to the Covenant God. But we know that she persevered in idolatrous practices from the fact that she kept an image in her house. Hence she was not in the least affected by the fact that the ark of God was returning to Moriah.[70]

> [A] woman of Michal's character could not but act like an icicle on the spiritual life of the household. She belonged to a class that cannot tolerate enthusiasm in religion.[71]

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[68] Clines lists Harvey's remark about the Canaanite dancing: 'she is just a stringent Yahwist who cannot abide Canaanite practices.' D. Harvey, 'Michal', in George Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, 1962), 373; cf. Clines, 54.

[69] Herbert Lockyer, 'The Woman who Tricked her Father', in *The Women Who Wrote the Bible* (London, 1967), 110; cf. Clines, 54.

[70] Abraham Kuyper, *The Women of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1933), 110-11.

[71] W.G. Blaikie, 'Michal in the Books of Samuel', in *The Second Book of Samuel* (London, 1898), 96.

In the first and last instance, the author makes an unconscious link between impious behaviour and aristocratic status. In the Kuyper passage, she is religiously disaffected because she has idols, despite the fact that she is a Jew (an anachronistic misnomer). Her cloudy religious practice shuts her off from true faith, for she is too uptight a princess to love YHWH truly. McCarter's synopsis may seem innocuous enough: 'She appears here as a mature and haughty aristocrat, openly contemptuous of her royal husband.'[72] But it buys into Blaikie's icicle theory when it could have carved a proud bust, not out of ice but of bronze or clay. These readers project their own perceptions of royal behaviour onto the sitter and would be advised to read Clines, who questions 'whether there was a lot of aristocratic hauteur around at the rustic court of King Saul'.[73]

As the daughter of Saul, Michal's royal lineage has only a short tree. Crowned twice as David's wife, she has little reason to feel loyal in her heart to either house. Both her father's and husband's nobility proved themselves to be bad jokes. To explain that Michal regards her husband 'as simple, as a boor, as one who may have taken up the reigns of government but not the grandeur of kingship',[74] assumes that she has a deep sense of her aristocratic heritage which is unlikely to have been the case in the first days of the monarchy in Israel. Saul after all had no hall lined with portraits of titled ancestors. So Steinsalz's appraisal of Michal's turned-up nose also overstates the class distinction.[75] Her heritage is rather a point of empathy. We want this daughter of Saul, the mad king, and this wife of David, the cocky king, finally to vent the anger she has built up over her futile relationship with the crown.

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[72] McCarter, 188.
[73] Clines, 138.
[74] Steinsalz, 150.
[75] *Ibid.*

Guenevere's crown, we remember, is made from holly and rosemary. Holly's festive connotations originate in the Roman Saturnalia and old Teutonic customs, and it is considered unlucky in the house before Christmas. The entry for Rosemary in *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* includes Ophelia's famous identification of the herb as 'for remembrance' and continues with some relevant qualities, including the advice of the seventeenth-century apothecary Nicholas Culpeper:

> 'It quickens a weak memory, and the senses.' As HUNGRY WATER, it was once extensively taken to quiet the nerves. It was much used in weddings, and to wear rosemary in ancient times was as significant of a wedding as to wear a white favour… In the language of FLOWERS it means 'Fidelity in love'.[76]

It is the perfect sprig to have handy on a morning like Guenevere's: it clarifies the senses, calms the nerves, helps her to remember, and assures her of her true marriage to Launcelot. To an orthodox viewer, the holly and rosemary might have lent Guenevere's infidelity a pagan stamp, but Morris clearly asks the viewer to consider her as both faithful and tragic in her love, as one despised and rejected like Christ.

If Guenevere's pagan halo symbolizes the paradox of her role as an adulterous pagan queen and a remembering, faithful heroine, Michal's family name and her religion pose a similar dichotomy. As we have shown, Michal's opponents often assume Michal to have inferior religious sensibilities to those of David. And Kuyper once insisted, the *teraphim* she conceals in her bed in 1 Sam. 19 expose her to be a lax or syncretistic Yahwist.[77] But David is an accomplice in the harbouring of these idols (and he tended to dance like a Canaanite), a fact Blaikie makes haste to strike from the record of the case against him: 'It is impossible to suppose that David could have either used, or countenanced the use of these images. God was too much of a spiritual

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[76] Cobham E. Brewer, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (London:, 1963), 967.
[77] Kuyper, 111.

reality to him to allow such material media of worship to be even thought of.'[78] Blaikie's anti-material interpretation of a man and a culture that sacrificed regularly obviously does not bear enough historical weight to speak for what David might have 'countenanced'.

Michal's ancestor, Rachel, kept *teraphim* hidden in her saddle in order to dupe her father and save her husband, but this has been no source of derision for her. Rachel's cover for why she cannot dismount from her camel employs an excuse only a woman can use: 'Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me' (Gen. 31.35b). She thus emasculates her father in order to facilitate a trick in which she has conspired with her more masculine husband, and this amuses the reader.

Michal's *teraphim* are not intended to and do not need to denigrate her religious character. Rather, they are key components in a program that shows her to be wise and more aware than the men around her. Michal's ingenuity with the *teraphim* is strategic and entertaining; it proves the men in her life are either easily substituted by idols and goat's hair, or capable of believing a contraption of them could be a man. Her intelligence also aligns her with Esther, who again has been described as wise in her ability to isolate and manipulate the foolishness in men.[79] When men are unto their own selves being true, women are using what is at hand to show their lords to be fools. Michal's idolatry can curiously incite empathy, like Guenevere's crown of saturnalian and superstitious boughs. A pagan identity in Samuel and in Morris is likewise a passport to the realm of the reader's compassion.

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[78] Blaikie, 95.
[79] Niditch illustrates how Esther, like Joseph and Daniel, embodies wisdom values, for 'the wisdom hero alters status via the careful, judicious exercise of God-given gifts.' Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Folklore* (San Francisco, 1987), 149.

Battles of the sexes

We return to the slides of our full text and painting and ask if there is more to learn about our true heroines. Is there a second self beneath the surface? A second sex? Have we missed any details that might problematize our portraits?

Guenevere draws her belt together and directs our attention to her sexual encounter with Launcelot. In Malory's text, 'Guenever' does not have a trial but is to be 'bernt' at the stake at once. In Tennyson's 'Morte d'Arthur' (1833), a truly repentant 'Guinevere' begs for forgiveness and no longer desires Launcelot. By confronting the viewer with elements that foreground her intimacy with Launcelot, by giving Guenevere a speech, and by ignoring any reference Launcelot's monastic career (and the celibacy he thus chooses in Malory), Morris selectively appropriates original Arthurian material and challenges conventional portraits of medieval women subjects.[80] Where Morris depicts Guenevere as a sexual being capable of defending herself, Malory is often bashful on the delicate subject of the sexual act: 'And then, as the French book saith, the queen and Launcelot were together. And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list not hereof make no mention, for love that time was not as is nowadays.'[81] For a moment, Malory sounds nostalgic, as if the love of the past were more innocent, and one wonders if Morris understood Malory in this way and took up an idealised view of the past as well. But Malory has only suggested that the past was different from the present, and he asks the reader not to

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[80] More conventional representations of medieval subjects can be seen in the work of Watts, Dyce, Hughes, and Wallace. Elizabeth Prettejohn explores the different treatments that occur in the work of women such as Joanna Boyce and Elizabeth Siddall in *The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (London, 2000).
[81] Thomas Malory, *Le Morte D'Arthur*, Book XX:III, vol. 2 (Everyman edition ; London: 1906), 342.

judge the affair from contemporary perspectives that might condemn the adultery without historical sensitivity.

When Guenevere puts on her belt, she prepares herself for battle. If her words are her weapons, her belt might be the only armour with which she can ply herself. Men compete for her favour and fight for her honour, but only in Morris does she fight in her own defence. Both Morris and Malory, however, depict a world of competition in which women are not merely fought for but are seen competing with one another. In 'King Arthur's Tomb', Guenevere hides her tears as she hears the 'tittering whispers' among the maids, who hush their chatter on the grounds that 'This tigress fair has claws'.[82] Morris's heroine is known to scratch those who slight her relationship with Launcelot.

More brutally, there is gossip that 'the poor knight' Launcelot has been the victim of her scratches: 'Why met he not with Iseult from the West? / Or better still, Iseult of Brittany?'[83] Guenevere does not simply have to be vigilant in maintaining her maidens' respect, she has to compete with other queens for the love of Launcelot. One verse towards the end of the poem remembers the sound of the 'clanging of arms about pavilions fair' when men would fight in their names:

> 'Iseult!' – again – the pieces of each spear
> Fly fathoms up, and both the great steeds reel;
> 'Tristram for Iseult!' 'Iseult!' and 'Guenevere!'
> The ladies' names bite verily like steel.[84]

Morris's Guenevere does not express direct contempt or show rivalry for Iseult, but in the whispers and at the fairground, they are placed in opposition nonetheless. Malory includes an insightful anecdote that suggests a Guenever who is unsettled by all the talk:

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[82] Morris, 'King Arthur's Tomb', 42.
[83] The maid also says Launcelot might be best off 'ladyless'. *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid.*, 44.

> How doth Sir Tristram, said the queen, and La Belle Isoud? Truly, said those two knights, he doth as a noble night should do; and as for the Queen Isoud, she is peerless of all ladies; for to speak of her beauty, bounte, and mirth, and of her goodness, we saw never her match as far as we have ridden and gone. O mercy Jesu, said Queen Guenever, so saith all the people that have seen her and spoken to her.[85]

Versed in their Tennyson and mourning the demise of the 'highest type of woman' he would elegise in *Idylls of the King* (1859), Morris's more conservative readers would have understood Guenevere as an adulteress. The Divorce Act of 1857 triggered anxieties over a growing body of single women, who could steal other women's husbands or end up in the brothels, so 'the Victorian fascination with subjects both morbid and sentimental' meant they would find a literary role model in Elaine and a scapegoat in Guenevere. Middle-class readers preferred the 'flower garden' to the 'wild flower'.[86] The significance of all of this for Michal's portrait lies in the light it sheds on Michal's relationship to the women in her court. Michal is not a garden girl but the wild flower, and her competition with other women contributes to a conflict in which she disarms the man's honourable image. Michal does not just have to compete with Abigail and his other preferred wives, she has the concubines and now the servants' slave girls to contend with. If Guenevere's belt may be linked to her sexual competition with women, perhaps Michal's sexual nature deserves closer attention so that we can better understand how she fights.

Michal may have swooned when she first saw David, but she does not fawn over him now, like a slave girl. David's military prowess was noticed and celebrated by the women who sang, 'Saul has slain his thousands, / and David has slain ten thousand' (1 Sam. 18.7). It is because she is a woman that she is drawn into her

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[85] Malory, Book X:LXXXI; vol. 2, 111.
[86] Christine Poulson, '"The True and the False": Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and the Visual Arts', in Debra Mancoff (ed.), *The Arthurian Revival: Essays on Form, Tradition, and Transformation* (New York, 1992), 98.

father's conflict with David. Her father inflicts his gaze and 'eyes' David after the victory parade (v. 9), and when we learn that Michal loves David (v. 20) we imagine she has also been eyeing him since then. From before the moment we learn she loved him, other women were on hand praising him. By the time she despises David 'in her heart', it becomes clear that 'Her disgust is not aesthetic, it is sexual. She cannot bear to see the man she has loved flaunt himself as sexually available… It is David's "sexual vulgarity" that she is protesting against, certainly; but it is more than that: it is his neglect of her.'[87] Her protest is an attempt to punish him for behaving as though he was available to the lowest of women. Like Guenevere, she must win her battle against other women, so she steps beyond her window to confront her king and the adoring throngs. But whereas Guenevere continues to rely on her lover's good return, Michal fights on her own, 'man to man'. And Guenevere, it turns out, might be something of a false witness in our trial after all.

Years after his death, Morris's wife and daughter insisted that the artist had always called this painting *La Belle Iseult*,[88] a fact which does seem outweighed by earlier records of it listed as *Queen Guenevere* (and by the coterminous poetry) but which does not throw us entirely off track if those records are misleading. Iseult, as many will know, was married to the traitorous King Mark but loved Tristram. The year prior to the painting Morris had attempted another easel painting depicting Tristram's reunion with Iseult's dog, and a few months later had painted a mural of Iseult refusing Palomydes's love. The dog has thus led some to believe this painting

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[87] Clines, 138. Cf. Exum, 25.
[88] Debra Mancoff discusses the confusion around the title, in 'Problems with the Pattern: William Morris's Arthurian Imagery', *Arthuriana* 6.3 (1996), 58-60. Morris never appears to have referred to the painting by any name in his writings.

actually depicts Malory's Isoud, presumably when she contemplates suicide on the false news that Tristram is dead, or afterwards when she is confined to a tower.[89]

In Renaissance painting the dog can sometimes symbolise carnality, but medieval usage usually implies fidelity. So although Iseult is also an adulterous queen she is portrayed as faithful to her true love. Our curtains, book, and window function as they do for Guenevere. She is known to be as competitive as Guenevere, though more desperately she elsewhere sends Tristram 'as piteous letters as could be thought and made,' and she makes 'the greatest dole that ever any earthly woman made'.[90] The Malory legend draws a clear parallel between Isoud and Guenever, with Isoud sending her lady word 'that there be within this land four lovers, that is, Sir Launcelot du Lake and Queen Guenever, and Sir Tristram de Liones and Queen Isoud.'[91] It is a politically astute move on her part, showing them *not* to be in competition and acknowledging Guenevere's true love. It also situates her in a structural unit that could suggest a mutual duality in their natures. In the painting, is Guenevere is looking in the mirror at Isoud or vice versa? Is there something of Guenevere in Isoud—a second self? The dichotomous roles Michal plays—as a daughter and a wife, as a recorded character and a true self—are all at battle with one another. And yet through these conflicting selves she becomes as multivalent as our Pre-Raphaelite heroine—a woman at odds with her other self, a woman who is not what she seems.

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[89] When she heard of the tidings, Isoud 'made such a sorrow that she was nigh out of her mind; and so upon a day she thought to slay herself', she 'pitched' a sword into a plum tree, before Mark prevents her from throwing herself on it. Malory, Book IX:XIX, vol. 1, 329.

[90] Malory, Book IX:X, 314, 325.

[91] There is no telling how Guenevere might have taken that. Book VIII:XXXII, vol. 1, 283.

In D.H. Lawrence's 1926 play *David*, David and Michal share a mutual passion, while Jonathan derides her for being "too much among the men".[92]   In rabbinic literature, Michal is prized for her beauty and credited with having read the sacred texts: she is known to wear *tefillin*, normally only worn by men.[93] Conveniently, her name might be a contracted form of Michael ('who is like God'), providing further grounds for drawing out her masculine and divinely oriented persona. In comparing Michal to her brother, Berlin has offered an illuminating fact: 'the characteristics normally associated with males are attached to Michal, and those usually perceived as feminine are linked with Jonathan.'[94] As the only woman in the Bible to choose her husband, she takes on the man's role.   She is also '…the aggressive and physical one. She saves David by physically lowering him out of a window', whereas 'Jonathan's most physical action is the shooting of the arrows for the pre-arranged signal—hardly a show of strength.'[95] She is also never described in the Bible as beautiful or therefore explicitly 'feminine', keeping her upper lip stiff while Palti follows her weeping, and never bearing a child. Berlin finds the scenario thus 'suggests that Michal never filled a female role, or at least the role that the Bible views as the primary female role.'[96]

Is it really then the case presented by Kapelovitz that 'Jonathan loves David, but sees him clearly' or that David is different from 'the passionate, imprudent

[92] D.H. Lawrence, *David* (first performed in London, 25 March 1926), in Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen (eds.), *The Plays/D.H. Lawrence* (Cambridge, 1999), scene 1, p. 437, line 11. Cf. Abbey Kapelovitz, 'Michal: A Vessel for the Desires of Others', in Clines and Eskenazi, 212.
[93] Tamara Eskenazi, 'Michal in Hebrew Sources', in Clines and Eskenazi, 158. Cf. Louis Ginzberg, 'The Family of David', *Legends of the Jews*, vol. IV (Philadelphia, 1913), 117. The rabbis even invoke Michal as an example of one who studied Torah.
[94] Jonathan has after all been more 'pleasing' and 'more wonderful' to David 'than the love of women' (2 Sam. 1.26). According to Berlin, 'The feelings of love and tenderness that David might have been expected to have for Michal are all reserved for Jonathan.' Adele Berlin, 'Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives', *JSOT* 23 (1982), 70, 71.
[95] *Ibid.*, 71.
[96] *Ibid.*, 72.

Michal'?[97] Michal may be passionate, but she has clearer vision than Jonathan; she does not fall for David's charms, like a woman. If Michal is masculine, she is fighting with her equal. Perhaps, like our Guenevere/Iseult, she even fights with herself.

Could we have the lights?

Bach notes how women can operate as mirrors to David: 'Abigail', for instance, 'holds up the mirror to the son David in [1 Sam. 25], assuring him that he is good'; Michal's 'divided loyalties mirror the difficulties of the reader in deserting Saul and taking up emotional residence with David'; and David's wives are considered by 'alerting our usual chronology of reading with a Lacanian moment of mirroring.' She continues, 'This strategy allows women to reflect one another as whole bodies, and deflects the bits-and-pieces views we get from glimpsing a shard of each woman in the Davidic mirror, where she appears as a distortion of the male image.'[98] When Guenevere looks in the mirror, maybe she sees Iseult, who also mourned her love for a man who was not her husband; maybe she sees herself as Launcelot's wife, as another woman. When Michal looks in the mirror, maybe she sees David.

In our final moment of comparison, we need to imagine Guenevere's reflection in her mirror and the reflections Michal might see of herself in order to posit some psychoanalytic queries that might lend further insight into her love for David and eventual apparent sexlessness. Freud's suggested 'primary narcissism'[99] would impact the work of Lacan, whose mirror theory will help generate a new

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[97] Kapelovitz, 213.

[98] Bach 54, 53, 46. I am not entirely certain what is 'Lacanian' about this process, as the deflection she pursues intends to disintegrate the phallagocentric economy one associates with Lacan and Freud. Also, Lacan's theoretical style is notoriously obscure, but as far as I have understood it the moment at the mirror is restricted to the infancy stage.

[99] Primary narcissism is the unaware self-absorption of the infant in its own body and needs.

conclusion about the king of Israel and the daughter of Saul. Just as some developing

egos seek out father or mother figures, Freud proposes, others will seek a form of

themselves in their partner or child (the narcissistic object choice). The glass into

which Iseult/Guenevere gazes will thus direct us to a form of mirror writing for

Michal—'implying that what is spoken or written is to be accepted in the reverse

sense or turned upside down'.[100] Between David and Michal, surely the king can now

be named the bigger narcissist of the two.[101] David loves God, but he also seems to

love the image of himself as the true love of God and the people.

But it is equally possible that as much as she loathes him, Michal sees herself

in David. David is certainly in some ways like Michal; he is up for a fight and can

choose his words wisely. But her psyche is equally suggested in the attributes the text

ascribes to David in 1 Samuel 16.18: she is skilful in foiling men, a woman of valour,

a woman of war, maybe or maybe not a woman of good presence, but certainly one

who is prudent in speech. She creates her own masculine object when she stuffs the

empty bed with 'an imitation man.'[102] Clines mentions several different examples of

how interpreters have explained Michal's love for David: princess falls for village

boy/war hero; sister loves her brother's friend; urbane court musician catches her eye;

she pities the victim of her dad's madness; etc.,[103] but there is no mention of

narcissistic love. In Michal's reflection, perhaps she grieves when she realises she

cannot possess the object of her desire. In this scenario, Michal seems to have been

thrown into the abysmal awareness that she is like him and can neither possess him

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[100] 'Mirror writing', Brewer, 742.
[101] Kapelovitz discusses the novelist Joseph Heller's treatment of David as a narcissist in Clines and Eskenazi, 221-23.
[102] Bach, 52. If we pushed the psycho-mythology far enough, we might have a Pygmalion complex.
[103] Clines, 32ff.

nor master his space.[104]   And this is certainly as good a reason as any not to have children!

It certainly seems more reasonable at this stage to answer Clines's question in the affirmative: 'Is she not better off to have no child of hers locked in [an] unlovely struggle for the throne, to put no son to the risk of an untimely death at the hands of power-crazed step-brothers?'[105]   Having seen herself in David and registered her lack of control over his libido and her own self, Michal decides to sever herself from a future with David.   As she tells him how he has honoured himself among the sexually available slave girls, she admits to her own loss of ownership and her own possession of self.

Guenevere's introspection does not indicate a retreat into sensation, as Henry James once accused Burne-Jones's women, for her meaning does not arise through the indulgence of our sensations in the painterly details.   Instead, the contemplation of her face and surroundings proves that there is much more to her case than the given details can contain.   Guenevere/Iseult looks into the mirror and sees a beauty that is faithful to love above marriage.   The Michal we see in the window, looking into her reflection in David, might see a queen who is faithful to God above king.   Each crown we have considered has shown our queens to be conflicted but imbued with dignity in their self-awareness, integrity in speech, and honour in destiny.   What God actually thinks is left an unanswered question, but the women who empower themselves through speech that prophesies against the worship of kings play critical roles in their respective narrative theologies.   How Michal the daughter of Saul has glorified herself today, indeed—robing herself as a Pre-Rapaelite queen, in the integrity of her defence.

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[104] See Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholy', *Collected Papers*, vol. 4 (Joan Riviere, trans.; New York, 1959), 158.
[105] Clines, 139.

II

EXPRESSIONISM AND THE PATRIARCH

IMAGE

II. *Portrait of Friedrich Nietsche*, Erich Heckel, 1905

Sarah lived for one hundred and twenty-seven years; this was the length of Sarah's life. ² And Sarah died at Kiriath-Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

³ Abraham rose up from beside his dead and said to the sons of Heth, ⁴'I am a stranger and an alien residing among you. Grant me property among you for a burying-place, in order that I may bury my dead out of my sight.' ⁵ The sons of Heth answered Abraham, ⁶ 'Hear us, my lord; you are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of burial places; none of us will withhold from you any burial ground for burying your dead.' ⁷ Abraham rose and bowed to the sons of Heth, the people of the land. ⁸ He said to them, 'If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat for me Ephron son of Zohar, ⁹ so that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as a possession for a burying-place.' ¹⁰Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites. And Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city: ¹¹ 'No, my lord, hear me; I will *give* you the field and give you the cave that is in it. In the presence of my people I *give* it to you. Now bury your dead.' ¹² Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³ He said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, 'If only you would *listen* to me! I will give the price of the field. Accept it from me, so that I may bury my dead there.' ¹⁴Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵ 'My lord, listen to *me*; a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me? Bury your dead!' ¹⁶ Abraham agreed with Ephron; and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

¹⁷ So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, ¹⁸Abraham deeded as a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, in the presence of all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹ After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ The field and the cave that is in it passed from the Hittites into Abraham's possession as a burying-place.

Genesis 23

'THAT I MAY BURY MY DEAD':
MARINE LOVER OF ABRAHAM THE OVERMAN

> The beauty of the legends of Genesis has always delighted sensitive readers. Not accidentally, painters have very often taken the material for their paintings from this book. Scholars have been touched by the beauty of these accounts much less often, probably because the esthetic perspectives frequently do not seem consistent with serious scholarship. We do not share such a prejudice *however*. We think that whoever overlooks the artistic form of these legends not only robs himself of a great pleasure, but cannot completely fulfill *the scholarly task of understanding Genesis*.
> (Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, 1901)[1]

> To think of the sea from afar, to eye her from a distance, to use her to fashion his highest reveries, to weave his dreams of her, and spread his sails while remaining safe[ly] in port, that is the delirium of the sea lover.
> (Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover*, 1991)[2]

Gunkel's very Modern concern for 'the artistic form' of Genesis and very German emphasis on 'the scholarly task of understanding [it]' opens his study with a manifesto that calls scholarship to a higher ground. Attempting sincere and gracious reverence to the text, he looks at a black hole of thinking that cannot fathom intuitive or aesthetic observations as valid. And so he preaches to the elite, the ones inducted into the appreciation of Priestly aesthetics, which he rather unromantically characterises according to its 'juristic precision' and restraint from 'rhetorical embellishment'.[3] A faith in the possibility of that high ideal, 'understanding', drives Gunkel to urge them to overturn their prejudices and allow themselves to be 'touched' by the beauty of Scripture. In a rejection of old-fashioned methods of interpretation

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[1] Hermann Gunkel, 'The Artistry of the Legends of Genesis', in *Genesis* (first published in Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901; trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon, GA, 1997), xxiii.

[2] Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (first published as *Amante marine*, in Paris: Minuit, 1990; trans. Gillian C. Gill; New York, 1991), 51. This translation will henceforth be referenced as *Marine Lover*.

[3] Gunkel, 17 and xxiii. Gunkel adds, 'The modest beauty' of the narratives exists primarily in 'this very calm and meagerness of narrative style'. He exhorts, 'The narratives seem to belong to a different class of people than the fiery prophets', xxiv. His primary observation on the overall literary style: 'they usually totally subordinate characterization to action', xxxiv.

(source criticism), he makes it his mission to carve up Genesis into the smallest of parts.

The focus on what I call an 'early Modern' adherence to representation annexes this chapter with the previous comparison. Where Morris's portrait produced a positive counterpart for a biblical queen, here we turn to a portrait of a patriarch. But the style in which we will envision Genesis 23 steps closer to abstraction than the Pre-Raphaelite's sympathetic attention to detail.[4] In its place a German Expressionist's woodcut (*Holzschnitt*) exudes a 'Priestly' chapter's archaic manner— carving a portrait of a founding father, revering him and offering present and future generations a lifeline to him and his heritage. The print, an homage to Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), furnishes us with an image with which to picture Abraham, in black and white, and reverts to an older way of representation. Produced five years after the radical Modern prophet died, the likeness memorialises an indomitable forefather in order to resist the erosion of memory. Much interpretation of Abraham has left little grey areas as far as his grief for Sarah and dignified composure with the Hittites are concerned. He is almost never the sinner and always the saint.

But looking at the black and white rendering of Abraham as a kind of higher man allows us to reconstruct the text for its inherent polarities and complex gender politics, and for the evidence it gives of the ancient and the Modern desire to keep the female body at a distance. In this medium the text can be addressed with an eye for irony and the 'white space' of the print, that is Sarah's space, the portion of the text that got carved away and buried in the cave at Machpelah. The juxtaposition of woodcut and text imprints the impression that the only woman Abraham loves is

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[4] Reinhold Heller distinguishes the two groups on the basis of their attitude to the academies: 'Although the Pre-Raphaelite's practices mirror aspects of the Brücke's efforts at utopian form [and naturalism]… the English artists did not seek to function as an alternative to existing art institutions.' Reinhold Heller, 'Bridge to Utopia: The Brücke as Utopian Experience', in Timothy O. Benson (ed.), *Expressionist Utopias: Paradise, Metropolis, Architectural Fantasy* (Berkeley, 2001), 67.

eternity. It creates a scandal by posing Abraham as an *Übermensch* and aligning him with Nietzsche, who would seem to many to be his natural enemy. And it brings to light the edge that underscores his interaction with the Hittites, for he seems caught up in a Kafkaesque labyrinth of exchange in which no one can stop talking. Presenting Abraham as an over-living man helps however to appreciate the aesthetics of his heightened portrayal in the text and in people's receptions of it. Abraham does not take death sitting down but rather 'lives over' his tragedy, immersing himself immediately in a process of exchange and possession. Within the 'black space' of this pressed image we encounter the presence of Sarah via Luce Irigaray's discursive dialogue with Nietzsche. This undressing of the over-powered patriarch ends by addressing his (and Israel's) subconscious relationship to Sarah and the cave, offering psychoanalytic explanations for his reaction to the textual matricide.

Abraham by the book

When Sarah dies in Genesis 23, Abraham mourns his dead and quickly tends to the arrangements for her burial. Because the belaboured negotiations with the Hittites for her plot dominate so much of the passage, the majority of commentary relating to it concerns either how necessary it is for Abraham to lay claim to a piece of the promised land or how like or unlike the transactions are to either Babylonian or Assyrian practices.[5]

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[5] Westermann notes that it was Wellhausen who first proposed that with the burial plot Abraham 'acquired a legal claim to the land'. He considers Gen. 23 to be a part of the 'Abraham narrative in P', to be read between Gen. 17 and 28, and he suggests origins in an exilic community that required a site on which to bury 'their dead'; in Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary* (first published in Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner, 1974; trans. John J. Scullion; London, 1985), 376ff. Speiser claimed the 'current merchant's rate' and other technicalities prove the passage's origins to be older than the time of J, as they resemble those in Old Babylonian legal documents and the Eshnunna Laws, in E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* (New York, 1964), 173. Petschow however determined a later affinity to neo-Babylonian sale documents, in 'Die neubabylonische Zwiegesprichsurkunde und Genesis 23', *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 19 (1965), 103-20. In 1953, Manfred Lehmann related the customs of exchange

After rising from before his wife's corpse (v. 3), the father of nations says to the sons of Heth:[6] 'I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight' (v. 4). He refuses the offer of a tomb for anything less than the full price in order to put his wife's body in a cave and to possess that space and its surrounding field at Machpelah.

Gunkel might have insisted P's unconcern with 'such personal emotions' means the chapter records ritual rather than feeling,[7] but Gordon Wenham imagines that Abraham did indeed 'carry out traditional mourning customs, such as rending his garments, disheveling [*sic*] his hair, cutting his beard, scattering dust on his head, and fasting'[8]—all of which husbands are said to do in Leviticus 21.5 and 10, and some of which David does in 2 Samuel 1.11. And he concludes that the performance of these rituals ultimately prove the sincerity and depth of Abraham's grief:

> From the way her husband treated her sometimes, one might wonder whether he really cared about his wife at all. Was he not most interested in preserving his own skin, and sometimes in serving God? The stories of the expulsion of Ishmael and the sacrifice of Isaac highlighted Abraham's deep affection for his sons. So this story makes plain Abraham's sincere love for Sarah and the honor he bestowed on her.[9]

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to Hittite law, in 'Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law', *BASOR* 129 (1953), 15-18, while Gene M. Tucker took a broader view that the legal forms reflect influence of many periods and cultures, in 'The Legal Background of Genesis 23', in *JBL* 85:1 (March 1966), 77-84. Westbrook dispensed with comparisons to 'double-transfers' in other ANE documents and argued that Abraham, the Hittites and Ephron constitute a three-party arrangement more similar to 'mid-second-millennium practice at Ugarit, Boghazköi, Mesopotamia and Elam', in Raymond Westbrook, 'Purchase of the Cave at Machpelah', *Israel Law Review* 6 (1971), 29-38. Thus, in documentary-minded circles, a dispute has been waged over whether P is responsible for the whole chapter or just the formulaic verses which frame it.

[6] I use the literal translation of the compound to draw attention to the patriarchal system of representation and to link these landowners with their ancestor in Gen. 10.15. The historic Hittite settlers are anachronisms in this story, so reversion to this later term occurs for purely stylistic reasons, and to emphasize Abraham's status as a dependent foreigner.

[7] 'P is not concerned with such personal emotions', Gunkel, 270.

[8] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Dallas, 1994), 126.

[9] *Ibid.,* 129-30.

Wenham's logic offers an easy route towards establishing sympathy for his protagonist, whose heart apparently knew nothing but love.

In contrast to Abraham's reverential behaviour, Wenham finds the Hittites' graciousness within the overly polite exchange merely reflects what he uncomfortably calls 'typical oriental exaggeration', indicating that Ephron's offer to give Abraham the cave for free might be nothing more than ritual courtesy.[10] In keeping with traditions that uphold Abraham as a model of faith (and as one who had good reason to be suspicious of gratuitousness from strangers),[11] twentieth-century criticism surrounding the chapter that follows the near sacrifice of his son has continued to make a hero out of him. As the master negotiator and venerated widower-patriarch he fulfils his duty to provide a legacy for his descendants. Julian Morgentern's 'Jewish Interpretation' in 1919 is thus headed with a verse from Proverbs ('The memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing' [10:7]) to introduce his pious approach.[12] Morgenstern's inclusion of rabbinic legends to prove the death of Sarah took the light out of Abraham's Sabbath indicates his untroubled understanding of their relationship. Nahum Sarna's 1966 commentary classifies the passage as one concerned with 'Winding up Affairs'—the preservation of which 'reflects great respect for the dead'.[13] A year later, Derek Kidner emphasised again the faithful

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[10] *Ibid.*, 126. Wenham may have inherited such Occidental near-sightedness from Gunkel, who wrote: 'The expansiveness of this whole negotiation is not unusual for the Oriental, who has more time than we do, but is quite natural. In addition, the P account manifests the comfort of this priest-jurist who can let himself go here in an area with which he is well acquainted', in Gunkel, 270. Equally uncomfortable to our ears is his equation of Abraham's persistence in vv. 12-13 with his 'Jewish tenacity', 271. Does this not constitute the Modern critic's primitivization of 'Orientals' as others?

[11] As Louis Ginzberg phrases the rabbinic retelling of the showdown between the untrustworthy Hittite and 'Abraham's unassuming modesty': 'Dissembling deceitfully, Ephron then offered to give Abraham the field without compensation…'; in Louis Ginzberg, 'The Death and Burial of Sarah', in *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. I (Philadelphia, 1909), 288, 289-90.

[12] The second epigram for this section is from 2 Samuel 19:1-5, implying Abraham would have given his life for his wife, just as David wept over Absalom. Julian Morgenstern, *The Book of Genesis: A Jewish Interpretation* (Cincinnati, 1919).

[13] Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York, 1966), 170.

example the chapter sets before us: '"These all died in faith." The importance of the chapter lies in this.'[14]

Additional criticism calls attention to Abraham's foreign status (rarely if ever recognising the Hittites as foreigners in the land themselves) and stresses the alien's need to gain a legal foothold in the land of Canaan.[15] Speiser describes Abraham as a tenuously settled sojourner with no established rights to the land, saying he 'lacked the normal privileges of a citizen' and realized the burial would require an irrevocable solution: 'The living could get by as sojourners, but the dead would require a permanent resting ground.'[16] But it is more than access to a perpetual crypt that is at stake, for as Clare Amos has more recently commented, 'the purchase of Sarah's tomb will be in effect a down-payment on [God's] promise.'[17] The chapter thus functions as a critical event in the development of 'The Theme of the Pentateuch', which is of course the fulfilment of the promises of land made to the patriarchs.[18]

The passage records a beleaboured transaction that tests Abraham's patience; exasperated, he pleads, 'If only you would *listen* to me (v. 13)!'[19] On the one hand the repetitive volley between Abraham and the Hittites seems intended to demarcate the two sides very clearly. Well-mannered as it is, the action is essentially a showdown between the protagonist and the foreigner, and each reply is like a rebuttal in a highly restrained but intense debate. But on the other hand, by Abraham's own admission *he* is the foreigner, while the Hittites are the native landowners who hold the power to change his situation. So there is what might be described as a Modern abrasiveness to the patriarch's interaction with them, a diffident fervour to claim the

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[14] Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (London, 1967), 145.
[15] Robert Davidson is one of many scholars to have highlighted the patriarch's precarious outsider position; in *Genesis 12-50* (Cambridge, 1979).
[16] Speiser, 170-72.
[17] Clare Amos, *The Book of Genesis* (Peterborough, 2004), 132.
[18] See David J.A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch,* JSOTS 10 (Sheffield, 1978).
[19] I modify slightly the *NRSV*'s 'If only you *will* listen to me!'

land as his/the nation's own. The scene is set in Canaan, with no mention of the Canaanites, the absent but original natives. Within these paradoxes surfaces an anxiety concerning the rightful ownership of this land at Hebron. God is conspicuously absent in the chapter (uninterested after the Akedah?) and leaves a void in which Abraham is left to fend for himself. When Sarah dies, God also withdraws.

Esteemed as a 'lord' and a 'mighty prince' by the Hittites (vv. 6, 11, 15), Abraham refrains from using such terms of respect for them. The common assumption has therefore been that the text upholds Abraham as a man of nobility, who with dignified reverence does honour to the matriarch and to God's promise. Tammi Schneider recently concludes that the trauma on Mount Moriah seems to have resulted in 'a change in Abraham' that 'possibly…caused him suddenly to understand (Sarah's) importance'.[20] But the change is not restricted to matters of mourning. Rather, Abraham's actions have proven him to be 'a savvy player… [who] never fails to come out well in a deal', and the 'personal impact' of the public rituals remain elusive.[21] Schneider clarifies that the grief and love one assumes to be the widower's primary emotions appear in fact to be of secondary importance in the narrative: 'Clearly neither Sarah, nor her death, nor the ramifications of her passing are the major focus of the chapter.'[22] They are repressed within the recesses of the portrait of the patriarch.

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[20] Tammi Schneider, *Sarah: Mother of Nations* (New York, 2004), 118.
[21] *Ibid.,* 116.
[22] *Ibid.,* 117.

'R.I.P.' with a sigh of relief?

So Sarah lived 127 years, a number the Mishna claims indicates her great age, beauty and, perhaps most importantly, her blamelessness.[23] Although the mention of her age and description of her husband mourning for her are unique,[24] the space given to Abraham's tears amounts to only half a verse. His competitive conversation with the men around him speedily overshadows his fleeting grief, and his repeated need to possess and to bury his dead out of his sight reveals his anxiety over the situation. Sarah's 127 years are over, and he makes haste to move on.

Deborah Sawyer creates a framework within which Sarah's passing can be understood to have been met with a sigh of relief. She revisits Abraham's story with an eye for how his authority and masculinity are consistently undermined: God removes him from his father's house in Ur and threatens to annihilate his patriarchal power by demanding Isaac's life, while Sarah poses as his sister (thus evading her role as his wife), becomes the temporary property of foreign kings, wields complete control over the Hagar situation, and of course laughs at the thought that her withered old husband could still give her pleasure.[25] In relation to God and the promise of

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[23] These are the attributes associated with the numbers 100, 20 and 7; Wenham, 125. Ginzberg summarises tales of her piety in aiding her husband and in converting women: 'While he exhorted the men and sought to convert them, Sarah addressed herself to the women. She was a helpmeet worthy of Abraham. Indeed, in prophetical powers she ranked higher than her husband. She was sometimes called Iscah, 'the seer,' on that account'; Ginzberg, 203. In the suggestion of Sarah's visionary qualities, Savina J. Teubal's article, 'Sarah and Hagar: Matriarchs and Visionaries', also warrants a mention. She argues both women to be vestiges of pre-patriarchal culture in which they function in 'the established role of Mesopotamian priestesses', in Athalya Brenner (ed.)*., A Feminist Companion to Genesis* (Sheffield, 1993), 235; reprinted from Savina Teubal, *Hagar the Egyptian: The Lost Traditions of the Matriarchs* (first published in San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962; reprinted 1990), 191-200. Teubel however associates Sarah 'with the voice and hearing' in contrast to Hagar's visionary encounters', 236.

[24] 'Sarah is the only patriarch's wife whose date of death is recorded', *ibid*.

[25] Deborah Sawyer, 'Biblical Gender Strategies: The Case of Abraham's Masculinity', in Ursula King and Tina Beattie (eds.), *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives,* (London, 2004), 166ff. Sawyer articulates, 'Although male power is clearly evident in human affairs, supported by social and political legislation, in the face of God male power is emasculated', while on the previous

progeny, Abraham is little more than 'a dependent child', without any autonomy over the regulation of his own life choices, 'even in terms of his marital relationship and the survival of his own offspring.'[26] Just as I have questioned David's public display of grief over Jonathan and Saul, so do I place Abraham's mildly manic preoccupation with securing a dwelling place for his wife's corpse as a tension in the text. For he jumps at the opportunity to bury her and thus effectively pursues an aggressive course of action to suppress her presence.

Abraham's identification of himself to the Hittites as 'a stranger and a sojourner' (v. 4) partly indicates his dependency on them, but his assertion of difference can also be reckoned to be a critical turning point in a journey the patriarch makes from a dependent emasculated figure to a more fully empowered male, whose stability typically relies on the exclusion and containment of others. Despite all of the clamouring on about how important the matriarch is to Abraham and her tomb is to Israel's rights to the land, ch. 23 participates fully within the patriarchal system, a system the feminist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray has defined as 'an exclusive respect for the genealogy of sons and fathers, and the competition between brothers'.[27] In order to dismantle the illusory nature of Abraham's masculine self and the patriarchal order it attempts to ingrain as fixed and eternal, we will explore the boundaries of his gendered identity via a stark Modern image that reflects how criticism and tradition have fashioned Abraham to be the apotheosis of Israel's manly duty.

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page she shows Sarah's mocking reference to her 'moisture' (Gen. 18.12) to fit within this subversive program, 170, 169.

[26] *Ibid.,* 170.

[27] Luce Irigaray, *Sexes et parentes* (Paris: Minuit, 1987), 202. Cf. Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London, 1991), 173.

A bridge from one man to another

If Gen. 22 validated Abraham for his unflinching focus on his divine master, and if his new role as a suffering widower-wanderer recapitulates his reputation as the archetypal God-fearing loner, then Abraham does live up to both his names (Abram, אברם, 'exalted', and Abraham, אברהמ, 'father of a multitude') and functions as the ancestor of a modern tribe of solitary supermen, as one whose mission to possess and to create his own values meant he consigned women's bodies to places of rest. The legends have it that his greatness was predicted in an astonishingly bright and hungry star (it swallows four others) when astrologers foretold of Terah's child: he 'will grow up and be fruitful, and he will multiply and possess all the earth … and he and his seed will slay great kings and inherit their lands.'[28] They even tell of Abraham being made 'king over the whole world' and having his and Sarah's faces on the currency,[29] but it is midrash's general glorification of Abraham that helps colour him as the kind of superman we have in mind.

In 1905, the Dresden artists who named themselves the *Künstlergruppe Brücke* (Artists'-Group Bridge), more commonly known as 'Die Brücke', followed the tide of secession groups that broke away from the traditional academies and state-sponsored patronage. The subjective nature of their aesthetic abstraction marked their Modern independence from the oppressive paternity of academic painting, and in 1906 they declared in an official program: 'we call together all youth… we want to create for ourselves freedom of life and of movement [in opposition to] the long-

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[28] From 'The Star in the East', Ginzberg, 207. The choice of word to express how the descendants 'will inherit' the land is an interesting euphemism for the infiltration.
[29] From 'Abraham Emigrates to Haran', Ginzberg, 206.

established older forces.'[30]   This self-conscious isolation from the older generations certainly bears an uncanny resemblance to that of the itinerant Chaldean, who left his father's house and made his way for Haran (a place named after/before his dead brother?) and then Canaan.   In midrashic legends Abraham is born far away from civilization in a cave to escape Nimrod's decree for male infanticide, he destroys his father's idols, and he sets himself apart as a superior sort of man: 'Abraham was also superior, not only of the impious king Nimrod and his attendants, but also of the pious men of his time, Noah, Shem, Eber, and Asshur.'[31]   In proclaiming his allegiance to his own one God, he established a new religious tradition that projected him into a sphere far higher than that of his father and his peers.

Contemporary cultural critics would frame Expressionism and the reversion to medieval methods and styles as a specifically German visual mode. Thus the work of Die Brücke was unwillingly appropriated into discourses which defined it as the antithesis of anything foreign and in particular anything French,[32] and the German *avant-garde* were branded as proponents of a national style. In an ironic twist of fate, work that was initially lauded as being distinctively German was later labelled by the Nazis as not only anti-*Volk* but as downright degenerate, when they showed paintings and sculptures by the Die Brücke artists in the *Entartente Kunst* (Degenerate Art) exhibition of 1937.

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[30] Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 'Gedrucktes Programm der Künstlergruppe "Brücke"' (1906), trans. Andrea Frey and Janni Müller-Hauck, in 'Programs, Manifestoes, Critical Writings', in Stephanie Barron and Wolf-Dieter Dube, (eds.), *German Expressionism: Art and Society 1909-1923* (London, 1997), 328.

[31] 'Abraham: In the Fiery Furnace', Ginzberg, 201. Ginzberg continues by comparing Abraham to Noah, who 'gave himself no concern whatsoever in the matter of spreading the pure faith of God' and 'was immersed in material pleasures.'

[32] The critic Wilhelm Worringer and the artist-critic Carl Vinnen were among those who led the crusade against international influences on German art. In *Form in the Gothic* (*Formprobleme der Gotik*, 1911-12) Worringer argued that the Gothic style was distinctly German, while Vinnen protested against the National Gallery in Berlin's purchase of Post-Impressionist paintings in *A Protest of German Artists* (*Ein Protest deutscher Künstler,* 1911).

Erich Heckel (1883-1970) and his friend Karl Schmidt-Rottluff met Ernst Ludwig Kirchner and Fritz Bleyl while they were students at Dresden's architectural institute. As the group's administrator, it was Heckel who found their first studio in the former butcher's shop where he and his colleagues would take carving tools of their own and cut out compositions on wood and linoleum printing blocks. When he painted, Heckel frequently applied his colours straight from the tube, preferring their un-modulated force and not wishing his viewers to mix the colours in their minds, the way the Impressionists had intended their pointillism to be perceived.[33] His apparent preference for the bold impact created by the juxtaposition of flat fields of colour, and the stamp of archaic authenticity to which he ascribed the woodcut made printing a preferred choice of medium.[34]

Heckel made his woodcut, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1905), in the same year Matisse, Derain and the other *Fauves* ('savage beasts') scandalised the Salon d'Automne in Paris by their expressive leaps in colour.[35] At 15.7 cm x 11.2 cm, the small devotional image shows the reverence paid by the artist and his colleagues to the philosopher who caused a Modern outrage by preaching on the drive to create as an expression of man's Dionysian vitality. Writing on 'The Influence of Nietzsche', Riccardo Dottori has explained how the self-styled apostate and overturner of all values 'understood art not as mere skill and pleasure, but as the *justification for existence*, perhaps the only authentic legitimation of existence, that legitimation

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[33] Dietmar Elger, *Expressionism: A Revolution in German Art* (Cologne, 1989), 48-49.

[34] The traditional method had been revived in the more sentimental prints of the *Jugendstil*, but the German Expressionists experimented with more violent treatments of the surface. The desire for authenticity reflects the same compulsion that drove Bishop Lowth and other enlightened Modern minds to produce literal translations of the Bible in the second half of the eighteenth century. See Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, 2005), 148ff.

[35] The Fauves, like Die Brücke, took courage in their departures from convention from the example set by Gauguin, who had died two years earlier. Where the Fauves' expression that year most manifested itself in their shocking use of heightened colours, the Dresden group experimented not just with expressive hues but also by deviating from conventional forms and experimenting with a more revolutionary manipulation of line and perspective.

otherwise always sought in metaphysics, ethics and religion.'[36] Zarathustra thus

spoke and said: 'I love him who wants to create over and beyond himself and thus

perishes.'[37] 'Nietzsche gave Expressionism its "artist's gospel"' in sowing the seeds

for a style that refused to please; here Dottori quotes from *Beyond Good and Evil*

(1886) to emphasise what great artists like Wagner and Delacroix have in common:

> all fanatics of *expression* 'at all costs'… all great discoverers in the
> realm of the sublime… and even greater discoverers in the effect, in
> the show … in short a rashly bold, splendidly violent, upward-flying
> and upward-pulling species of superior men, who must, above all,
> teach their century—which is the century of *multitude*—the idea of
> the 'superior man'.[38]

Expressionism in painting thrived on the attack posed by returning to 'primitive'

forms, by liberating line and colour from conventional pictorial rules, and by skewing

their figures and picture planes for 'greater expressive force'.[39] Kirchner chronicled

how in Dresden drawing the nude had inspired him and the others 'to derive

inspiration for work from life itself, and to submit to direct experience.'[40] This

observation links intertextually with Nietzsche's rejection of Christianity's exclusive

focus on the afterlife, and Zarathustra's call to return to the earth. Yet for all of the

higher man's hell-raising and ranting against the herd's mental enslavement to the

idols of Western civilization, the Die Brücke artists and other Expressionists have

been accused of not having made much of a protest after all: 'Although the

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[36] Riccardo Dottori, 'Expressionism and Philosophy', in Barron and Dube, 69. Dottori notes how Nietzsche was an apostate for teaching philosophy having studied classics, an apostate against his Christian upbringing, and an apostate from his university, his colleagues and finally his country. See also Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Volume I: The Will to Power as Art* (first published as *Nietzsche: Erstser Band* in Pfullingen: Verlag Günter Neske, 1961; trans. David Farrell Krell; London, 1981).

[37] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Way to the Creator', Part I, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No One* (first published as *Also Sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen,* in Chemnitz: Ernst Schmeitzner, 1883; trans. Walter Kaufmann [ed.], *The Portable Nietzshce* [London, 1954]), 177; hereafter referenced as *Zarathustra*. Kaufmann notes that '*All* the characters' in Part IV 'are caricatures of Nietzsche', but Zarathustra is the one he clearly identifies himself with over all others, 345.

[38] Friedrich Nietzsche, Aph. 256, ch. VIII, *Beyond Good and Evil* (first published as *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* at the author's own expense, in Leipzig: C.G. Naumann, 1886); cf. Dottori, 71.

[39] Dottori, 72.

[40] Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 'Chronik der Künstlergruppe Brücke' (1913); trans. Peter Selz; in Barron and Dube, 329.

Expressionism of Die Brücke was among other things a revolt against aspects of bourgeois life, in the problems the young painters faced and in their ways of solving them they remained in the bourgeois world.'[41] They encountered tribal culture not in the jungle but at the ethnographic museum, an institution in Modern art history that brought foreign culture to Western cities but in doing so erected an absence of relation by staging the spoils and subjects of these cultures as spectacle. Die Brücke have been canonized for their progressive aesthetics and *avant-garde* aims but paradoxically worked comfortably within middle-class Weimar society. It seems behind every showman who talks big there is a weaker man not fully comfortable with his status.

Lesley Chamberlain has proposed that Nietzsche's hyper-masculine moustache gives us a clue to his childlike desire to be like a Prussian officer and only partially veils a 'confused masculinity'.[42] He opens *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), which he rushed to complete on the brink of his final physical and mental breakdown, with the virile adage: '*Increscunt animi, virescit volnere virtus*'. Translated 'The spirits increase, vigour grows through a wound', this second-century and so archaic motto was first composed by Aulus Gellius and seems almost a paraphrase of the cumbersome name chosen for prophetic offspring in Isaiah 8—'Maher-shalal-hash-baz', or 'The spoil speeds, the prey hastes' (vv. 1, 3). Nietzsche's great man is full of fiery prophetic passion and well up for a fight, ready to use traditional tools to break down old walls (*Twilight of the Idols* is subtitled *Or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer*), and it is in the spirit of such muscular brio that Heckel hammered away at his surface.

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[41] Peter Paret, 'Expressionism in Imperial Germany', in Barron and Dube, 31.
[42] Lesley Chamberlain, *Nietzsche in Turin: The End of the Future* (London, 1996), 37.

The Dresden group consciously employed a Nietzschean image in their choice of a name: 'What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is [an overture; *Übergang*] and a going under [*Untergang*].'[43] Die Brücke heeded his call and named themselves as a bridge from 'one shore to another'[44] as a pledge, it seems, to their will to be 'great' like the rarest of men this all-too Modern prophet had celebrated. Taking as his model an etching by Hans Old that originally appeared in the periodical *PAN* in 1899,[45] Heckel renders a faithful depiction of his generation's hero but does so within a stylised context; he has reduced the portrait to two stark dimensions and achieved a startling visual effect. So although the portrait does not distinguish itself by a radical distortion of form that most characterises the broader Expressionist experiment, it abstracts the subject by reducing his features to two fields of colour and non-colour. It utilises the signature woodcut and references devotion to a Modern ideologist who helped shape the group's primary ambitions.[46]

Nietzsche himself is an unlikely but not dissimilar figure to assess in a revaluation of Abraham. His itinerant lifestyle equates to some degree with that of the emigrant from Ur. Disenchanted by Germany, Nietzsche spent ten years sojourning between Italy, Switzerland and France before settling in Turin, a city he found to be the ideal for wandering and whose planning he adulated as an aristocratic

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[43] *Zarathustra*, Part I, 4; cf. Kaufmann, 127. The bridge is mentioned and crossed many times in *Zarathustra.*

[44] Schmidt-Rottluff's reference to the bridge is cited in Shulamith Behr, *Expressionism* (London, 1999), 18.

[45] The total copies printed and the colour or colours in which it were originally printed are not documented. Old's black-and-white etching—and the fact that Heckel almost always structured his printed portraits and scenes in black—are the basis for presenting the image as a single layer of black ink on white paper.

[46] The art historian Peter Lasko writes: 'There certainly was … a general climate of interest in Nietzsche's thought and, as Friedrich Paulson claimed in 1905, German youth was shaken by 'paroxysms of the Nietzsche fever'; in Peter Lasko, *The Expressionist Roots of Modernism* (Manchester, 2003), 37. Cf. Friedrich Paulson, 'Vom Kulturwerk der Deutschen Schule', *Hochland* (1904-05), 627; quoted by R. Hinton Thomas, *Nietzsche in German Politics and Society 1890-1918* (Manchester, 1983), 98. Paulson's sound-bite encapsulates the degree to which the 'youth culture' sparked the interest of the students in Weimar-era academies and universities.

triumph.[47] In his writings he romanticises the outsider as the one who refuses to be enslaved, exhorting his readers to liberate themselves from their *réssentiment* through self-imposed exile: 'Sooner emigrate and in savage fresh regions seek to become *master* of the world, and above all master of myself; keep changing as long as a single sign of slavery still beckons me'.[48] In *Beyond Good and Evil*, the one who ceases from belonging is further indoctrinated as the greatest of men: 'He shall be the greatest who can be the loneliest, the most hidden, the most deviating, the human being beyond good and evil, the master of his virtues, he that is overrich in will.'[49] And though not recommending solitude for everyone, in *Zarathustra* he speaks of it as his spiritual home and as a perfect wife who never nags.[50] It is time alone that allows the great man Abraham to have his twilight moment, when all of his father's idols come crashing down and he overturns and leaves them to worship his own God. The rabbis recount several stories of the son of Terah smashing his father's gods. Nursed in isolation from infancy to toddlerhood in just ten days by the angel Gabriel, he walks along the edge of a valley in the crepuscular haze of both dusk and dawn and has his revelation in the company of no one but the celestial bodies: 'When the sun sank, and the stars came forth, he said, "These are the gods!" But the dawn came, and the stars could be seen no longer, and then he said, "I will not pay worship to these for they are no gods."'[51] Elsewhere he decries wooden votives that can be consumed by fire and heralds a new deity, 'The God who hath created all things… He hath

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[47] In Chamberlain's study of the relationship between Nietzsche's living conditions in Turin and the themes of his final work, she reminds us that '*Wanderer* in German are not only itinerants but walkers for pleasure'. The air in Turin apparently made him feel like the king of Italy; Chamberlain, 27, 44.

[48] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dawn,* Aph. 206 (first published in Chemnitz: Schmeitzner, 1881); cf. Kaufmann, 91.   By *réssentiment* Nietzsche means the grudge people bear from living as 'slaves' to morality, religion and tradition—and the process through which they subsequently project their self-loathing onto others.

[49] Nietzsche, Aph., 212*, Beyond Good and Evil*, in Kaufmann, 446.

[50] *Zarathustra*, 'On the Higher Man', Part IV, 13; cf. Kaufmann, 404. He calls out to the tender voice of his solitude, which never questions him and never complains, in Part III, 'The Return Home', 296.

[51] 'The Babe Proclaims God', in Ginzberg, 189.

empurpled the heavens… and me hath He sought out in the confusion of my thoughts.'[52] Reports of violence surface in him refusing to sell Terah's votives and instead dragging them face down by ropes around their neck—once hacking off the feet of one and beheading another—and taking a hatchet to 'all his father's gods', menacingly 'plac[ing] the hatchet in the hand of the biggest god among them all'.[53] Ginzberg even calls him an 'iconoclast', as if he stands with Nietzsche in the twilight—alone, defiant, and carrying big tools.

While to my knowledge Nietzsche never directly refers to Abraham, he criticises Christianity for manipulating Jewish scriptures and makes clear his premise that ancient Israelite culture and European Jewry exhibited sure signs of the heroic. He finds in Jews a perpetual belief in 'their calling to the highest of things' that sets them 'above all Europeans',[54] and he grants premier status to their sacred texts: 'In the Jewish "Old Testament," the book of divine justice, there are men, things, and speeches in so grand a style that Greek and Indian literature have nothing to compare with it.'[55] Abraham naturally springs to mind when wondering which men Nietzsche determined to be incomparable to all others. And Abraham's bereavement of Sarah offers a unique moment in which to intersect the ancient text with the figure of the modern loner.

At the opening of a book that cheekily affects the style and format of an overman's Bible, Zarathustra comes down from his mountain 'To teach you the overman', by which he means the man who has overcome cultural conditioning and transcended being an animal; Kaufmann adds that by 'creating for himself that unique

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[52] Ginzberg, 'The True Believer', 213.
[53] Ginzberg, 195, 197-98, 214.
[54] Nietzsche, Aph. 205, *The Dawn*, *op. cit.*, 88. Nietzsche's attack on the usurping of the Hebrew Bible by Christian doctrine is brilliantly relayed in Aphorism 18 (80), while in an earlier collection he contrasts Christianity with the 'heroic-epic religions' of the 'Semites'; *Mixed Opinions and Maxims*, Aph. 95 (1879), in Kaufmann, 65.
[55] Nietzsche, Aph. 52, Part II, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, 443.

position in the cosmos which the Bible considered his divine birthright[…] The meaning of life is thus found on earth, in *this* life'.[56] Zarathustra roams the valleys and villages like a Greco-Nordic Moses-Jesus, and the author's vignette in Part IV about kings and higher men worshipping an ass satirises the Golden Calf incident and disciples who easily stray from the flock. Nietzsche not only parodies the style of biblical storytelling[57] but also narrates the story of his own alter ego in a way that allows us to construct a bridge between him, Zarathustra, the overman and finally Abraham. Certain characteristics and biographical details reverberate between these men to provide the beams and girders that hold the bridge together. Where Nietzsche's physical and mental ailments gave him reason to loathe his all-too-human body, Zarathustra has an experience with a corpse not unlike Abraham's;[58] bodies that die burden them. Zarathustra and Abraham both resist their missions to go and preach among men, even when those men happen to be kings.[59] And for each of them, the role of the miraculous man overcomes the subject, and everything prophesied by/about him is girded by the iron will of male power.[60]

Visualising Abraham as a Nietzschean *Übermensch* (an over/superior/superman, or an overly superior man?), he can be seen rising before the corpse of his dead wife in an assertion of his will to power—as a victorious sufferer who embraces tragedy as an essential and character-forming part of life that helps him

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[56] *Zarathustra,* Part I, 124; and Kaufmann, 'Editor's Note' on *Zarathustra*, Part I, 115-16. Zarathustra thus hopes to deflect us from focusing too much on 'otherworldly hopes' and ceasing to live, 125.

[57] The book's mimicry can be witnessed in Zarathustra's resistance to his call (259), a Last Supper, a 'sermonizer on the mount' (381), and a vision in which he sees himself as a shepherd choking on an enormous black snake (271). Nietzsche also makes use of biblical adverbs and idioms such as 'verily', has a devil tempt his hero, sets him on a Mount of Olives, and critiques the wisdom that 'All is vanity!' as 'antiquarian babbling' that might still hold some merit (316).

[58] In Part I Zarathustra finds a dead man and hoists his corpse along until realizing he no longer needs 'dead companions' (by which Nietzsche means dead ideas) and opts for his 'proud' eagle and 'wise' serpent; 132-37.

[59] See Abraham objecting 'that he was in no wise equipped to undertake a campaign against the king', in Ginzberg, 193.

[60] Abraham exerts his personal power over the people and is crowned 'king of the world', in Ginzberg, 205-06.

to overcome weakness. In the moment he seeks to eradicate her presence and thus bury any traces of anaemic sentimentality, we portray him in a black and white print that bears the impression of a block of wood that has been 'cut' (כתב), the word that also makes covenants. As in Heckel's rendering, the carved depression in the surface of the block is in fact represented by its absence (the white area) in the final print; the mark of his labour is revealed only through the contours of the portions of the block he left uncut. This essence of the print supplies us with a form in which to envision Gen. 23 as a text which gets carved up and impressed upon the reader but whose negative image effects the absence and rising up of (un)touched portions of the patriarchal carving. Such a rendering reverses the contours of Abraham's traditional portrait and looks into the cavernous recesses of one commonly depicted as the mightiest of men.

The absence of half-tones in Heckel's woodcut shows it to be a dualistic medium for a subject who divided the world into slaves and free men. Describing Nietzsche's progression from Lutheran faith in Providence to a belief that accident, rather than divine law, was the moving force behind events, Leslie Paul Thiele cites his earlier work *The Gay Science* (1882), in which he addressed God and wrote: 'Thy will be done; accept everything: happiness and unhappiness, poverty and wealth and even look death daringly in the eyes.'[61] Abraham the overman refrains from being debilitated by death (first his son's and then his wife's) and becomes the master of his chaos by turning ill into will, making grief the source of land and future. Through his excessive expression of grief, he proves he still has chaos within himself.[62] His readiness to strike a deal shows his spirits increasing, his vigour growing through a

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[61] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (*Die fröhliche Wissenschaft,* 1882; *GW,* 21:35); cf. Leslie Paul Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the politics of the soul : a study of heroic individualism* (Princeton, 1990), 197.

[62] In *Zarathustra*, Part I, 'Prologue', 5 (129), Nietzsche's prophet insists one must have chaos within himself in order 'to give birth to a dancing star.'

wound. In securing property on his terms and without reluctance to paying the full retail price, he also models the competitive spirit Nietzsche extolled in the Greeks.[63] He might even be said to fulfil at least three of Nietzsche's 'four cardinal virtues': '*Honest* with ourselves and with whatever is friend to us' (admits he is a foreigner); '*courageous* toward the enemy' (gets to business with Hittites); '*generous* towards the vanquished' (to his dead wife); and '*polite—always*' (etiquette *plus*).[64]

All of which paints Abraham in an unquestionably heroic light. Yet as we search the dark areas of this carved portrait we decipher potential insecurities in the moments God and his wife emasculate him. Through the cunning guise of courtesy, Abraham the overman—the 'prince' and 'lord' to his Hittite competitors—overcomes their suspected attempts to deprive him of his future prize. But his compulsive effort to obtain land and a cave in which to *bury his dead* reveals his unhealthy obsession with the idea that he must *own* the dead. In the negative image, he becomes possessed by a desire to possess her and the land in which her body will be left to rot. Never to laugh at him (or God) again.

And so we build a bridge between Modern men and their methods to illustrate the nature of Abraham's possession and dispossession of Sarah. This story about overcoming a body and claiming a portion of the giants' land constructs a portrait of Abraham by calling upon Modern sources: Heckel's silhouetted study of Nietzsche; Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* (and Kaufmann's 1954 translation of it); Gunkel's 1901 commentary on Genesis; and Ginzberg's 1909 volume on legends inspired by Genesis, Modernist revivals of their own times perhaps. Each work results in some way from each Modern man believing in the great potential of his mind to give new value to past ways of seeing. Belonging to an editorial signature in Genesis that

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[63] In *Human, All-Too-Human* (*Menschliches, Allzumenschliches,* 1878), he wrote: 'Their whole art is unthinkable without the contest', Aph. 170; cf. Kaufmann, 53.
[64] Nietzsche, *The Dawn,* Aph. 556, 91.

apportions a higher status to priests, patriarchs and the sons of Israel in general, Gen. 23 finds natural conversation partners in such a brotherhood. The German Expressionist's Modernism lends an 'authentic' aesthetic to the portrait of Abraham. Modernism for Die Brücke meant an editorial process that appropriated/possessed the style of other 'primitive' cultures and developed their own archaic format to negotiate tradition within the present. Does the editorial imprint on the Torah/Pentateuch not engage in primitivisms of its own Modern kind, by copying other cultures' forms and making pictures that *look* old? The narrative's Modern method establishes a sense of heritage and the promise of a future, while also laying plain certain constructions of masculinity in the strident clarity of black and white.

Dispossessing bodies

Unlike *Der Blaue Reiter Gruppe* (The Blue Rider Group) headed by Kandinsky and Marc but counting Gabrielle Münter and Marianne von Werefkin among its members, Die Brücke was men-only. In their return to the nude via scenes of lakeside bathers and portraits of female nudes painted in their studios, their representation of the female form aspired to a utopian sense of reunion with nature and spiritual rejuvenation, depicting people escaping their industrial cages and harmonising with the earth once more.[65] In their 'primitive' painterly programs they intended to shock viewers' sentimental expectations of classical and academic proportion, but in so doing they subtly treated colonised peoples as the 'other' and likewise manipulated

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[65] This is not to let the Blue Rider men off the hook entirely. Their writings and relationships display chauvinistic tendencies, and feminist art historians have often cited Kandinsky's infamous description of the canvas in which he inadvertently confessed his fear of the female form by calling it 'a pure, chaste maiden' that he must '(conquer)…gradually'. He likens his role as a painter to that of a 'European colonist who…penetrates the virgin jungle…bending it to conform to his will.' 'Reminiscences' ('Rückblicke', June 1913), in Wassily Kandinsky, *Complete Writings on Art, Vol. 1 (1901-1921),* eds. Kenneth C. Lindsay and Peter Vergo (London, 1982), 373.

the body and figure of the woman as the object of their gaze.[66] Heckel's rendering of a pubescent girl in *Stehendes Kind* (1911) (fig. 2) epitomises the disturbing placement of the woman's body in so many artistic Modernisms, for his control over his subjects remains tainted by what many today would acknowledges as awkward politics of gender and power. For his portrait of Nietzsche, Heckel's choice of a male subject establishes an exclusive zone, and the lone central staging granted the overman is conspicuous for the absence of the woman's voice and visage.

Figure 2. *Stehendes Kind* (Standing Child), Erich Heckel, 1911

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[66] For discussions of the Bridge artists' interest in the exotic objects and styles of non-European cultures, the Nietzschean inspiration behind their name, and how they introduced spontaneity to 'the frozen angularity of *Jugendstil* style', see Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven, 1991), ix-x, 13-50.

In her contribution to *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader* (1995), Rosalyn Diprose critiques issues of ethics and sexual difference in Nietzsche's writings. She highlights how 'man's desire to possess the distant image of a woman' fuels his need to create and maintain his masculine identity.[67] His relationship to women and to other men relies on the tenuous but persistent comparison of himself to others and involves 'the construction of qualitative differences and hierarchies'. Diprose concludes, 'nothing exists, *in essence,* apart from relational effects and the interpretation of those relations as differences in quality'.[68] Zarathustra despises masses (and women) and plays the lonely seafarer, mourning the loss of youth and the hopes that once *possessed* him.[69] The difference Abraham strives to instil and maintain—between himself and his wife's dead body, and between himself and the sons of Heth—exercises similar relational effects and power struggles. Gen. 23 is structured in order to emphasise and prove Abraham's right to possess his wife's dead body and the land in which he plans to bury her. Yet the mother of the nation can be read as an uncomfortable juxtaposition to the patriarch, as one whose presence corrodes the concept of his greatness. Her introduction as Abram's wife in Gen. 11 is immediately followed by deadly news that threatens the father: 'Now Sarai was barren; she had no child' (v. 30). From the outset she is a resistant body, a body that will not produce. And as feminist readings of her role in the patriarchal narrative have argued, on a fundamental level she refuses to be his property.

Even the position of Sarah's own servant disrupts the sense of Abraham's ownership. Much analysis on Hagar as a possession pays tribute to the work of

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[67] Rosalyn Diprose, 'Nietzsche, Ethics and Sexual Difference', in Peter R. Sedgwick (ed.), *Nietzsche: A Critical Reader* (Oxford, 1995), 74.
[68] *Ibid.,* 76.
[69] He says of the 'visions of my youth': 'For you have always been closest to my heart, my possession and what possessed me'; Part II, 'The Tomb Song', 223.

Phyllis Trible in *Texts of Terror* (1984).[70] Her opening chapter recounts Hagar's story as an oppressed maid who threatens an inheritance and becomes a slave, and she shows how the exile of Hagar remains a blight on Abraham, Sarah and Israel. Dispossessed and banished to the wilderness, Hagar nevertheless finds herself liberated and no longer owned—a nation/room/womb of her own. In the case of Sarah, Abraham stakes his claim in her body and strives to contain it. His quest to possess provides a fitting example of what Nietzsche considered to be an 'ingenious form of egoism', for in his mourning he gives credence to the aphorism: 'Love is just a desire for possession; the lover desires power over soul and body of other, etc.'[71] However, in the Bible the possession of bodies and of land is ultimately dependent upon YHWH's power. Sarna for instance relates Leviticus 25.23 to this chapter as evidence of God's ownership of all earthly real estate: 'You are but strangers resident with me.'[72] The land is therefore never entirely under Israel or Abraham's control and might be couched in Freudian terms as an object partly lost to the infant ego.[73] Abraham/Israel reaches out towards objects it knows it cannot fully possess (mother and land) so that it may exert its control in discarding and dispossessing it. As a not-so grieving widow, Abraham's active suppression of his wife's body into a dark space might signify the repression of his anxieties. Sarah dies, and he gets carried away with the deal. Is that repression or more conscious denial? At the moment of

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[70] Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, 1984).

[71] *The Gay Science,* Aph. 14.

[72] Sarna, 169.

[73] Ilana Pardes discusses the maternal myths and psychological undercurrent of Israel's story of its infancy, in *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley, 2000). Her exploration of how the drive for national coherence led to a symbolic birth story persuades us of the significance of manna as milk and the Golden Calf as a suckling/weaning object. Her use of Freudian and Kleinian concepts speaks of the Israelites in the early stages of development, in which it craves the breast of its mother Egypt and is confronted by an unwelcoming land: 'The home of the fathers … turned out to be a strange land, a land of menacing giants, a land of others', 101.

mourning he wills himself to self-empowerment, keeping his goal in sight, not giving up but getting up and getting on with it.

A multidimensional letter in the Hebrew alphabet can speak volumes about possession in Gen. 23. In her collection, *Derrida's Bible* (2004)*, Yvonne Sherwood explores the unbinding and indecisive nature of the *waw,* the first letter of the second verse of our chosen chapter. Its pliability as a connecting consonant means that 'And Sarah died' (ומתי שרה) can alternatively imply either 'therefore', 'but', 'because', or 'then she died', generating a multitude of interpretive consequences. Sherwood thus deconstructs the death of Sarah as a continuation and/or disruption of the sacrifice in the previous chapter.[74] She quotes from Derrida's memorial address on Sarah Kofman in which he noted Abraham's desire to establish 'a place that would separate her from him, like death from life': 'he wants at all costs that [the land] not be given to him.'[75] In his paper for the 'Hospitality' seminar Derrida later added that Abraham's insistence on paying the 'full price' (v. 9) is a sacrifice he is willing to make 'in order to mourn Sarah and to owe nothing.'[76] The down-payment made is thus not so much one of coins handed over as it is of the internment of death itself, making the land (and ownership of it) a partial invitation or consignment of the settler to mortality.

Sherwood articulates how Derrida's Abraham does not effortlessly succeed in possessing a portion of land; rather, his 'struggle to *dispossess* himself of his dead wife' constitutes a conflict 'with his own "foreign body."'[77] The dead wife whom

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[74] Yvonne Sherwood, 'And Sarah Died', in Yvonne Sherwood (ed.), *Derrida's Bible (Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida)* (New York, 2004), 261-92.
[75] Jacques Derrida, 'Sarah Kofman (1934-94)', in Pascal Anne Brault and Michael Naas (eds.), *The Work of Mourning* (Chicago, 2001), 187.
[76] Jacques Derrida, 'Hospitality', in Gil Anidjar (ed.), *Acts of Religion* (New York, 2002), 415.
[77] Sherwood, 267-68.

Abraham claims to possess (*maiti*) in v. 4 therefore casts a shadow of a debt he owes and desperately needs to repay:

> …to the universal sense of guilt, of obligation of those who sur-vive, or 'overlive,' and to the labour of mourning that is connected to the (over) remuneration of the dead—poignantly expressing itself in the lavish sacrificial 'waste' of Taj Mahals or polished mahogany coffins.[78]

But Derrida's ascertainment of grappled guilt, Sherwood determines, treats the passage as a mere appendix to chapter 22, so 'For Derrida, the death of Sarah, *like* the near-death of Isaac, becomes a scene of *sacrifice* and *substitution*'.[79] Derrida's conception therefore stops short of reading Sarah as a fully independent subject.

Beyond the debt he owes to Sarah lies the radical possibility that her corpse lies before him as an accusatory presence. Abraham's need to 'owe nothing' and bury his guilt might veil an impulse to suppress the part of himself which threatens to laugh at or doubt his 'idealising high "sacrifices"…or, worse, intrude with accusing evidence.'[80] Thus, Sherwood finds Sarah resists possession by Abraham and instead dispossesses him, functioning as 'the fundamental wound of conscience, the default of responsibility which Genesis must thrust aside in order to live'.[81] By exploring the various ways the introductory *waw* can be translated, Sherwood offers a number of routes into 'deflect(ing) Derrida's patriarch-centred substitutionary chain',[82] revaluing Sarah's corpse as something more troublesome than the dead over whom Abraham grieves, and revisiting the father of Israel's motives, fears and actions. Read in this light, the presence of Sarah's corpse becomes a subject that resists ownership, a body that acts through death. Or, as Irigaray has phrased the matter, 'the/a woman

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[78] *Ibid.,* 268.
[79] *Ibid.,* 269.
[80] *Ibid.,* 274.
[81] *Ibid.,* 276.
[82] *Ibid.,* 278.

withholds herself from the identifiable, [and] therefore threatens—with death. A residue left over from the set up of representation: she lives in death.'[83]

Marine love

Irigaray composed *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (1991) as a poetic response to the misogynistic assumptions upon which the philosopher's aspirations rest. Psychoanalysing him and mimicking his stylization of the overman as a seafarer who has just seen land,[84] she addresses him as one who has spent so much time shouting his greatness from the mountaintops that he appears to have grown afraid of the water. Mountains loom imposingly in Nietzsche's work, especially in *Zarathustra*,[85] who gives the tidings: 'Whoever climbs the highest mountains laughs at all tragic plays and tragic seriousness.'[86] His hero lives in a cave on a mountain for ten years, an experience that visibly changes him, and he values such spaces for being 'where one experiences only oneself', and though his mountain's cave recurs throughout Part 4 as the pinnacle of hospitality**,** he brings his longings to them when he climbs them alone.

In contrast to his love for rocky hideaways, Irigaray has keenly detected how Nietzsche frequently betrays his phobia of the threatening sea.[87] And she connects this fear with his contempt for women, whom he cordons off as unfortunate necessities that need to be owned and dominated.[88] His conflicted relationships with

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[83] *Marine Lover*, 91.
[84] See *Zarathustra,* Part I, 9, 135.
[85] Mountains signified for Nietzsche 'aesthetic beauty, moral courage and intellectual clarity', writes Chamberlain. Mountains said yes to over-living and no to subordination: '*Zarathustra* was a hilltop survey of the resentful spirit and the impoverished spirituality of the modern world, with its unthinking mass movements, its vengeful class antagonisms, its insensitivity to nature and poetry, its hidden and institutionalized brutalities, insipidness, false righteousness and cultural feebleness'; Chamberlain, 99
[86] 'On Reading and Writing', in *Zarathustra*, Part I, 153.
[87] In *Zarathustra*, Part II, 'On Those Who are Sublime' opens with: 'Still is the bottom of my sea: who would guess that it harbors sportive monsters? Imperturable is my depth, but it sparkles with swimming riddles and laughters'; *op. cit.*, 228. The sea storms with terror on 248, 273 and 325.
[88] Take his unsentimental approach to marriage: 'With the growing indulgence of love matches, the very foundation of marriage has been eliminated… Never, absolutely never, can an institution be

his dreaded mother and much loved sister, and his failed compatibility with the psychoanalyst and author Lou Andreas-Salomé speak of someone driven crazy by the sound of a woman's voice, of someone who wished to be a man alone.[89] So Irigaray interrogates his conception of the sea as the feared and ever-suppressed body of the Other, whose surface is only skimmed by men.[90] In her opening section 'Speaking of Immemorial Waters', she utilises an image of man on top of the mountain that visualises the distant position he prefers—as far removed as he can get from the murky depths of the ocean's abyss. And it is in moments such as this that she seems to speak directly to Abraham, beckoning him to return from the heights where he proved himself to be God's greatest and most loyal man:

> Over there, appearing and disappearing behind the clouds, your mountain peaks have the transparency of a dream… Come back down from your mountain. It will be cold there tonight. And even if you are not afraid to be alone in the dark and chill of your cave, at least remember that you need some other light and heat than those of your sun. And if you wish to muse over your great thoughts tomorrow, come back here and sleep a little.[91]

Irigaray writes as the 'open' voice of the Other, who invites the heroic male to rest from his mission to overcome all, a process that sequesters and silences the woman. Further along in the passage, she might as well be speaking of Sarah as Abraham mourns 'his dead':

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founded on an idiosyncrasy; one cannot… found marriage on 'love'—it can be founded on the sex drive, on the property drive (wife and child as property), on the drive to dominate, which continuously organizes for itself the smallest structure of domination, the family…' *Twilight of the Idols* (*Götzen-Dämmerung*, 1889)*,* Aph. 39; cf. Kaufmann, 544.

[89] After his father died when young Friedrich was four, Nietzsche grew up in a family of five women: a stern mother, involved sister, matriarchal grandmother, and two strict aunts. His sister Elisabeth committed herself to compiling as well as censoring portions of Nietzsche's work. Scholars have studied his relationships with Andreas-Salomé and other women, as well as his relationships with other men, all of which relate his frustrated incompatibility with *either* sex.

[90] Evoking the image of Ulysses resisting the call of the Sirens, Irigaray writes: 'Even the most intrepid tie themselves to the mast, for fear of succumbing to the spell of the undauntable one… But her depths are never ploughed by their blades. Which barely cleave the crest of her waves… Even as their ships cross over her, yet she remains the same… The proudest navigators wait and pray… How afraid they are the sea will swallow them up'; *Marine Lover*, 48-49.

[91] *Marine Lover,* 38.

And might it not be she whom you come back to see at night? The
persistence of a silence that would not be obedience. The sound of
lips pressed together being sweeter harmony for you than all the fine
speeches that merely sicken the appetite…[92]

Abraham's journey up Mount Moriah marks the first moment of ascent in the
Bible, if not in Western culture. Prior to this the earth was flooded, and as the
(feminine) waters in Gen. 8 subside mountains are the first thing Noah sees from the
ark. Man's attempt to see things from God's perspective and create his own high
place in the form of a tower at Babel subsequently comes crashing down. From
Abraham onwards, the mountain functions as a physically imposing site of
empowerment and awe that attests to God's creative might and the authority of his
word. In prophecy and on Sinai, the mountain is where God descends and meets, and
spews smoke and quakes, like a big brawny superhero before whom we cannot help
but stand wide-eyed and speechless. Moses tries to back out of God's commission for
him at Horeb, but Sinai transforms him to the point that rays emanate from his head
(Ex. 34.30). David and Solomon live loftily on Zion and the Lord roars like a lion
from there in Amos 1.2, but Moriah is where YHWH has his temple built. In 1 Kgs.
18 Mount Carmel serves as the sporting ground for Elijah to bulldoze the prophets of
Baal (and crush Jezebel's pride), while further on in Amos the mountains of Samaria
provide the meeting point from which the northern kingdom Israel's own die are cast:
'Assemble yourselves upon the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults
within her, and the oppressions in her midst' (Am. 3.9). Mountains are popular in the
Psalms as symbols of God's strength (65.6), foundations of righteousness (36.6),
protective buffers (125.2), and settings for blessing (133.3).

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[92] *Ibid.,* 39.

In art, mountains serve as compositional focal points and symbols of magnitude. Cézanne's views of Mont Sainte Victoire and the breathtaking landscapes of Church, Cole, Durand and other painters associated with the Hudson River School come to mind. In Caspar David Friedrich's Romantic landmark, *The Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818), the Saxon peak provides a vantage point from which to witness man's small scale in relation to the Sublime.[93] The viewer cannot also help but wonder how on earth the figure reached such a remote and forbidding vista, so such summits prove the climber to be a success, to have reached a pinnacle of human experience. Not everyone can make it to the peak, and the value placed on mastering the mountain exhibits itself in the giving of titles to men like Edmund Hillary, in the hiker's determination to fulfil a rite of passage, and in the perennial success of James Bond on the slopes of nearly every continent. Even in travel consumerism, though waterfront views are also desirable, it is always mountains tourists want to see out of their windows. And who would not prefer a scenic drive through the Highlands to the monotony of the Midlands? Flat land is simply a failure.

Nietzsche's reverence for Richard Wagner (1813-1883), forged and complicated by a friendship and falling out with the composer,[94] leads us to a significant mountain scene, Act III of *Die Walküre* (1856), that might initially seem to defy the site of the mountain as an exclusively masculine space. The Valkyries and their rollicking leitmotif give a spectacular show of godly feminine strength, but the intrusion of the mortal woman Sieglinde into their midst throws them into a frenzy over what Wotan their father and in all respects king of the mountain will do when he

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[93] Friedrich based himself in Dresden, almost a century before the Brücke artists worked there.

[94] As a friend, Nietzsche would visit the Wagners at their villa in Bayreuth. As a critic, he first hailed Wagner as a Dionysian genius and then grew disillusioned with the composer's adherence to Christianity and sympathy with the popular plebiscite. Wagner and Schoepenhauer are regularly regarded as the two greatest influences on Nietzsche, so it is no wonder his correspondence with the composer and notes on him amount to hefty volumes.

learns of Brünnhilde's defiance of him.   He arrives and orders his disobedient

daughter out of hiding, stripping her of her power and damning her to mortality:

'*Walküre bist du gewesen: nun sei fortan, was so du noch bist!*' ('Your Valkyriehood

is over. From now on be what is still left for you to be'). He magnifies the curse by

leaving her to sleep on the mountain, left as prey to wandering men. And though

Brünnhilde persuades her father to encircle her in a ring of fire to keep all but heroes

out, her sequestered fate hardly seems fair.

In introducing Irigaray's dialogue to the man on the mountain, I acknowledge

the risk of over-essentializing the feminine as either earthy and in touch with the

seasons or as marine-loving and potentially full of froth, and I am quick to stress that

the strength in Irigaray's language lies its metaphoric interpretive capabilities. It

employs gender stereotypes to a degree by speaking in terms of all-knowing and all-

feeling women on the one hand and 'masculinst' absolutes on the other. The divisive

state Irigarary seems to envision between the sea and mountain is arguably too

polarised to fully account for Zarathustra's love for it, for he wants to be alone with

the sea and claims to be fondest of it when it 'angrily contradicts' him.[95] The site

Zarathustra calls home on his mountain is his maternal cave, disrupting the sense of

the mountain as exclusively masculine. But Irigaray solidly persuades us how

Nietzsche nonetheless views the sea from afar, owning it and burying his contempt

beneath a surface he only skims. By speaking of the sea as 'she', she reclaims it and

psychoanalyses the distance he keeps from it. Irigaray's insistence on difference

convinces us of a masculine economy of love that has persisted for millennia, which

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[95] See *Zarathustra,* 272, 342. This contradiction of loving something that contradicts himself seems
fundamentally Nietzschean and fundamentally Modern, for confrontation and the reinvention of values
must disrupt our rational expectations. Is there not also something innately biblical about loving a
sea/God most when it corrects you?

she fittingly summarises as 'A love that knows no other.'[96] And I incorporate her in order to search for Sarah in the void of her space in Gen. 23.

Irigaray's idiom correctly articulates how the overman/Nietzsche resents having to descend back into the realm of the other and how he either denies her presence ('wrapping [it] in an airy shroud' and housing it 'in a tomb of godly aspect')[97] or simply makes a 'double' of her, a feminine image he insists she should be.[98] The root of this *réssentiment* is the essentialist truth that women bear children and give 'what escapes [man's] creation … the gift of life': 'And you rise ever higher, believing that fertility can only come down from the sky! That is your incredible naïveté, o man of mountain peaks, neglectful of other landscapes.'[99] It is Irigaray's apparent wish that the overman learn to immerse himself and swim in the waters of the woman's creative 'becoming',[100] to think in fluids rather than solids.

Irigaray calls upon her metaphor of two lips to indicate a distinctively feminine mode of relation. In contrast to phallagocentric forcefulness, monolithic certitude and other closed 'masculine' systems that invariably situate women as objects of men, Irigaray finds in the action of rubbing together a symbol of a more mutual and 'open' encounter. She defends her use of the two-lip construct by explaining its intention 'to open up the autological and tautological circle of systems

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[96] *Marine Lover,* 189.

[97] *Marine Lover,* 30, 131. In Ginzberg, girls born during the infanticide that almost took Abraham are wrapped in a shroud of 'byssus, silk, and embroidered garments', 187.

[98] 'But isn't this a strange love you are preaching: love for a looking glass eternally set opposite you. That is your most sublime fortune. / And if you found your reflection with her in a river that you would set flowing together, isn't that a feast you're forgetting, o modern man, devoted to appearances.' *Ibid.,* 32-33.

[99] *Ibid.,* 42.

[100] As Judith Butler remarks on de Beauvoir's statement, 'One is not born but becomes a woman': 'woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification.' Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London, 1990), 43; cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (first published, 1949; trans. H.M. Parshley; New York, 1961; Everyman edition, 1993).

of representation and their discourse so that women may speak (of) their sex'.[101] Lips are for her ever in dialogue, more capable of resolving conflict and eroding boundaries.

In Gen. 23 Abraham is determined to own the cave at the field in Machpelah, the verbal route of which (כפל) means 'to double over'. The vaginal associations of the cave and the name of the field onto which it opens set the scene of Abraham's overcoming with a backdrop that very much evokes Irigaray's descriptive symbol. The mouth of the cave and its womblike hollows therefore define the boundaries of Sarah's space rather than Abraham's land. The internment of Sarah's corpse into it helps to configure a disruptive presence, one that destabilizes normative constructions of masculinity and the 'philosophical system that desires a standard of truth against which everything else can be measured', based upon the exchange of women.[102] Sarah's cave may now speak to the man of the mountain with the hope that Abraham will get over his desire to control and open up to her. He will after all return to her and her tomb, so it seems only healthy to talk about it.

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[101] Luce Irigaray, *Parler n'est jamais neutre* (Paris: Minuit, 1985), 272; cf. Whitford, 272. In the final section of *Marine Lover,* Irigaray offers a new interpretation of Christianity after Nietzsche that speaks of Christ's wound as a mere double of the woman's natural opening: 'This is the Christ handed down to us by tradition. The tradition that reverses the wound in the side of the crucified one. In the body of the son of Man there reappears, in the form of a wound, the place that, in women, is naturally open … Does this mean that Christ takes upon himself, mimics, the female in order to effect the passage back and beyond that creature whose flesh constantly incites men to lose control[?]', 166.

[102] Whitford, 187. At the opening of ch. 8, Whitford lists the following citations of Irigaray that illustrate the nature of the system of exchange: 'Order is assured by the fact that men circulate women among themselves' (*This Sex Which is Not One* [first published as *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* in Paris: Minuit, 1977], 167); trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke; Ithaca, NY, 1985], 170); and 'Patriarchal culture is based on sacrifice, crime, war' (*Sexes and Genealogies* [first published as *Sexes et parentés;* trans. Gillian C. Gill; Ithaca, 1993], 200).

Rereading the writing of 'my dead'

There is Abraham—carved into the surface of the text like an overman, Prussian whiskers and all. Pictured as he is from just beneath the line of his gaze ('You look up', says Zarathustra), he forces the viewer to look up at him ('And I look down because I am elevated').[103] He directs his elusive gaze onto the horizons and vistas of his own delirious visions. In black and white, he sits at the head of Israel's patriarchal throne, yet when Sarah the marine lover speaks to him, the overman who almost killed her son and wants her out of his sight comes to the surface. He is there, chisel in hand, carving an image of his own God and helping himself to an investment opportunity. After all, 'They that help not themselves, how can they help thee or bless me?'[104]

To borrow the words of gender critic Calvin Thomas, such a crisis as is depicted in Gen. 23 signifies 'writing as a scene of gender ambiguity and [as] a cause of anxiety.'[105] Thomas introduces his study of male anxiety about the masculine body by pinpointing the instability of bodily inscription due to its unpredictability as a productive site: 'Writing is a problem because it … causes the subject to confront the abject production(s) of his own body.'[106] In an economy in which the subject is defined by the boundaries set up (both physically and textually) by foreign bodies, 'the anxious male writer attempts to stabilize and fortify his own identity because he fears castration/death/shitting/abjecting himself… and so he projects his fears onto others as a way of fixing the boundaries of his own *corps proper'*.[107] In writing ch. 23

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[103] 'On Reading and Writing', *Zarathustra*, Part I, 152.
[104] *Ibid.*, 210.
[105] Calvin Thomas, *Male Matters: Masculinity Anxiety, and the Male Body on the Line* (Urbana and Chicago, 1996), 3.
[106] *Ibid.,* 28.
[107] *Ibid.,* 34-35.

the Priestly redactors attempt to secure Abraham's patriarchal legacy against the bodies of the sons of Heth and against the dead weight of Sarah's corpse. A line from Luce interjects echoes of Sarah's laughter as an audible strain that resists the projections of male writing onto/about her body. It shows her humoured disbelief at the very idea that a woman could be owned by a man: 'I had been taught that a woman who belonged to no one was nothing, and I laughed. I really laughed to hear such startling news.'[108] With this sound calling from the cave, from the depths of the sea, from the recesses of Heckel's carved block, and from the white/dark space on the printed portrait, we turn to the lines of the text and integrate them with the voice of the marine lover in order to reclaim Sarah's body from Abraham's possession and let it write its own eulogy.

Abraham's actions in this chapter may be plotted as follows: he rises up and speaks to the sons of Heth (v. 3); he rises again and bows to them (v. 7); he bows before the people of the land and personally implores Ephron to sell him the land (vv. 12-13); and finally he agrees with the landowner before weighing out the silver required to secure his purchase (v. 16). When the chapter opens, it announces the duration of her life: 'Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah' (v. 1). While the formulaic flavour sounds fairly straightforward, the distinctive phrasing does not belong within the *toledot* series; it is merely incidental within the larger phallic economy. The news of her demise reads like a dispassionate briefing following the near death of the son and the angel's promise that the descendants of Abraham's seed will one day 'possess the gate of their enemies' (22.17). Throughout the saga, lineage has been defined according to the male line and has consistently been a pressing issue—from Sarah's barren state, to God's repeated promises, and to

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[108] *Marine Lover,* 5.

Abraham's desperate plea in 15.2: 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless.' Abraham dreams of the day his descendants will be as numerous as the stars and sand and knows nations will be blessed through them because he has obeyed God's voice (22.17-18), but the death of the matriarch comes without warning and puts the pressure on Isaac to propagate himself. The phallic economy cannot fully function without the woman, and the patriarch succumbs to the double-edged crisis of the will to power's conflict with progeny: "Without the peril of death, would you want children? Yet isn't it equally because you fear death that you want no children?'[109]

The death of Sarah therefore throws patriarchy into crisis because it highlights the attempt to bury women upon whom the continuation of life depends, and because it raises the question of whether one fears death and therefore wants children or fears it and thus wants them not. The father keeps children to manifest his power: 'Master of the daylight, the father … keeps [his children] as a place where his power can be manifested, transformed, transfigured.'[110] His God has told him heirs will flow from him: 'He alone may procreate and foster growth according to his light. ... The lightning is his. And henceforward it will sire all genesis.'[111] But the death of the mother interrupts such certitude and interrogates the father's subconscious conflict:

> And, going back to the source of all your children, you want to bring yourself back into the world. As a father? As a child? And isn't being two at a time the point where you become unstuck? Because to be a father, you have to produce, procreate, your seed has to escape and fall from you. You have to engender suns, dawns, and twilights other than your own.[112]

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[109] *Ibid.,* 40. When Zarathustra harangues, 'In your children you shall make up for being the children of your fathers', he attempts to resolve the spiral into paternally paranoid psychosis, in *Zarathustra,* Part III, 'On Old and New Tablets', 12, 316.
[110] *Zarathustra,* 130.
[111] *Ibid.,* 131.
[112] *Marine Lover,* 34.

The marine lover senses the part of Abraham that might want to escape the timeline of fathers and sons but is secretly gratified to have the wife's body as his own to displace: 'You have made a choice: your only wife is eternity.'[113] Sarah lived 127 years and now that she is dead she can serve more readily from her cave as a 'Receptacle that, faithfully, welcomes and reproduces only the will of the Father.'[114]

The location of Sarah's death goes by a name with etymological roots in big men: Kiriath-Arba might be the 'City of Four' (קרית ארבע) but Joshua 15.13 and 21.11 explain Arba to have been the father of Anak (lit. 'long neck'), both ancestors of the tall and mighty Anakim and Nephilim (Numbers 13.33). In this city (once a capital of giants), Abraham should feel right at home. Speiser notes the 'non-Semitic origin' of the name might indicate a 'possible connection to the "children of Heth"',[115] but Arba points farther back in history than the Hittites and suggests a community of physically superior men. It sounds archaic as a name: 'City of the Giant'.

But what of the other geographical details—that this place was in Canaan and is now called Hebron? Canaan is of course a land that belonged to the Canaanites, and yet they are nowhere to be found in Gen. 23. Has the text attempted to bring about their partial death along with Sarah's? By clarifying this place as that which contemporary audiences will know as Hebron, the verse brings the story into the present while giving evidence that places, like people, can have their names changed according to systematic changes in ownership. Reading the verse today, I cannot help but mentally insert an additional 'that is Nablus' after the parenthetical mention of

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[113] *Ibid.*, 42. Irigaray alludes to the refrain in the final section of *Zarathustra,* Part III, that recurs seven times: 'Never yet have I found the woman from whom I wanted children, unless it be this woman whom I love: for I love you, O eternity. *For I love you, O eternity!*' See 340-43.

[114] *Marine Lover*, 166.

[115] Speiser, 168.

Hebron. The authentic-sounding town name sets the story safely in the distant past while also reminding the reader that this is Canaan. It is here where Abraham comes to mourn and to weep, shredding his clothes no doubt and raising his fist to the sky in a silhouette of both rage and comeuppance.

The second half of v. 2 tells how Abraham went to mourn and weep (compare 'from wrath and longing Zarathustra wept bitterly'):[116] 'Death is always minus one, less simple than one imagines. It resists belonging, it sub-sists beyond appropriation. It is still left over. There is always more of death, than the one already identified.'[117] Jane Gallop has written, 'death is the most violent sign we live in a nonsensical body which limits the powers of our will and consciousness'.[118] The articulation of the fact that Sarah has died reinforces the unexpected significance and nonsensical violence of her death, echoed in Irigaray's voice:

> Never death where one might have expected death—in a place where
> it might have been circumvented. Everywhere and nowhere…
>
> He who wishes to master death spends his time jumping endlessly
> further out. But … between himself and the other, he will have
> created only a void. Surely, he will need to jump higher and higher,
> and round and round his world, or else tumble into that abyss.[119]

Abraham indeed jumps up in v. 3: 'And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and said to the Hittites…' ('Walk upright betimes, O my brothers; learn to walk upright').[120] The same verbal construction that begins verses 3, 7, 17 and 20 (ויקם) shows how over the course of the story Abraham turns a situation in which he 'rises'

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[116] *Zarathustra*, 246.
[117] *Marine Lover,* 91.
[118] Jane Gallop, *Thinking through the Body* (New York, 1988), 19.
[119] *Marine Lover,* 17.
[120] *Zarathustra*, 325.

out of deference to others into one in which he is 'assured' a portion of the land.[121]

First he rises from mourning Sarah (v. 3), and then he rises from apparently kneeling before the sons of Heth (v. 7). The passing of property over to Abraham, however, empowers the patriarch with a critical possession that allows him to take his next step of ensuring that his covenantal dreams come true by finding a kindred wife for his heir Isaac.

Getting up and speaking, like Zarathustra before his onlookers, Abraham rises to the occasion and walks on to bargain with the men. Here is Irigaray on the overman's resilience:

> he who has gone through pain, is free of heaviness. Miraculous is the motion of him who, beyond nostalgia, goes on walking. And what once was a burden has become a bad dream dissolving in a mist.[122]

Abraham's first words to the Hittites suggest he treads carefully: 'I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight' (v. 4). In confronting the sons of Heth man-to-man, Abraham 'crowds to his neighbour'[123] so that he may lock his dead away, but he succeeds in separating himself from them; he resists their attempts to control the action and makes plain his intention to erase any image of his dead from before his face (מלפני). The brutal phrase ואקברה מתי מלפני is the first of ten instances of the verb 'to bury' (קבר) in ch. 23, and the verb appears again to record Miriam's

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[121] *BDB* lists the second pairing of the *waw*-consecutive with masculine-singular imperfect *qal* as it would function with a *lamed*: 'be assured to', 878, 7b. They are often translated as if the cave and field are the plural subject of the verb (i.e., they 'became the possession of Abraham' (REB), they 'passed to Abraham as a possession' (JPS), or, utilizing a passive subject, they 'were made over' to him (RSV and von Rad). The NIV's 'were deeded' changes both the voice and the subject of the verb they literally translate in the interlinear format as 'he-was-deeded'. In order to maintain Abraham as the fully active subject, I prefer to treat it as a transitive verb (though there is no particle *eth*): 'Abraham deeded' the field and cave.

[122] *Marine Lover,* 29.

[123] In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part I, Nietzsche discourages too much neighbourliness on the grounds that it binds the man to debts and weakens his will. Yet he plays the lord of all hosts when he has his followers to his cave.

burial at Kadeah in Numbers 20.1, the ass that will be buried when Josiah's bad son is buried in Jeremiah 22.19, and the wicked who are buried in Qoheleth 8.10. Its usage varies but seldom refers to anything but human corpses.

The next eleven verses (vv. 5-16) are given over to the dialogue with the Hittites and enforce a silence in regard to Sarah's name and memory. She has become his property and the Hittites respect this, calling Abraham 'my lord' and 'mighty prince'. They affirm his need to bury his dead by repeating the phrase so many times while delaying the process with a frustrating and potentially sinister degree of courtesy ('Every one of them talks', Zarathustra chants over and over, cynical of unclean chattering men).[124] They either recognise and respect his stature or mock it when they call him a prince among them and a man without a country. The men deal with the business of burying the dead, and Sarah is forgotten when they speak. In v. 7 the reference to Hittites as 'the people of the land' cuts into the surface of the story. The phrase is repeated in vv. 12-13, when Abraham himself utters the unbearable phrase and incises a second scar. The use of this phrase of ownership reminds the reader that Abraham was a wanderer and now more alone than ever. Yet he still leaped at the chance to follow the codes of the symbolic masculine order.

Thomas finds that the codification of the masculine body guarantees competition frequently accompanied by violence, as in sport.[125] Here the obeisant gesture and other niceties carried out by both sides of the bargaining table betray similar intonations. Violent impulses are buried well beneath gleaming social veneers, and the will to invade is displaced onto the woman's body. There is a set social structure between men for how to dispose of it. The dialogue is heavily infused with the aroma of possession. In vv. 8-9 Abraham asks to bury his dead out of his

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[124] *Zarathustra*, Part III, 297.
[125] Thomas, 12.

sight and entreat Ephron to him so that he may give him the cave which he owns: 'For the full price, let him give it to me as a possession for a burying place.' Verses 10-11 present Ephron as the powerful ruler of 'his city' and as one who can afford to give away some of his fields and caves in the presence of his people. Here and in vv. 13, 15, 17-20 reference is made to some aspect or object of Abraham's possession. In response to Abraham's demand 'that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns' (v. 9), we read and see more from the marine lover: 'This is the way with exchanges among man/men. Take possession, make use of, use up. With excess spoiling the object.'[126]

When Abraham bows before the people of the land in v. 12 he adheres to the laws of masculine codes and oozes confidence in his flawless execution of manners. With palpable persistence he rejects Ephron's untrustworthy offer and asserts once again the uncomfortable immediacy of his dead ('I will give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there' [v. 13]). When Ephron answers for the second time he again implores the foreigner to forget the four hundred shekels ('What is that between you and me?') and tells him just to 'Bury [his] dead' (v. 14). Once the agreement between the two parties is met, Abraham weighs out a hefty amount of silver, 'according to the weights current among the merchants' (v. 16). In a love poem all his own Zarathustra confesses to love the squanderer, 'him who casts golden words before his deeds and always does even more than he promises'.[127] Abraham spends here as a squandering genius, and it matters not how many shekels it has taken to make his possession possible. Excess instead spoils the object.

The closing verses (vv. 17-20) relegate the woman to impassive ground. Land 'and all of the trees that were in the field' (v. 17) are passed as a possession to

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[126] *Marine Lover,* 113.
[127] *Zarathustra*, 127-28.

Abraham, who deeds it in order to survive and overlive his wife. Asserting his allegiance to patriarchy and his 'respect for the intangible empire' between fathers and sons,[128] Abraham buys a memorial for his dead but acts so quickly as to erase her memory: 'The other is remembered less. Except as a muse.'[129] And the woman's place in the patriarchal chain is the crypt: 'By making her into a crypt that is never opened, and absorbing into the night anything that lingers there.'[130] As Zarathustra said to the fool, 'where one can no longer love, there one should *pass by*.'[131] The mention of Machpelah in the land of Canaan at the beginning and end forms an inclusio (two lips) around the story. Zarathustra returns to his cave and the chapter comes back to Machpelah. In both instances an author chisels an impression of love conducted from afar, 'but fear [of] her close at hand'.[132] Abraham's next course of action will be to find a wife from his clan for Isaac, for his attention must turn to his quest for descendants.

The midrashim tell the story that the terror of the Akedah killed Sarah, and though one does not necessarily want to weigh her death merely as a moment of sacrifice or substitution for what was almost lost in Gen. 22, one must certainly ask why she remains so conspicuously absent in the chapter and recognise the traces of terror in Abraham's heroic purchase:

> And out of the horror they will fashion an epic to captivate the women and children. And take pride in being men. And cover terror in heroism. Abraham's terror at almost slaying Isaac … That is how the gaps in history are filled. That is how a bright beyond springs out of the shadow.[133]

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[128] *Marine Lover*, 159.
[129] *Ibid.*, 157.
[130] *Ibid.*, 130.
[131] *Zarathustra*, Part III, 'On Passing By', 290.
[132] *Marine Lover,* 40.
[133] Ibid., 50. Speaking directly of the Bible, Irigary asks, when 'men are killing each other and draping themselves in the garments of glory… Where has God gone to? … He returns in an unexpected place and in an unexpected guise. In the womb of a woman', 175.

Abraham's epic portrait carves out the distance between himself and her. But despite the image's mode of segregation, these different bodies can be visualised as contiguous subjects, whose contours rub against one another. Never one without the other.

After the matchmaking of Isaac is wrapped up in ch. 24, Abraham takes another wife, Keturah, who bears him six more offspring. He clearly needs 'an eternal entourage of mothers'[134] as much as Israel does. Only two of these bear further descendants, and they are set apart from Sarah's clan by their title 'the children of Keturah' (25.1-4). Sarah's memory indeed seems to be a mimicry for the father's benefit,[135] but her legacy establishes its priority over the children of Keturah. Just before his marriage to her, and before Abraham then sends the children of his concubines away to ensure none of them attempt any advances on Isaac's inheritance, Abraham's son finds 'comfort' in Rebecca 'after his mother's death' (24.67). Though Isaac benefits from the intangible empire by fathers and sons throughout cultures, the mention of his sorrow is both genuine and temporarily subversive of patrilineal allegiances. His mother has not been entirely 'left in the night… Hidden in the shadows or in the moon's reflection.'[136]

From within the walls of her cave and the recesses of our woodcut portrait of Abraham, Sarah's body beckons the father of Israel to 'Come back down from [his] mountain' once and for all. Eventually he does return to her, when Isaac and his brother Ishmael bury him next to his wife Sarah in 25.10, into the cave at Machpelah where her lips will continue to speak to him.

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[134] *Ibid.,* 124.
[135] *Ibid.,* 106.
[136] *Ibid.,* 157.

Analytic aftermaths

After the Great War, artists in Germany found themselves disillusioned with everything prior to it and looked to a newer more political man to bring art to the masses on a more social level.[137] Many gods of Western civilization had perished in the destruction. Modern man's humanity had done itself under, and economies and social values fell into turmoil. The overman could no longer think only of himself. Where artists such as Otto Dix (1891-1969) brought graphic images of war to life through etchings of limb-lined trenches, or critiqued urban culture through cartoons and caricatures commissioned by left-wing journals, others found outlets for their newfound political purpose in state-sponsorship and communist projects. Heckel's unconcern with city-life always contrasted Kirchner's fascination with it, and he continued to work in landscape and figurative painting through the Wars: 'He directed his attentions toward the variety in landscape, and also of the behaviour of men in their longings, joys and sufferings. His paintings originated in human compassion.'[138] For all of his vitriol on the subject of religion, the essence of Nietzsche's fundamental revaluing of human life as being enormously important lies in that sympathy. Despite being a loner, he preached as someone trying to drag people out of their miseries and 'over' their humanness.

Perhaps it is not such a scandal to pair Abraham with Nietzsche after all. The latter's Lutheran background seems to have instilled a distinctively Protestant fervour in him—the kind of fire inflamed by the desire for each and every man to know God personally, without the interference of priests or old-fashioned ways of speaking.[139]

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[137] See Stephanie Barron, 'Themes of the Exhibition', in Barron and Dube, 27.

[138] Wolf-Dieter Dube, 'Biographies of the Artists: Erich Heckel', in Barron and Dube, 347.

[139] I owe this observation on the religious nature of Nietzsche's anti-ideological intensity to Giles Fraser, who taught me at Oxford and is now the Vicar of Putney. Nietzsche began his adulthood

The Harvard psychologist and philosopher William James (1842-1910) minimized the social nature of religious experience in favour of exploring the individual's spiritual encounter in solitude, and such a focus reminds us that religious experience happens outside of institutions and theologically controlled readings.[140] So Nietzsche's separation of himself from the God of the Church does not exclude the reality of his religiously personal life and career. To want to convert people. Is that not the most religious impulse known to humankind? He descended into madness and contested for years that religion killed the one, true, great, but not wholly omnipotent God by reducing an ineffable vital life force to prescriptive words and doctrines. God, to Nietzsche, existed over and above the common man's narrow constructions of him. He insisted love was a derisive euphemism for possession and spoke as an anti-Christ against Christianity's focus on suffering and all-too-passive ways of dealing with it, but he was not anti-God. The real God is his personal God, his highest power, and that God lives. Surely he would not contradict much of Abraham's exposition of the deity after he emerges uncharred from the fiery furnace: 'He sees, but He cannot be seen, He is in the heavens above, and is present in all places, for He Himself superviseth all things and provideth for all.'[141] Zarathustra welcomes the sun and praises it, and while he does not assume it *controls* everything he does he embraces life on earth as an experience in which all experience (God-given or merely supervised) provides an opportunity for personal greatness. Whatever door death

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almost following in his father's footsteps and becoming a pastor. He studied theology at Bonn before switching to classics at Leipzig, as his indignation at the hypocrisy of the Church finally grew too great to bear.

[140] In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (the published collection of the Gifford Lectures, Edinburgh, 1902), James locates a function of religion in 'the feelings, acts and experiences of individuals in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they consider the divine'; cf. Mary Jo Meadow and Richard D. Kahoe, *Psychology of Religion: Religion in Individual Lives* (New York, 1984), 18.

[141] Ginzberg, 199.

might open or close, life and mourning enough constitute the grounds for praise. Tragedy welcomes us to overlive it.

Here is what many Modernisms and religious reactionaries would abject or bury: that Nietzsche was a man of God, *par excellence*. But Nietzsche located divine power in human vitality, and, as we have witnessed, vitality is something Abraham has in spades in Gen. 23. He rejects the gods of his father, sacrificing his religious heritage in order to lay claim to a new land, and he wilfully subsumes this land and his wife to the monotheistic patriarchal system. The abjection of Sarah's body thus occurs within a process of consumption that validates the father's authority but leaves Abraham unsatisfied and spending too much to escape his conflicted grief. Wound up as he gets by the fussy 'Oriental' customs, his compulsion to possess a space in which to bury his wife and his guilt takes over as he mourns with a sigh of relief and impatience. Abraham has to *buy more*, and what is left after over-living but the eternally recurring compulsion to possess?

But enough of the dead wife as a possessed body and distanced woman. Speaking as an amateur psychoanalyst—and as a theologian—if Abraham/Nietzsche is the father of great Modern men, is not Sarah the original mother, the cave to which he eternally returns? Modernism's memory cannot be separated from the birth of psychoanalysis, and the suggestions about Abraham/Israel's unconscious made thus far owe their perspective to Freud's legacy and Irigaray's poetic-analytical approach.[142] The discipline's focus on the mind's unknown realm and attachment of symbolic meaning to body parts both rely on abstract intuition. Freud's breakthrough in addressing the unconscious through the study of dreams is equally personified by the woodcut metaphor, for in his picture of the patient the analyst studies the

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[142] We also remember that the love of Nietzsche's life, Andreas-Salomé, was a psychoanalyst.

impressions of the subject's wildest dreams and uses this key to unlock the door to unconscious space. He is also the natural heir to Nietzsche in making the mind of the individual the centre of attention and in helping to pave the road that has led to the religion of self-fulfilment and personal empowerment.[143] Yet Freud's whole system revolves around the man and the penis, so Irigaray and other heirs of Melanie Klein (1882-1960) including Julia Kristeva, who has written on Klein, have disrupted his system by a revised psychological system 'dominated by the mother'.[144] This correction also strikes me as Modern, overturning the mode of the fathers as it does. Klein's whole objective that 'the loss of the mother' should become 'the organizing principle for the subject's symbolic capacity'[145] leads to inquiries from the couch beyond Abraham's desire to dispossess his wife and looks at Israel's relationship to its mother Sarah.

The examination begins by revisiting the cave, the object of Zarathustra's love and the place to which the chapter and Israel return, the site to which people still flock. At Hebron Israel can go back to the womb.[146] For Klein and Freud however, development of course occurs post-womb, and the retreat to it represents the precondition to the death drive, the desire to have never been born. The opening of the cave encloses Gen. 23, but in the Kleinian universe, it is the breast that is a site of death and the first step toward individuation. Since Sarah performs a symbolic function as Israel's mother, it seems an acceptable consequence that a psychological consideration should conceive of her as the breast of the nation.

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[143] That there is a connection between the author of *Will to Power* and the psychology preached on *Oprah* was, once again, the wisdom imparted to me by Giles Fraser.

[144] Julia Kristeva, *Melanie Klein* (first published as *Le Génie feminine* in Paris: Fayard, 2000; trans. Ross Guberman; New York, 2001), 114. In Freud's man-centred terms, separation from the mother brought about 'a journey toward the father', but Klein questions why such a separation should be considered as plausible, let alone normative.

[145] *Ibid.*, 129-30.

[146] As if reinforcement were required for the idea of Sarah as the quintessential mother, see the story about how she suckles the child of every last visitor to her infant Isaac, in Ginzberg, 263.

In Freud, the infant ego in its earliest conquest of the world around it attempts to devour or erase the breast in search of the penis, whereas in Klein it splits this primary object into a good breast (nurturing) and a bad breast (the one that is not there). As the ego acquires consciousness, the breast functions as the first object of relation, the first thing it sees and identifies as separate from itself and the first thing it sees as an object that both gives and takes. The withdrawal of the breast induces rage and the impulse to possess. This developmental stage, Klein gesticulates, is not a coincidence but a necessary factor in human development. For only 'after the object has been devoured and destroyed'[147] can the first cognitive process of splitting begin and the ego develop a sense of two extremes, of having and having not, which initiates the process towards symbolic understanding. Therefore, 'In order to think, one must first lose the mother.[148] So Klein's theory tenders a different Modern re-structuring of the mother: Sarah suckles but momentarily removes her breast from Israel by dying.

For Klein, the infant does not abandon the breast for good but comes back to it 'for subsequent reunions'; Kristeva asks, 'Does the requisite abandonment of the mother constitute a journey toward the father, as Freud and Lacan believed? Or does it set the stage for subsequent reunions with a good mother who is finally restored, gratifying, and gratified'?[149] Israel's loss of Sarah and return to Machpelah form the case study for an infant in its earliest stage of development who partially annihilates the mother but eventually returns to it. In this process the infant Israel's conscience is born, and he/Abraham is able to negotiate his symbolic existence as a lone wanderer and a child that can continually return to its mother at Hebron.

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[147] Kristeva, 130.
[148] *Ibid.*, 130.
[149] *Ibid.*, 114.

In the Priestly recording of Abraham's purchase of her space, the text ingrains a place for reunion within the wider patriarchal story. The chapter returns to Machpelah, and Israel's aggression to possess the land and mother can relax in the knowledge that its mother is still there. In the walls of Machpelah Sarah does not die, for she remains a separate being from the subject Israel but also a living body from which the 'early processes of individuation (introjection, projection, projective identification, and defense mechanisms)'[150] take their shape. The temporary textual matricide is necessary and not evil, and actually helps build a bridge to the mother.

Despite the critical treatment Abraham's ego has received in this study, one cannot help but sympathise with him in his loneliness. His grief may be mixed with relief and guilt, but his proceedings with the Hittites amplify his isolation as the outsider with no wife. Another Modern German critic, the sociologist Georg Simmel (1858-1918), commented in *The Philosophy of Money* (*Philosophie des Geldes*, 1900), the year Nietzsche died, how under the capitalist system money abstracted and depersonalized every aspect of human relation, 'allowing greater freedom and greater loneliness'.[151] Abraham/Israel's exchange with the sons of Heth involves an excessive amount of currency, and the silver he spends equates with the abject productions of a culture alientated from itself. He squanders his savings among them in order to overturn his grief, but he leaves them as strangers.

Can anything be said of the Priestly compulsion to cut such a story? For Kristeva, the abject productions of the male body (within which we include the excessive money and energy spent on giving Sarah the best memorial possible) force the subject to confront his own physical and psychological waste. Through writing, the subject confronts maternal authority (here, the dead mother) and imprints

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[150] *Ibid.*, 7.
[151] Cf. Lloyd, vii.

institutional authority on the dispossessed body. The boldly two-toned Abrahamic body preserves its own boundaries and coherence through the writing of the Priestly print. The homage to him promotes a figure codified according to the patriarchal borders that set his descendants against the Hittites and the Canaanites at Hebron, who are along with Sarah the abject aftermaths of the Priestly scribe. But the institutional coherence surrounding such a portrait unravels when one contrasts notions of Abraham's genuine mourning with an appreciation for the darker shade of his anxieties.

Illustrating what Abraham overcomes via the medium of the Expressionist woodcut allows us to surpass traditional heroic portraits of him and to contemplate the white space of both Sarah's relative absence and Israel's early moment of separation. In a composition polarized between the man and the other, we reverse appearances and create dialogue. The diagnosis unlocks the patriarchal psychology and opens a door to help bridge his distance from the woman. While Abraham squanders his shekels, the marine lover opens Sarah's grave and calls him to the sea.

III

PROPHETIC PRACTICE PICTURES

III. *Green Over Yellow*, Kurt Schwitters, 1947

But now hear, O Jacob, my servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen
² Thus says YHWH, who made you,
who formed you in the womb, and who will help you:
'Fear not, my servant Jacob, Jeshurun whom I have chosen
³ For I will pour water on the thirsty and streams upon the dry ground;
I will pour my spirit upon your descendants and my blessing upon your offspring.
⁴ They shall spring up like the green tamarisk tree,
like the poplars beside water courses.
⁵ This one will say, "I am the YHWH's," and call himself in the name of Jacob;
this one will write on his hand, "YHWH's," and will title himself in the name of Israel.'

⁶ Thus says the LORD, king of Israel, and his Redeemer, LORD of Hosts:
'I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there are no gods.
⁷ *Who is like me? Let him proclaim it and set it forth before me.*
What is more than my establishing an everlasting people and the things to come?
Let them report to him what shall come to pass.
⁸ *Do not be afraid or daunted. Have I not told you from long ago and declared it?*
And you are my witnesses! Is there a god beside me?
There is no rock. I know none.'

⁹ All the ones making idols are nothing; the things that are treasured by them have no value; their witnesses do not see and do not know, so that they are ashamed. ¹⁰Whoever fashions a god has cast an image that is profitable for nothing. ¹¹ Behold, all his fellows will be put to shame; and as for craftsmen they are numbered among men. Let them all assemble and stand; they will be afraid and be put to shame together. ¹² The ironsmith takes it and works it over glowing coals, and with the hammers he fashions it and forges it with his strong arm. He also becomes hungry, so he has no strength; he cannot drink water, so he grows faint. ¹³ The carpenter draws a line and traces it out with a marking tool. He makes it with a plane and marks it with the compass. He makes it like the form of a man—like beauty of a man—to inhabit a house. ¹⁴ He cuts down cedars for himself and takes tirzah and oak. He chooses for himself among the trees of the forest, he plants laurel, and rain makes it grow. ¹⁵Then it becomes fuel for man, and he takes from it and warms himself. He also kindles fire and bakes bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. ¹⁶ Half of it he burns in the fire; over half of it he eats flesh, roasts meat, and is satisfied; he also warms himself and says, 'Aha! I am warm. I have seen the flame.' ¹⁷ And the rest of it he makes into a god, into his idol, and he bows before it; he worships it and prays to it. And he says, 'Save me, for you are my god!' ¹⁸ They do not know. They do not understand, for their eyes are smeared, so that they cannot see, and their minds smeared, so that they cannot understand. ¹⁹ He does not consider, for he has neither knowledge nor discernment to say, 'I burned half in the fire. I also baked bread upon its coals, roasted flesh, and ate; I make what is left of it into a detestable thing and bow down to a block of wood.'²⁰ As for the one who feeds on ashes, his deluded mind is deceived. He cannot save his life. He cannot say, 'Is there not a lie in my right hand?'

^{21} *'Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant.*
I formed you, you are my servant, O Israel. Do not forget me.
^{22} *I wiped away your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist.*
Return to me, for I am your Redeemer.'

^{23} SING FOR JOY, O heavens, for YHWH has done it!
SHOUT OUT, O depths of the earth!
BREAK FORTH, O mountains, into singing—you forests and every tree in it.
For YHWH has redeemed Jacob and WILL GLORIFY HIMSELF in Israel.

^{24} Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb:
'I am the LORD, who made all things,
who stretched out the heavens alone and spread out the earth (Who was with me?),

^{25} 'Who frustrates the signs of false prophets and makes fools of diviners;
who causes the wise to turn back and turns their knowledge to foolishness;

^{26} 'Who confirms the word of His servant and carries out the counsel of His
messengers;
who says to Jerusalem, "She will be inhabited", and to the cities of Judah,
"Let them be rebuilt", and "I will raise up her ruins."

^{27} 'Who says to the deep waters, "Be dry! I will make your channels dry up."

^{28} 'Who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd, and he shall accomplish my will,
by saying to Jerusalem, 'Let her be rebuilt and the temple be relaid.'"'

Isaiah 44

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME:
ISAIAH'S CUT-UP CULTURE

> No matter how well they may do, exiles are always eccentrics who *feel* their difference…as a kind of orphanhood. … Clutching difference like a weapon to be used with stiffened will, the exile jealously insists on his or her rights to refuse to belong.
> (Edward Said, 'The Mind of Winter', 1984)[1]

> 'Exile' is not simply a geographical fact, but also a theological decision.
> (Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*, 1986)[2]

Exile is okay

Edward Said and Walter Brueggemann recognise the Exilic stamp's theological weight and betray how exile as a concept can be used as a weapon and as an idea. Each author indicates what exile means for people who use the term today, especially in the humanities. Said and Brueggemann are just two of the 360 names that come up when one types 'exile' into the Glasgow University Library catalogue's keyword field: there's every figure from Ovid, Camus, Trotsky and Hagar, to Charles II, Joseph Conrad, Pearl Buck and Bonhoeffer. Many subjects reflect contemporary cultural interests in revisiting the Western tradition from subjective vantage points, from the position of the Other. But the ubiquity of the concept throughout cultures and history exhibits itself in passionate titles such as *Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb* (Valérie Orlando, 1999), *Seeing Red: Hungarian Intellectuals in Exile and the Challenge of Communism* (Lee Congdon, 2001), and *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity* (J. Gerald Kennedy, 1993). Beyond the stacks of biblical commentaries, its repeated use

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[1] Edward Said, 'The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Exile', in *Harper's* (September 1984), 53. Cf. Edward Said, *Reflections on the Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London, 2000), 173-86.
[2] Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination* (Philadelphia, 1986), 93.

in poetic titles and in aesthetic criticism (e.g., *Living Theatre: Art, Exile and Outrage* [John Tytell, 1995]) shows the idea's Romantic associations. Not just groups, but concepts and movements like beauty and Surrealism, go into exile. The sense one gets from perusing the stacks, and in fact reviewing a large portion of the work written on the Babylonian exile, is that the exile is not always a nice place to be. But it can be a creative place to be.

Said's alienated and orphaned figure personifies the way the contemporary psyche anthropomorphises society's spiritual condition as one of exile. At the opening of the piece, he identifies the transformation of exile 'into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture': 'We have become accustomed to thinking of the modern experience itself as spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement.'[3] Julia Kristeva describes the existential condition of exile—of being 'strangers to ourselves'—that results from the non-traversable distance between our innermost experience and its ultimate inexpressibility through language.[4] As an icon of the Modern Western tradition, the exile as a stranger to himself is something like a saint who suffers for our sins. These conceptions of society vs. the self parallel particular mythologies of the *avant-garde's* outsiderness composed by the historians of Modern Art, as well as historical and theological views of the exile as a defining event that forever made Israel different from the rest of the world. To trust the Chronicler's heroic accounts of a mass return and rebuilding at the good command of Cyrus, however, would miss some obvious signs that something much less sensational might have actually taken place.

Charles C. Torrey began a revisionist campaign against the theological view of the exile in 1910, declaring it in fact to have been 'a small and relatively insignificant

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[3] Said, 173.

[4] See Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (*Étrangers à nous-mêmes* first published in Paris: Librairie Fayard, 1988; trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York, 1991).

affair'.[5] Donner and Bright are among those who offer similar less forgiving views of the legendary accounts of the suffering and the walking wounded: 'Babylonian policy was not overly oppressive… The exiles were not forced to live in inhuman conditions' was Donner's summation in 1986; and 'their lot does not seem to have been unduly severe' was Bright's in 1981. Robert Carroll has however been the most forthright in readdressing the implications of an overemphasised exile and supposed return. He has subjected the 'exilic' and early 'post-exilic' texts (along with the nomenclature) to scrupulous ideological scrutiny. With his blade of hermeneutic suspicion, Carroll slices through the refuse of deportation and diaspora discourses to ask not just was the exile all that dire, but did the exile actually ever end?[6]

The questions Carroll raises challenge the portrait of a group of faithful and pious descendants who finally all got to go home and to realise there was no place like it. 'To talk about the exile', Carroll warns, 'is to take a position following or favouring the Jerusalem-orientated point of view'.[7] But with Carroll I wonder if it is not more likely that a significant population stayed behind in diaspora. And is it not equally more realistic to imagine a group of descendants who might have lapsed in their religious observance and who seemed to be assimilating into Babylonian culture to the point of cultural extinction? In Egypt a population was also told it could return, but nowhere are the descendants of refugees forced to go back and it seems many stayed behind. The question is as much Carroll's 'What exile?' or Philip Davies' 'Whose exile?'[8] as it is '*Where* is the exile?'

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[5] Charles C. Torrey, 'The Exile and the Restoration', in *Ezra Studies* (New York, 1910), 285.
[6] Robert P. Carroll, 'Exile! What Exile? Deportation and the Discourses of Diaspora', in Lester Grabbe (ed.), *Leading the Captivity Captive: The Exile' as History and Ideology* (Sheffield, 1998), 62-79 [76].
[7] *Ibid*, 67.
[8] Philip Davies, 'Exile? What Exile? Whose Exile?', in Grabbe, 128-38.

None of which is to deny that an exile and the destruction of Jerusalem were not in fact highly traumatic for the people of Judah, or that many did in fact return. Archaeological evidence does suggest an increase in population by twenty-five percent at the end of the sixth century in Judah/Yehud.[9] But following Carroll's suspicions, the exile must be considered as a minority's construct that won its own propaganda war. The legacy of this trope was to bind a diaspora community together with a renewed sense of centre and of punishment suffered together. It secured identity in the looming threat of becoming too much like the Other, like the people of the empires. And it became the second most important milestone in Israel's history after the Exodus, a concept known to have emerged in tandem with the Exile.

One success of this well branded metaphor has come in trumping historical critics since Wellhausen into believing in the romance of this critical turning point; 'pre-exilic' and 'post-exilic' still define the boundaries within which Israel's ancient literature is classified. Beyond that, the experience of exile has helped to define the character of Deutero-Isaiah through his person, time and style, and scholars psychologize his prophecy according to autobiographical depictions that cast him as the personification of Israel's exile—the suffering homeless individual, the emotional hobo, the tormented *artiste*.

In revealing an instance of critical hyperbole in relation to Jeremiah, Yvonne Sherwood cites Gunkel's 'distinctively Romantic' description of the more dire exilic prophet, whose dark emotional life apparently made possible his ability to write

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[9] See M. Kochavi (ed.), *Judaea, Samaria and the Golan: Archaeological Survey 1967-1968* (in modern Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1972). Cf. Bob Becking, 'Ezra's Re-enactment of the Exile', in Grabbe, 42, n. 9. As with all archaelogical research, one has to question whether the archaeologist isn't hoping to find evidence that supports the biblical story.

'majestically rolling sentences [like] Isaiah'.[10] Brueggemann might be guilty of similar sins in glorifying Deutero-Isaiah's own 'prophetic imagination'. His 1986 work comments on the 'helpless' situation of the Babylonian exiles and on the poetic imagination as 'the most subversive, redemptive act that a leader of faith can undertake in the midst of exiles.'[11] As 'the supreme example of the liberated poetic imagination in the Old Testament', Deutero-Isaiah is remembered for the lyrical strains of his verse and for his innovative creative genius; he 'evokes an entirely different perception of reality', intones Brueggemann,[12] whose table of contents to *Hopeful Imagination* indicates his theological focus that appropriates the metaphor for a range of pastoral situations: 'Exile and the Voice of Hope', 'Only Grief Permits Newness', 'Only Holiness Gives Hope', 'Only Memory Allows Possibility', and 'Hurt as Hope's Home'.

Brueggemann classifies Second Isaiah as the 'buoyant literature of hope exquisitely expressed', and he is not alone. Peter Ackroyd helped build up an image of a perceptive, 'backward and forward looking…prophet' while claiming, 'Any attempt at dealing with the *richness of the thought of these chapters of Deutero-Isaiah* immediately comes up against the difficultly of finding an entirely satisfactory method of analysing the contents'[13] (italics my own). Ackroyd's glorification of the ancient prophet's creative persona may only be a mild case of a more rampant Exilic-Romantic Syndrome (ERS?), but it highlights how idols are made of texts, authors, and even redactors. Historiography has shown that nineteenth-century critics saw Israel as a nation-state according to their own evolving brands of republican state

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[10] Yvonne Sherwood, 'Prophetic Scatology: Prophecy and the Art of Sensation', *Semeia* 82 (1998), 188. Cf. Hermann Gunkel, 'The Prophets and Writers as Poets', in D.L. Petersen (ed.), *Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia, 1987), 47.
[11] Brueggemann, 95-96.
[12] *Ibid*, 96.
[13] Peter Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (London, 1968), 120.

structures, and recent projects which map the idea of the exile are demonstrating how the modern description of it has been projected back onto Israel and its prophets. It seems some apologists have found a safe home in their conceptual reconstructions and assumptions, but the glue to their arguments is drying out.

Though Michael Goulder has tempted us with rethinking Isaiah 40-55 as a text written in Jerusalem,[14] for the moment I shall argue according to the traditional assumption that the audience addressed is one present in Babylon around or just after 540. The proof the chapters provide of God's providence on Israel's behalf—and the linking of the nearly completed period of exile back to God's creative powers over the forces of chaos and in the exodus—suggests an ideology that lucked out and could use history to prove its message. God created the heavens and the earth, so to whom better than God to attribute the possibility of returning to the long-lost home in Jerusalem? It is a comfortable thought, but one that does not necessarily account for everyone, namely those who chose not to go back to their ancestors' homeland.

Linking up Israel's identity once again with Jerusalem, and with people who had been taken away but brought back there by God, is just one way the author of Is. 44 leads a creative crusade which solidifies a concept of national identity. Through the repetition of Jacob's new image as the redeemed servant Israel, he enforces a unified and corporal image of the collective people. Through his rhetoric of celebration and common sense he confirms and proves Israel's cleansed self and renewed elect status. And through the passage against the idol-makers (vv. 9-20), the focal point of the chapter, he animates what it really means to be 'of Israel': beyond just looking towards Jerusalem, it means not doing the foolish things that foreigners

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[14] Michael Goulder, 'Deutero-Isaiah of Jerusalem', *JSOT* 28:3 (March 2004), 351-62.

do. Making sport of idolatrous practice is a biblical pursuit,[15] but it also suggests an

author with protective and defensive aims. Possibly by after forty-plus years of exile

it was not such an uncommon matter to have descendants of the Israelite elite putting

idols up in their houses, and possibly a moment of satire was needed to bring them

back to their senses.

Identity is never stable.[16] Descendants of exiles grow different identities from

parents or grandparents who lived in a homeland. 'In the diaspora', Carroll has

written, 'people may regard themselves as living at home (*Heimat*).'[17] To protect

against feeling *too* at home, the early-Persian Jerusalemite doctrine thus gives land a

definitive identity—as the place where the people have always belonged and the place

where God's promises are fulfilled. Despite the sensationally grim account in

Lamentations aside, it does seem as if the ones who came back after years away

thought they had a much more dramatic story to tell than the people who were simply

left behind. So it was their prophetic traditions that survived and that ensured the

community's coherence through a required sense of belonging to Israel alone—

identity locked firmly into a more practical geographical place.

Prophets cut up culture

Why choose Is. 44 as a focal point for re-evaluating the modern reader's conceptions

of the exile? Why choose the upbeat Deutero-Isaiah at all, when Jeremiah and

Ezekiel typically provide so much more Modern trauma? Though there is no specific

mention of God's 'comfort', the chapter typifies the sentimental visual strategies of

Deutero-Isaiah: the heavens and the earth are called forth to praise (44.23; cf. 49.13);

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[15] See Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal 1 Kgs. 18.

[16] Davies's mention of his own Welsh ancestry and the intertwined histories of exile and conflict between past Welsh, English, and Irish populations illustrates how even white Britons cannot claim coherence of identity; see Grabbe, 134-35.

[17] Carroll in Grabbe, 67.

water functions as a medium of salvation (44.3-4; cf. 41.17ff; 43.2; 48.21; 49.10; 55.1); and Israel is regularly identified as God's servant (44.1, 2, 21, 26; cf. the Servant Songs). The idols passage (vv. 9-20) on the other hand is one of only two passages in chs. 40-55 that are generally translated as prose.[18] Its prosaic texture looks and feels different from the surrounding poetic verses. The chapter's emphatic optimism assures its audience that redemption triumphs over fear. Israel's transgressions have been swept away like a cloud (v. 21), and a new shepherd will see to it that Judah and her cities are rebuilt (v. 28). All of which is very nice indeed.

Yet witnessing the chapter as a compilation of forms, the product of a *bricoleur*,[19] the surface becomes a fragmented Modern composition, softened somewhat by the overall content and the logical transitions between genres.[20] Still, most exegetes divide Is. 44 according to the following fragments which show the literary surface to be a multi-textured composite: an oracle (or 'announcement') of salvation (vv. 1-5), now commonly considered as a continuation of the final verses of ch. 43;[21] a broken trial speech, which they address in its amended form (vv. 6-8, 21-24); a lengthy prose passage (vv. 9-20), sometimes translated as poetry;[22] an

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[18] The other prose passage occurs in 52.3-6.

[19] Drawing a somewhat over-simplified contrast between scientific and mythical thought, Claude Lévi-Strauss called the latter 'a kind of intellectual "bricolage"'. The *bricoleur* is the handy-man who, instead of retreating into the lofty realm of 'concepts', less self-consciously appropriates the more mundane 'tools that are at hand'. The resulting 'mythical' assemblage is a system of signs that work easily within its given cultural limits. Though the compilation may be identified for its structural incoherence, its pieces are fully legible as they reflect the incorporation of concrete familiar components of culture. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (*La Pensée sauvage* first published in Paris: Librairie Plon, 1962; trans. London, 1966), 17-20.

[20] Though Blenkinsopp acknowledges that 'abrupt transitions and alternation between reassurance and commination are not out of character with the author's style', he warns against breaking passages apart and failing to see the continuity of themes and discourses throughout Is. 40-55. Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55* (New York, 2000), 228ff.

[21] In keeping with Merendino's conclusion that the verse more closely resembles an 'announcement of salvation' which he links with the judicial context of Jer. 28.15-16; 34.4-5; Ezek. 21.3-5; *et passim*, he treats this oracle as the conclusion to the trial speech of 43.22-28. R.P. Merendino, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Eine Untersuchung von Jes 40-48* (Leiden, 1981). Westermann and Baltzer, on the other hand, treat vv. 1-5 as a separate form altogether. Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Philadelphia, 1969), 133ff. Claus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah* (Minneapolis, 2001), 184ff.

[22] D.W. Thomas explains his reasons for formatting this passage poetically in *BHS*, in 'Isaiah XLIV, 9-20: A Translation and Commentary', in *Hommages a André Dupont-Sommer* (Paris, 1971), 319. More

eschatological hymn of praise (v. 23); and the beginning of the oracle on Cyrus (vv. 24-28), which often gets pushed out of the frame and into that of Is. 45. A frame has been placed around 43.22-44.23 by John D.W. Watts and Brevard Childs,[23] among others, but the traditional chapter division creates a more disjunctive frame that is appropriate for viewing the prophetic text as a compilation of assembled and layered forms. Severing the opening oracle of salvation from chapter 43 and the final verses from the rest of the Cyrus oracle heightens the sense that the chapter consists of cut-up pieces that bear differing tones and hues due to their associated *Sitze im Leben*. But even so, the logical progression of thought from one form to the next, and the overall message of assurance, reflect a constructive practice that is quite the opposite of that found in Lamentations. Whereas Lamentations thrusts images of destruction before the viewer in relentless bursts—often failing to move from complaint to praise, as more traditional psalms of lament do—Isaiah grabs and maintains its audience's attention through more pleasant forms of persuasion.

If the Lamentations read violently, like a photomontage, then Is. 44 has a more suitable analogue in the collages of the Hanover-born artist and poet Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). The fact that Schwitters went into exile himself makes him an agreeable figure for the present discussion of each artist's situation and method. He began to recycle refuse and to arrange his collected scraps into paintings (or *Merzbilden*, as he called them) after the First World War, when economic hardship prevented him from creating through more traditional media. In 1930, Schwitters wrote: 'Out of parsimony…I took whatever I found…because we were now a poor country. One

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recently, Dierdre Dempsey translates poetically, revocalising for a 'timeless present' (*weyiqtol)* and maintaining the Masoretic pointing, which renders a 'past relative' (*wayyiqtol*), in 'The Verb Syntax of the Idol Passage of Isaiah 44:9-20', in Lawrence Boadt and Mark Smith (eds.), *Imagery and Imagination in Biblical Literature* (Washington, D.C., 2001), 145-56.

[23] John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (Waco, 1987), and Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville, 2001), 337ff.

can…shout out through refuse, and this is what I did, nailing and gluing it together. I called it "*Merz*", [and] it was a prayer about the victorious end of the war'.[24]

Though he embraced the expressive disorder he witnessed in the collages of his Dada-minded colleagues in Berlin, Zurich, and Cologne, by 1923 he had officially separated himself from their partisan alignments and manifestos. Schwitters' appropriation of typography as a means of exploring visual poetics marks a Cubist-inspired shift away from the aggressive disfiguration of forms found in the works of Raoul Hausmann and other practitioners of photomontage. For the rest of his career, he remained 'on the periphery of all movements'—fleeing to Norway on 1 January 1937 and then to England in 1940, when he spent a year interned on the Isle of Man before settling in the Lake District until his death.[25] And what could conjure up more Romantic connotations of picture-perfect bliss than the Lake District?

My appropriation of Schwitters emphasises the cut-up and pasted nature of Is. 44 when it is viewed with a form-critical eye as an assembled text, as a kind of *Merzbild*. Schwitters coined the term '*Merz*' after a cut-out from a bank advertisement that appears in an early collage, *Das Merzbild* (1919), and that had read 'Kommerz- und Privatbank' (Commercial and Private Bank).[26] He also related it to the verb, *ausmerzen,* 'to weed out or extirpate'. Arranging pieces of disparate origin, Schwitters wished to suppress the sources or contexts to which they referred in favour of a new, liberating, aesthetic function within the overall composition—one that would transform the viewer's way of seeing after the Great War. As Dorothea

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[24] His frequently cited statement first appeared in Heinz and Bodo Rasch (eds.), *Gefesselter Blick. 25 kurtze Monografien und Beiträge über neue Werbegestaltung* (Stuttgart, 1930). Cf. Werner Schmalenbach, *Kurt Schwitters* (New York, 1967), 32. As an ex-patriate American resident in the UK for eight years, I am fascinated by how Schwitters identifies himself with his chosen country England in saying, 'we were a poor country'.

[25] His wife stayed behind in Germany while he lived with his son and daughter-in-law in a remote village in Norway. In London he chose not to associate with the German immigrant community before moving to the ends of the earth in Ambleside on Lake Windermere.

[26] John Elderfield, *Kurt Schwitters* (New York, 1985), 12.

Dietrich, a leading historian on Schwitters, has written, he 'selected materials not as a shortcut to representation but for properties of colour, texture, or design'.[27] The resulting layered arrangement of pieces requires the viewer to engage with what Schwitters himself described as 'the totality of all imaginable materials and the principle that all of these individual materials have equal value.'[28]

It helps to recognise however that contrary to the artist's expressed aims, the cuttings one finds in any given *Merzbild* do not simply perform structural roles. Their composition presents a visual puzzle of sorts whose fragments are arranged with the intention of transforming the viewer in some way. Advertising images and portions of text produce associations beyond the strictly visual,[29] just as the prophet's forms evoke whatever cultic, legal, or textual contexts they appear to echo. Although it has become fashionable to survey Deutero-Isaiah for its structural coherence and as a series of scenes, and although ch. 44 fits logically within a textual whole, the breaks and seams between forms create a fractured sense of the finished text that is brought to light next to the gentle ruptures in Schwitter's collage.

The linearity of The Book of Isaiah is disrupted by the visual reconfiguration of forms, by intertextual allusions, and by its temporal shifts. As Claire Matthews has shown in relation to the fate and function of Edom throughout the book,[30] the text demands that the reader draw analogies between the past and the present. And if

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[27] Dorothea Dietrich, 'Absences/Presences: Kurt Schwitters's Late Collages', in Siegfried Gohr and Gunda Luyken (eds.), *Kurt Schwitters: I is Style,* retrospective exhibition catalogue (Leipsig and Amsterdam, 2000), 69.

[28] From a statement by Schwitters on 'Merz Painting', as recorded in Gohr and Lukyen, 2. That Schwitters believed in the religious or spiritual dimension of his artwork is apparent in a few of his documented reflections. Dietrich for instance relates how in 1920 he called *Merz* a 'prayer about the victorious end of the war', in Gohr and Lukyen, 58, while the Marlborough Fine Arts catalogue, *Schwitters* (London, 1963), quotes him as saying 'the foremost virtue of the critic' is 'humility': '…humbly he should listen to the voice of God in the work of art', 6.

[29] …if indeed there is such thing as a 'strictly visual' reaction, free of any verbal commentary within the viewer's own head.

[30] Claire Matthews, 'Apportioning Desolation: Contexts for Interpreting Edom's Fate and Function in Isaiah', in E.H. Lovering (ed.), SBL papers (Atlanta, 1995), 250-66.

'Deutero-Isaiah stands centrally in the tradition of *Heilgeschichte...* [then] With Zimmerli we may recognize that "The real Exodus event…lies in the future".'[31] But the lack of past, present and future in Hebrew's perfect/imperfect tense system contributes to a cut-up sense of time that consists of things that have been done and things that are in the process of being done.

Moving between tenses and between contexts, the exilic prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah operates like the exilic *Merz*-work of Kurt Schwitters. Seeing the exile as Said has, for the 'nomadic, decentered [and] contrapuntal' perspectives it produces,[32] Is. 44 and the work Schwitters produced in Norway and England appear coarse, angular, and restless. The juxtaposition of forms register difference, dissidence and harmonic disorder. But is this actually the case? Are Deutero-Isaiah and Schwitters wielding their difference like a weapon or even making their individual identities a subject for the viewer's reflection?

The scraps in Schwitters' collages compile an autobiographical inventory: wrappers reveal his preferences for particular kinds of chocolate and tobacco; tickets show the bus routes on which he travelled through London; and postmarks document where his correspondents lived. Neither Is. 44 nor *Green over Yellow* (17 x 14cm, 1947) poses a direct challenge to the viewer. In each work, the erratic movement between materials, styles, and tenses, bears an overall placatory tone while showing certain systems of human control to be delusional and laughable. Isaiah 44 opens with the demand that Jacob 'now hear' what the LORD has to say. Already the reader is confronted with questions of time: 'now' sets the text in the historical past, in the reader's present, and in the present of every possible audience in between. Jacob is

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[31] Ackroyd, 130. Cf. W. Zimmerli, 'Le Nouvel "Exode" dans le message des deux grands prophètes de l'exil', in *Maqqél Shâqédh: Hommage à W. Vischer* (Montpellier, 1960), 216-27.

[32] 'Composure and serenity' are for Said 'the last things associated with the work of exiles'. Said, 186, 182.

addressed as God's servant and is synonymous with Israel, whom God has chosen. The image of the patriarch harks back to a time of blessing (and deception). Through looking back 'now' the ones addressed in the future as Jacob see themselves re-formed as the people of God.[33] The transformative collage of forms is visualised in the variety of fonts and sizes that I have applied in an abridged diagram of the text:

But now hear, O Jacob…
For I will pour water on the thirsty and streams upon the dry ground…
this one … will title himself in the name of Israel.

Thus says the LORD:
'I am the first, and I am the last…
And you are my witnesses…'

All the ones making idols are nothing … They do not understand, for their eyes are smeared, so that they cannot see, and their minds smeared, so that they cannot understand. …

'Remember these things, O Jacob …
I wiped away your transgressions like a cloud…'

SING FOR JOY!

Thus says the LORD … I am the LORD…
Who says to the deep waters, "Be dry! I will make your channels dry up."
… Who says of Cyrus, "He is my shepherd…"

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[33] Just at what point the northern name became a term for the people of Judah is not entirely clear, but it occurred at least as early as the time of Proto-Isaiah (e.g., Judah is addressed as the 'house of Jacob' in Is. 2:5). Reinhard Kratz traced the evolution of the Jacob-Israel motif in 'Israel and the Book of Isaiah', a paper given at the Society for Old Testament Study conference, 2004.

The standard messenger formula (כה־אמר יהוה) that opens the second verse returns to a timeless present, addressing any audience at any time, but the supporting phrases which modify the deity refer again to an event in the distant past—this time to Israel's prenatal experience as an unformed entity, now about to be helped.[34] So the mind is thrown back to an unknown time. Then in v. 7, the prophet brings up 'the things to come' and shifts the focus momentarily to the future. The present tense of vv. 6-8 is followed by the comic sidebar that shows those who put too much trust in the work of their own hands to be foolish, and this is followed by a return to the trial-speech specific present and its call for Jacob/Israel to remember. The uses of Jacob/Israel having been formed in the womb and having his transgressions wiped away (vv. 21-22, 24) break out of linear time by alluding to the occasions of these critical past moments, which appear throughout the chapter and the book.

The hymn in v. 23 commands the heavens to sing (a present command that indicates immediate future action), because 'the LORD has done it' (past perfect) and 'will be glorified in Israel'. Finally, the return of the messenger formula and series of self-praising clauses that comprise the chapter's closing disputation move from past actions ('who formed you…' [v. 24]) to present circumstances ('who confirms the word of his servant…' [v. 26]) that progress into the future hope in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Like an image turned upside down, the streams that saturated dry ground in v. 3 are now inverted in the command for the rivers to dry up in v. 27.

Green over Yellow cannot be read according to the same narrative sequence, but the pieces echo one another and move between tenses in similar ways. There are three cuttings from what appears to have been a greeting card in the upper left, three

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[34] While her focus is almost exclusively on Exodus and Numbers, Ilana Pardes' analysis of Israel's development from infancy to adulthood is worth mentioning here. See her *The Biography of Ancient Israel* (Berkeley, 2000).

cropped or layered bus tickets turned at different angles, and three pieces of transparent blue which, overlaying the yellow grapefruits, make green. The English title thus reflects a shift in perspective: it does not describe the literal placement of blue over yellow, but instead the resulting transformed colour, green, over yellow. The title and use of English text seems significant as the artist's second language but may have less to do with the artist attempting to conceal his identity than it does with his simple environmental circumstances. He collected refuse, and refuse in England was naturally in English. Making joyful use of the bits lefts over from his life in exile, Schwitters pieced together visions of bounty.

The illustration of grapefruit halves clipped from a magazine and a cutting of mouth-watering buttered corn, torn and trimmed from a tin wrapper, are assembled next to one another and with the other fragments betray their multiple origins. In their totality, they mirror the exilic text in a number of ways: 1) they convey the process of rebuilding at the end of a long war and time abroad; 2) they create a surface of varying times and places; and 3) they are primarily directed towards the viewer's senses, intuitions, and desires. As the viewer surveys them s/he ponders where and when each item was found, recognises familiar images, textures, and even registers of text, and is made aware of a temporal process in which the pieces were pasted on top of one another.

Although I am certainly imposing my own theological vision on the process of collage, the centrality of the creative process itself seems to resist the idea that the work of art is ever complete. It is of course dead without the viewer's reaction, but *Green over Yellow* sets a creative structure into motion that entices the mind to free-associate and to be seduced by the refreshing images of life at the exile's chosen home; the same creative process comes about by Is. 44's images of the womb,

quenching streams and the rock-solid stability of God. The sum total of Schwitters's playful construction undermines what the watercolour of the fine country house seems to stand for, which is perhaps the belief in the completed state of the art object and representational art's static vision.[35]

Green over Yellow points in many directions: What did the rest of the greeting card look like? Did the sliver of text at the left belong to a story or an article? These are not urgent questions, lacking the potential crisis of identity one might expect from a German living in Britain after the War. Perhaps the bus tickets add a sombre note as they conjure up visions of transport routes in varying degrees of ruin, but only mildly so. The pieces tend to access the viewer's senses—the blue creating or quenching a visual or spiritual thirst, the buttered corn creating hunger or satisfaction, and the card and bus tickets offering spectacles for purely decorative pleasure.

At the middle of the creative flourish in the Schwitters piece, a torn portion of text adds further levity. Taken out of context, the directions from the back of a Bovril wrapper adopt an ironic register. The appropriation of such printed instructions alongside the orderly intonation of the schedules listed on the bus tickets seems shaded by the paradox between the false comfort and the inherent futility of humanly formed systems of order. The directions instruct on how to prepare the contents 'As a BEVERAGE' with a '*small* teaspoonful' or a '*medium* teaspoonful' and a 'breakfast cup' (not a mug or small bowl, then). The reminder to fill the cup with 'BOILING water, stirring all the time' adds to the patronising and pedantic tone which occurs in the displaced context. The attempt to grab the consumer's attention through the use of capital and italicised letters seems driven by a trivial urgency. 'As a SANDWICH

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[35] As the 'wet' ground on which the rest of the painting is placed, the watercolour functions as a pun. This canvas was however already dry when it became the base for the collage. Its dried up state and the retreat of its carefully drawn architecture beneath the mass of disposable pieces undermine the authority of such precise and regimented forms of construction that the watercoloured building ground seems to signify.

SPREAD', the torn label maternally commands, 'Spread *very thinly*', as if admonishing a clueless or wayward child. In its standard context, enveloping a jar of the actual spread, the text would not register in such an absurd way; Schwitters's placement of a common cutting transforms a scrap from his cupboard into a communicative poetic text.

Compare this to the prose passage in Is. 44. Although several critics have argued that vv. 9-20 were composed by Deutero-Isaiah himself, most follow Duhm in determining it to have been interpolated (regardless of authorship), as it disrupts the expected flow of the trial speech now framing it.[36] Duhm's commentary imagines the passage to be too crude to have come from the prophet but employs language that is serendipitous for our aesthetic assessment: 'Even the language displays peculiarities, and the difference in rhythm and style is more striking still; above all, it is impossible to imagine the grandiloquent DtIsa engaging in this finicking painting [*Detailmalerei zutrauen*].'[37] In other words, although the passage bears linguistic commonalities with the rest of Deutero-Isaiah,[38] its overall style and tone prove it to be graphically different from its poetic edges. It interrupts as a prosaic sidebar from the more formal court proceedings. The *puncta extraordinaria* above הֵמָּה (v. 9) marks the word as uncomfortable to the Masoretic eye and therefore adds a further element of difference at the opening of the passage. The dramatic nature of the passage will be elaborated upon below, but for now the comedic language (amplified by what Elliger identifies

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[36] For a summary of opinions of the integrity of this passage, see Baltzer, 192, n. 270.

[37] Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja, übersetzt und erklärt,* fourth edition, 1922 (Göttingen, 1892), 333; cf. Baltzer, 192.

[38] Baltzer mentions H.D. Preuss, *Verspottung fremder Religionen im AT* (1971), and H.C. Spykerboer, *The Structure and Composition of Deutero-Isaiah* (1976), as those who determine the passage to be 'intimately connected'. *Ibid*, 192. The mention of the idol-makers' 'witnesses' (v. 9) and subsequent command for the accused to 'assemble and stand' (v. 11), for instance, maintains the judicial conceit.

in vv. 14-20 as a 'confusion of…tenses'[39]) will be the grounds to treat the passage as prose and not as poetry.

Like the Bovril wrapper, the prose passage stands in stark relief to its surrounding environment. Each becomes the centre of its respective piece by demanding that the viewer focus in on it in order to read the fine print and to witness a scene-within-a-scene. In contrast to the more picturesque neighbouring pieces, each centre shows how silly the unquestioned following of instructions can be. But like other pieces, they also tell small tales of desire. The ironsmith goes through the motions of working his piece over glowing coals, hammering away at it, and forging it with all of the strength of his arms (v. 12),[40] but he simply ends up tired and hungry. The carpenter follows an even more elaborate and exhausting regimen that ends after five verses in the tragic-comic plea for the remaining piece of wood to save him (v. 17): he draws a line, traces it with a marking tool, even marks his plane with a compass, and makes it 'like the form of a man…to inhabit a house' (v. 13). Next, the materials which he so diligently and aggressively sources for his darling little sculpture (it has the cunning appearance of 'the beauty of a man') are shown to be better fit for more mundane purposes; the cedars he cuts down and the tirzah and oak he takes for himself (v. 14) become fuel for the fire. Rather preposterously, the carpenter then takes the remainder of this wood, turns it into an idol, and bows down to it (vv. 15-17). Imagine! Using the wood you use to cook your food to 'make' your god!

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[39] 'Another reason [why this is not genuine] is the confusion of…tenses, with the unregulated and promiscuous use of the perfect, imperfect and imperfect consecutive, which can otherwise be evidenced in later Hebrew poetry'; Karl Elliger, *Deuterojesaja* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1978), 416; cf. Baltzer, 193.

[40] The literal translation is complicated by the presence of the *waw*-consecutive, indicating an absence of a verb in the first phrase. Ignoring that, v. 12 reads: 'The craftsman of [the] iron tool works it over the glowing coal, and with hammers he fashions it and forges it with his strong arm (בזרוע כחו). He also becomes hungry, so he has no strength; he cannot drink water, so he grows faint.'

The tone then turns sapiential (vv. 18-20)—potentially pedantic language that is still 'consciously that of everyday speech'.[41] By breaking momentarily from the other celebratory and judicial sequences of the surrounding work, the idols passage grants a funny life-lesson at the end of the exile and proves it is okay and sometimes proper to laugh at instruction. The prophet and the artist have come to positions of relative comfort and presumably found it okay to laugh again.[42] Humour is embedded in the biblical chapter and the Modern collage through a liberating process of visual and literary rebuilding that mimics the tone of home-grown wisdom.

In picking up where it left off and echoing the earlier images of forming and being formed, the trial speech transitions well from the prose passage. The instruction to Jacob-Israel to 'Remember' (v. 21) moves swiftly onto the commands not to forget and to 'return' to the 'Redeemer' (v. 22). The shift does not necessarily form an abrupt or glaring seam (especially if it is treated as poetry), but neither does the Bovril wrapper radically disrupt its surface, for it fits comfortably into its position.

The jubilant hymn of praise that follows, for Baltzer, 'brings us to the close of the larger unit 42.14-44.23'.[43] Crüsemann classifies this as an 'imperative hymn', but it is more than that. The other gods and the making of them have been shown to be quantitative and qualitative failures. Human control through the construction of wooden or metal idols (which are burned and fussed over) has been enacted as the ludicrous embodiment of the foreigners' anthropocentric misconceptions about creative power. God's spoken wisdom has deafened the case for idols or systems of human control that fail to acknowledge the true creator. And the natural consequence resolves itself spectacularly in the heavens and the earth being called to praise

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[41] Elliger, 427; cf. Baltzer, 193.
[42] Comical stories such as Rachel's deception of her father in Gen. 31 (the hilarious punchline coming in v. 35) and Elisha's over-reaction to the boys who dared to call him 'baldie' in 2 Kgs. 2.23-25 reflect Israel's appreciation of a good joke in texts produced before the exile.
[43] Baltzer, 206. Cf. Westermann (1969) and Spykeboer (1976).

because redemption has come.[44] The mountains, and every 'forest and every tree in it' are being called to praise a God for forgiving his people and promising them that their city will be rebuilt. This is some celebration.

The modern reader cannot know exactly what effects the reference to Cyrus as YHWH's 'servant' and 'shepherd' had on all of its audiences—titles more commonly used for Israel, Jacob, and David. The prophet casually drops it in at the peak of an oratorical toast, minimising the potential for controversy. The bombardment of participles in the Cyrus oracle emphasises the power of the speaker, YHWH, who wields all of his power like one with a mighty weapon. Cyrus is only introduced as a messenger and fulfiller of the divine word (v. 28) after the speaker has established the many manifestations of God's intimidating and comprehensive authority. It is God who commands the foundations of the temple to be laid and Cyrus who merely relays his command. Cyrus's speech is only recounted secondhand: it is *YHWH* 'who says to/of Cyrus: "He is *my shepherd*! And he shall accomplish *my will*, / by saying to Jerusalem: 'Let her be rebuilt and the temple be relaid.' " ' English requires a complexity of inverted commas to illustrate the layering of voices in the text; so many quotes within quotes blur the identities of the speakers while establishing competing hierarchies between the prophet's and YHWH's authority. Schwitters' modest collage lacks anything immediately resembling a messianic or salvational figure, but it creates tensions between different authoritative voices that can lead to questions about creative power.

To establish too many corollaries between the forms in *Green over Yellow* and in the chapter might affix unnecessary theory onto either piece. Parts begin to be locked into positions of fixed meanings by modes of discourse that interpret them as

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[44] Cf. 49.13 and last verse of the Psalter, *et al.*

signifiers of concepts, practices, and power structures that stray far from the source. Nevertheless, the similarities between methods and styles, between the expressive, humorous, and instructional tendencies of each producer, affirm commonalities between prophecy and the artist's practice. Both employed a relatively free construction, which Schwitters described as 'not [the] lack of restraint, but the product of strict artistic discipline.'[45] Maybe exile really is the most creative place to be. It can produce aggressive, *avant-garde* assemblages as well as altogether 'nice' and enjoyable compositions such as *Green over Yellow* and Is. 44.

Both Schwitters and Deutero-Isaiah show particular systems of human control to be foolish. Neither challenges the viewer, but perhaps the unthreatening nature of Deutero-Isaiah is what has made his work appealing to Christians in search of a gentle prophet. By contrast, the mild-mannered appeal in Schwitters' late collages has resulted in a slight dismissal of them in comparison to his more angular and restless post-World-War-I *Merz*-work (*Materialcollagen*).

Viewed as a *Merzbild*, Is. 44 appears as an assemblage of different forms that play off one another, undermining prescribed systems of human control and expressing the identity of Israel through a new celebratory collection. On the whole however, neither picture is hugely subversive. The distance Schwitters kept from other artists throughout the greater part of his itinerant career might credit him with a Romantic loner's mystique, but he did not reveal himself to possess a radical sense of difference from the English. Instead he appropriated their language and shared in their culture, occasionally making innocent sport of their apparent faith in instruction, order, and the institution. The parallel between the two artists informs our sense of Deutero-Isaiah's aesthetic practice and allows the text to be seen as something spliced

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[45] As cited in Elderfield, 27.

together, like something made at home. Furthermore, it develops a sense of these exiles' relaxed conditions in their adopted homelands.   But the exilic prophecy requires consideration not just as a cut-up text but also, by breaking beyond the two-dimensional boundaries of the picture plane, as the record of a performance.

EARTH ACTIONS:
DISINTEGRATION AND DIASPORA IN ISAIAH 44
AND IN MENDIETA'S *SILUETAS*

Performance pieces

Baltzer's commentary on Isaiah 40-55 divides the exilic corpus into six acts and an

epilogue.[46]   The judicial, satirical, instructional, and celebratory sequences in Is. 44

are enacted between Act II (42.14-44.23) and the opening of Act III over five scenes.

His sub-scenes follow the traditional forms, but his dramatic rubric appreciates that

the prophecy should be *acted out*. Goulder has proposed that, prior to being written

down, portions of Isaiah's liturgy were performed during the autumn festival.[47]

Brueggemann may romanticize the prophet's imaginative genius, but he correctly

stresses the importance of prophecy as public speech.[48]

Since the 1970s, cultural theory on the function of performance has queried

whether performance primarily produces pleasure, or if it alternatively undermines its

viewers' values.   Christian tradition has appropriated Deutero-Isaiah's joyous

intonations towards messianic ends; the exilic prophet is employed to confirm for the

reader that Jesus is near. Considered in its sixth-century context, Is. 40-55 assures an

audience that no doubt liked what it was hearing about comfort, renewal and the re-

election of Israel as God's chosen one. The initial performance provokes applause

rather than controversy. On the other hand, if one interprets exile as an experience

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[46] His division is as follows: Prologue (40.1-31); Act I (41.1-42.13); Act II (42.14-44.23); Act III (44.24-45.25); Act IV (46.1-49.13); Act V (49.14-52.10); Act VI (52.11-54.17); Epilogue (55.1-13).
[47] Michael Goulder, *Isaiah as Liturgy* (Aldershot, 2004).
[48] Brueggemann, 95.

that elicits 'nomadic, decentered [and] contrapuntal' perspectives,[49] then perhaps the performance of the prophecy should be imagined as a means of searching for something more dissident in Isaiah's voice. Shedding the baggage readers have loaded onto the exile and the exilic prophets, and reading texts from the vantage-point of diaspora, can ultimately highlight the ways in which prophecy caters to alternative audiences and confesses more expansive attitudes towards God, geography and exile.

We cannot conclusively determine exactly what year Isaiah's forty-fourth chapter was written down, and it is impossible to establish exactly how it was enacted and received in its earliest performed incarnations. Nevertheless, imagining the chapter in a performed context—as repeated structures of action that allow a community to negotiate the challenges to its collective identity—should begin by a brief review of anthropology's influence on performance theory. In Milton Singer's introduction to a 1959 collection on Indian culture, the anthropologist isolates performance from everyday behaviour by defining it as the 'most concrete observable units of cultural structure', but he includes a wide range of 'organized program[s]' under the term, including religious ceremonies, recitations, concerts, and weddings— any scripted event.[50] Others have since expanded the definition to include any kind of patterned behaviour, as in the consciously repeated gestures that help to produce the social roles people play. (Gender and identity criticism obviously have roots in this research.) Victor Turner, for instance, helped take performance out of its conservative theatrical context by treating it as a kind of ritual 'social drama' and then dividing traditional structures of action according to preliminal, liminal, and postliminal stages of transition.[51] And James Clifford more recently defined

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[49] Said, 186.

[50] Milton Singer (ed.), *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia, 1959), xii, xiii.

[51] Victor Turner said he based his concept of social drama on Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de Passage* (1908), in Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre* (New York, 1982). Marvin Carlson determines

ethnography as 'a performance emplotted by powerful stories.'[52] So even the study of performance becomes a performance.

As something staged or merely socially performed, performance is a persuasive exercise. Performance assumes different rhetorical strategies and could be said to wield more power than the written text, confining the viewer to a time and place determined by the performer. There is no going back and rereading, control of the pace is relinquished, and the past is ever lost. The viewer is on the receiving end of the production of action and atmosphere. The characters in the play are at the mercy of the playwright and performers, who in turn are indebted to the audience's attention. The five sub-scenes in Isaiah 44 demonstrate that complete control is out of human hands. As repeated, performed, social dramas, they relate a sense of the surrendering of identity and of living away from the imagined centre.

Performance art itself can be repeated on many occasions, but each performance is obviously different, and photos merely document brief moments that have been lost forever. The identities of the performer and the audience in the live moment effectively disappear once the moment is 'immortalised' in a photograph. Immortal seems to have become the euphemism for the more brutal truth that the photograph signifies the mortality of the sitter and the viewer.[53] A photo of a performance is no more 'real' or representative of the live event than an unread script. Fear of death as the ultimate loss of identity undercuts the taking of the photograph and the viewing of it.

'theatre, play, and recreation' to be, more specifically, 'liminoid activities', in *Performance: a critical introduction* (London, 1996), 223.

[52] James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', in James Clifford and George Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, 1986), 98.

[53] Walter Benjamin wrote that the photograph signifies 'what we know…we will soon no longer have before us'. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (first published posthumously in German, 1969; trans. Harry Zorn; London, 1973), 87.

When a performer dies, the photographic record of her performance pieces can be all the more haunting. The earth artist Ana Mendieta (1948-1985) left Cuba with her family when she was ten and later married the minimalist sculptor Carl Andre. She remembered and referenced her homeland in her work, yet in interviews she revealed that she considered Iowa, where her parents had settled, to be her home as well. The photographs that document her earth and body sculptures provide only silent stills of once witnessed performances. And the exclusion of her work from the SoHo Guggenheim's male-dominated inaugural exhibition in 1992 led to a protest at which one banner demanded to know: 'Carle Andre is in the Guggenheim. Where is Ana Mendieta? Donde está Ana Mendieta?' (Carl had been acquitted in 1988, but many still harboured suspicions that he had pushed Ana to her death out of the window of their 34th-floor apartment three years earlier.) So for someone who called several places home, it is ironic that her legacy is overshadowed by her absence and distance.

As a woman 'in exile',[54] Mendieta showed her true home to be the earth: female forms sculpted in mud dissolve in an Iowan current; flowers appear to sprout from her body, lying like a corpse in a shallow and uncovered grave; and, at the conceptual level, man-made maps and other gendered constructions disintegrate as such *siluetas* are left to be absorbed back into the earth's endless cycles.

Addressing the liminal nature of identity in an untitled piece from 1978 (fig. 3), she branded the shape of her hand onto a coverless copy of Mircea Eliade's *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: The Mysteries of Birth and Rebirth* (1958)—enacting what the art historian Jane Blocker has described as her distinctive 'dissolutive process' of

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[54] One might take issue with the description of the Cuban elite who fled Castro as 'exiles'. I do not know if Ana's parents were active Battista supporters or if they simply chose to leave to avoid the consequences of the revolution, but such details seem somewhat irrelevant to the identity issues she addressed in her life and work.

'marking through disappearance'.[55]   Through her symbolic strategy, Mendieta communicates 'the unyielding power of names'.[56]   Eliade's name has been formally erased but the remaining words preserve his socio-scientific vocabulary and ethnographic position. 'Rites and Symbols' and 'Birth/Rebirth' have survived the red iron and now signify the grouping of the mythological into prescriptive pairs, clinical compartments set up by men who treat 'primitive' religion as a land of 'Mysteries' and make-believe. His name has been branded over, but His text has survived.

Figure 3. Untitled, Ana Mendieta (c. 1978)
Galerie Lelong, New York

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[55] Jane Blocker, *Where is Ana Mendieta?* (Durham, 1999), 30.
[56] Blocker illustrates how in Mendieta's work the power of names and of men acutely oppose the 'unbaptized' nature of the earth.

Through burning the shape of her hand onto Eliade's opus, however, Mendieta turns part of his work to ashes and rejects his binary perceptions of modern and ancient man, of history and prehistory.[57] She marks her presence over the text but leaves only an anonymous trace of herself. This universal shadow or silhouette symbolises the negotiation of an identity that is, like that of many exiles, refugees and women, destined in part to disappear.

In Is. 44, hands are not imprinted on texts, but YHWH's name is printed on the hands of the performers. YHWH announces, 'This one will say, "I am YHWH's", and call himself in the name of Jacob. This one will write on his hand, "the Lord's", and will title himself in the name of Israel' (v.5). Deutero-Isaiah certainly polarises Israel and the nations at times, but if these extras in the drama are rewriting YHWH's name onto their hands they might also be writing over names of foreign owners that are already on them.[58] The ritualistic titling of selves by extras in the prophetic performance indicates the need to eradicate the signs of previous ownership. Israel's framing as a nation of exodus and exile reflects the attempt to solidify identity on a more comprehensive editorial level, but here the gesture of identification is set on metaphorical dry ground, whose thirst will be quenched by water and streams (v. 3). The 'thirsty land' is not site-specific. The characters hover somewhere in 'third-space',[59] between the imagined homeland and their homes abroad. Under the universal threat of disappearance in diaspora, the anonymous become named in YHWH.

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[57] Blocker, 35.

[58] Letters from Elephantine mention the branding of slaves.

[59] The term was coined by Edward Soja in *Thirdspace: journeys to Los Angeles and other real-and-imagined places* (Oxford, 1996), to account for a combined perception of real and imagined space. Calling this marginal state 'lived space', metaphilosopher Henri Lefebvre had conceived it to be the complex space in which power is made concrete through social production, in Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (*Production de l'espace*), trans. Donald Nicholson Smith (Oxford, 1991).

The quenching of dry ground occurs frequently throughout chs. 40-55. So the situation in 44.3-4 is not so unusual at first glance:

> For I will pour water on the thirsty,
>   and streams on the dry ground;
> I will pour my spirit on your descendants,
>   and my blessing on your offspring.
> They shall spring up like grass[60] amid waters,
>   like the poplars beside flowing courses.

The dry ground evokes the parched experience of exile, and the layer of dry, cracked earth left by drought will wash away with the rushing streams. The descendants will nevertheless spring up like grass and willows and presumably will steadily withstand the current. They will survive where the dry earth drowned. But in a reversal of the dust and gush of this scene, the proclamation in v. 27 in which God says to the deep, 'Your waters will dry up' (or, 'Be dry!') pulls the tides mentioned in the trial speech back in the opposite direction. With water and with its absence in drought the playwright illustrates not just the power of the Lord to pour water and to take it back but, on a more mundane level, the reality of erosion. The ground disintegrates, but the descendants of the exiles effortlessly resist this process as blades in gentle waters. They are not fully threatened by such natural forces.

Water flows in Mendieta's work with a similar softness. In *Isla* (*Silueta* series, dimensions unknown, 1981; fig. 4), Mendieta moulded mud into a fertility figure roughly in the shape of the island of Cuba and left it to wash away in a river outside Iowa City. Its erosion is a more natural event than the branding of the text, but in producing the exiled female body as a map-less object, Mendieta both mimics the creation of land and humankind from the ground (Gen. 2.7, 3.19) and makes the woman in Her own image. She conjures the 'fleeting' condition of exile[61] and,

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[60] Or 'the green tamarisk tree'.
[61] Blocker, 82.

through the disintegration of the woman/island, an accusation against the grating

forces of masculinity and misogyny.

Figure 4. *Isla*, from the *Siluetas* series, Ana Mendieta (1981)
Galerie Lelong, New York

Mendieta knows the forms she creates with earth and with her own body are

going to wash away. Her forms recall ancient fertility statuary, and such 'idols'

parody what the theologian might call the gods of men. The dissolution of the

goddess in the sand shows work formed by hands to be at the mercy of the natural

processes of water and earth, not men. It illustrates the relative smallness of

masculine constructions (including nationalism and sexism) in relation to the creative

force of/behind the earth. The critique of the self-worship of men does not occur so

conspicuously in prophetic performances; on the contrary, the bad examples set by the

seductress and the harlot in so many of the playwrights' scenarios hardly sends a

message that power is poorly handled by her opposite sex. And though ch. 44 does

not explicitly dramatise a breakdown in gender politics, vv. 9-20 nonetheless provide a parody of certain men whose power is shown to be ludicrously petty.

Mendieta's disappearing *siluetas* allow one to establish a scenario in the prophetic performance that makes a mockery of masculinity.   Likewise, her portrayals of the earth as home highlight a correlative feature in the indeterminate locale in vv. 9-20. The absence of a specific geographic setting (no specific forest is mentioned v. 14 or in v. 23) makes it accessible to audiences everywhere. All over the earth fools make useless things with their hands. The characters now cut and take trees and hammer endlessly away at the anvil with graphic, probing, possessive, even masturbatory force. Their behaviour contrasts the images of Israel in YHWH's womb that frame the scene (vv. 1, 24). When Ana meets Isaiah, formation is no longer the exclusive action of a masculine God but rather a feminine function. The ground of the earth and the womb of YHWH defy the borders imposed by men, while to form out of clay or in one's womb becomes a more God-like pursuit than bashing blindly away with manly tools.

Relating to the living earth

The earth motif and the subject of divine vs. human creativity continue in the scenes that follow the prose skit. God calls on the redeemed Israel to remember and return to him (v. 22). The command to rebuild Jerusalem at the end of the chapter could mean that the return God calls his people to implies one back to Zion, but directed as it is to the servant, the sense of return is figurative not literal: the people Jacob-Israel return to their master metaphorically, because their sins have been swept away 'like mist'. This return can be enacted anywhere, in diaspora or chosen exile.

Then the eschatological hymn of praise in v. 23 follows with a jubilant chorus of wonder and harmony. The land sings praises to the Lord for his redemptive and restorative actions. Since exiles are everywhere, the whole earth sings:

> Sing for joy, O heavens, for YHWH has done it!
> Shout out, O depths of the earth!
> Break forth, O mountains, into singing—you forests and every tree in it…

God exists separate from the land and, having created it, has authority over it and can command it to praise. It is of course common in Deutero-Isaiah and in the Psalms to see the earth witness and praise God's redemptive power and creative influence (cf. Is. 41.1, 5, 18-19; 42.5, 10; and Ps. 96.11; 98.4; *et passim*), and here the reason for praise is once again for bringing the time of punishment to an end.

The singing mountains and the rock-God of v. 8 continue a geological motif that recurs fifteen times in chs. 40-55.[62] Mountains and hills break forth into singing in 49.13 and 55.12, while elsewhere mountains serve as the rostra from which tidings are proclaimed (40.9; 42.11). Most prominently (and four times prior to ch. 44), mountains appear to illustrate the ultimate power God bears to manipulate them at will or have them flattened or threshed on his behalf (40.4, 12; 41.15; 42.15; 49.11). In 52.7, mountains are the stomping ground for the messenger's 'beautiful' feet, but in no instance does the text specify an actual range either near Babylon or in Judah itself. These mountains are of a generic variety; these are the mountains of the earth.

Zion appears in parallel and synonymous with Jerusalem, but not as a mountain in competition with other mountains (or high places for that matter). The mountains after all are choristers of divine praise. In 40.9, Zion and Jerusalem are called to 'go/get up to a high mountain' to announce the arrival of God, so rather than designate an exact elevation or route that would confine the space for praise to Zion,

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[62] The prophet remembers God cleaving the rock and making water flow at Meribah in 48.21, and in 51.1 YHWH directs those who seek deliverance: 'Look to the rock from which you were hewn, / and to the quarry from which you were hewn' (RSV).

Zion personifies the dispersed people instead. The ransomed (51.11) and YHWH return (52.8), but otherwise Zion is either the one to whom tidings are told (40.9; 41.27; 51.16; 52.7), the one who is comforted (51.3), or the one awaiting salvation (46.13; 49.14). Putting on her strength and 'beautiful garments', the captive daughter Zion appears shaking herself of dust and loosening the bonds of her neck (52.1-2)—a feminine counterpart to Said's alienated orphan perhaps. Zion's physical supremacy as a literal mountain does not feature in the prophet's landscape at this moment. The mountains and the earth are distinct from Zion, counterbalancing the Jerusalem-centred axis of salvation. The viewers are addressed as Zion and are thus relieved of the responsibility of climbing it themselves. The oracle of salvation and the chapter as a whole envision an earth made up of mountains and trees—a land that is properly understood as demarcated and crafted by God alone. The whole earth is an object of a masculine subject, but the conception of a living earth poses at least a partial challenge to the borders men arrogantly project onto it.

By the second century BCE, Jewish religious writings created in Jerusalem and collected and preserved from the diaspora continued to adopt this more open attitude towards the land. In 'Exile and Return in Jubilees', Betsy Halpern-Amaru analyses how the pseudepigraphical work revises the centrality of exile and finds that in Jubilees 'Land is no longer the key component' in the covenant structure.[63] The exilic metaphor has been significantly diminished in the book's patriarchal accounts, as Jacob and the other patriarchs are no longer seen as strangers in other lands. With the memory of exile diminished, did Jubilees' approach to land and identity prove too postliminal a reality in the canonizers' eyes for the book to have been given scriptural status?

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[63] Betsy Halpern-Amaru, 'Exile and Return in Jubilees', in James M. Scott (ed.), *Exile: Old Testament, Jewish and Christian Conceptions* (Leiden, NY, 1997), 143. 'Restoration of lost purity, not exile and return to the Land, is the signature of the immanent eschaton', 144.

As the closing disputation, the Cyrus oracle formally announces the messenger of the rebuilding. The exiles returning home accept Cyrus as a messenger but will worship YHWH alone. Now that the exile is over, the redeemed people do not wither in diaspora but instead accept their new ruler as the one who will fulfil all of YHWH's purpose (v. 28). The chapter ends marking the presence of the foreigner and welcoming him as one's neighbour and God's shepherd. But the curtain call reveals a disappointing flaw: the dramatis personae consists entirely of men.

So to ask a question like that shouted on Mendieta's behalf: where are all the women in Isaiah 44? Save for the virgin of Babylon (47.1), the children born during their mothers' bereavement (49.20-21), mothers being divorced for the audience's transgressions (50.1), and the appearance of Jerusalem as a disempowered and captive daughter, the exilic prophet does not give his women much stage time. In a performance by men and mostly about men, women have all but disappeared. The comparison to Mendieta's earth and body works reintroduces them into the repertoire.

Set against the work of Mendieta's hands, the earth in Isaiah decentres Jerusalem and reminds viewers of God's creative and redemptive powers. Her dissolutive process helps highlight the failure that often comes from men's hands, and the lies they perpetually tell themselves about their own importance (v. 20). Assurance in exile comes from having fewer fears about the disintegration of identity over time and between spaces. Keeping one's hands from the fruitless pursuit of the gods of foolish men ensures connection to the community's exiled heritage.

Mendieta likened her exile as a girl to being torn from the womb but renewed her broken 'bonds with the universe' through art. Like Kristeva, she embraced exile as a privileged position that granted her an outsider's critical awareness.[64] In her

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[64] The artist expressed this in her Introduction to *Dialectics of Isolation* (New York, 1980).

earth works performed in exile, she exercised a greater intimacy with the earth than she might have had she simply stayed in Cuba. Her branded hand and her 'fertility' forms manifest the creation of a woman's presence not in conjunction with the gods of men but instead with the earth's cycles.

So why not contrive a production of Deutero-Isaiah in which the actions performed by prophets, mountains, mud, water and rocks serve to animate the earth's regenerative properties and the power God has over them? Why not employ the records of her performance as a means to destabilise male power? By projecting images of the earth artist's work onto the biblical script, the viewer is treated to a performance that articulates the inadequacies of masculine action. Flowing waters and eroding islands find counterparts in Deutero-Isaiah's quenching streams and singing mountains. These figures provide a backdrop against which exilic identity is allowed to form itself, as well as dissolve, in fluid motions. Fertility figures made from mud bring a silhouette of an Israel formed in a feminine womb more clearly into focus. Disintegration comes as a natural consequence of living on the earth, as only God-the-rock can claim true permanence. Mendieta's fertile forms can form a chorus behind this divine gesture and help feminine action to upstage the vain things men do. In exile and diaspora, feminine action proves itself to be sustainable, Godlike and synchronised with the earth's actions.

And yet the branding of identity, both in Mendieta's ashen handprint and in the signing of YHWH's name on the exiles' hands, nevertheless occurs within a world scripted by men. Eliade's text survives and the descendants of the deported are called by the name of Jacob. But in a drama so prone to metaphor, in which the return to Zion happens not by physical journey but by verbal declaration, there is room for more inventive direction. Set in the shadows of Mendieta's earthen forms of

disappearance, the exilic identity can be set free from Jerusalem and integrate itself beyond borders, within a broader geography of mountains, streams and foreign lands.

So Is. 44 is at once a collaged text and an earth-action performance piece. In fact Isaiah, Schwitters and Mendieta stray somewhat from Said's model of the exile: instead of wielding weapons, they seem content to lay down their hammers and hatchets, retire their worn-out walking shoes, and replace them with tools more fit for forming earthly bonds. Witnessing Is. 44 against Mendieta's practice permits the series of scenes to be staged as a lived event in which the dispersed servant Zion can comfortably focus both on God and the earth. Each performer's earth actions can reflect an acceptance of the disintegration of identity while living as potential outsiders, because identity can be maintained anywhere. Earth actions can intervene in such conditions to propel the exile into a more hospitable diaspora.

IV

ABSTRACTION ON A PSALM

IV. *Cathedral*, Jackson Pollock, 1947
Reprinted from Varnedoe, 225

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

² How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

³ Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;
lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.

⁴ and my enemy should say, 'I have prevailed over him',
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

⁶ I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Psalm 13

THE INDIVIDUAL LAMENT IN AN ABSTRACT CATHEDRAL:
PSALM 13 AS POURED PAINT

…David being not only pinched with extreme distress, but also overwhelmed with long and manifold miseries heaped one upon the other, calls upon God's faithfulness for help, which was the only remedy that remained for him… (John Calvin on Psalm 13, *A Commentary on the Psalms of David,* 1557)[1]

… like pictures painted on the inside walls of his mind…[Pollock's] work amounts to an invitation: Forget all, sever all, inhabit your white cell and—most ironic paradox of all—discover the universal in your self, for in a one-man world you are universal!
(John Berger, *Permanent Red*, 1960)[2]

Following on from the previous chapter on prophetic performance, we shift now to liturgical (e)motions and the aesthetics of psalmody. In order to introduce an abstract appreciation of a rather generic individual lament (or as Hermann Gunkel preferred to designate Psalm 13, 'the model of a "lament of the individual" … in which the individual components of the genre step forth most clearly'),[3] I begin with some concerns of the art historian, Donald Kuspit. His observations on the polarized criticism surrounding certain American painters of the 1940s and 1950s provides a model for rethinking a similar split in the criticism and commentary of the psalms. And it provides an opening vignette to lead into a rehanging of the pint-sized poem as a protest in poured paint. The legacy of the so-called New York School and its practitioners[4] has been determined by the battle to quantify the value—or failure—of Abstract Expressionism. As the artists' diverse and distinctive styles appeared to project mere individual preferences, the question of their work's relevance to the halls of art and the world at large helped draw a bold line in the critical sand. One camp of

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[1] John Calvin, *A Commentary on David* (first published in 1557; reprinted in London, 1840).
[2] John Berger, *Permanent Red* (London, 1960), 68-69.
[3] Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen,* Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (Göttingen, 1926), 46; cf. Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form Critical and Theological Study,* (Sheffield: 1989), 185.
[4] The name is merely a convenient monicker to group stylistically disparate post-War artists in New York—many of them expatriates—under a falsely unifying banner.

critics regarded the work of Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) and his 'drip' method in particular as a triumph in the development of form alone. Their opponents on the other hand regarded the action of his painting to be important for philosophical reasons beyond the artist's mere feelings; and so Pollock helped introduce the concept of the event as art.

Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg led the colours of these counterposed theorist-troops via 'some of the most vivid partisan writing in the history of criticism'.[5] Influential critics such as John Berger spoke of the universal nature of Pollock's one-man worlds but maintained Greenberg's focus on his formal achievements,[6] while Rosenberg's heritage lived on in criticism that waxed on the painterly style's more existential implications. More recently, Peter Fuller discredited Pollock for failing to speak beyond his own generation; he found the over-eager upstart's work 'symptomatic of the courageousness of what the Abstract Expressionists tried to do and of the enormity of their failure.' In attempting to realise a historical vision through his painting, Fuller insists, 'his vision became increasingly confined within the universal imagery of psychosis and infantilism'.[7]

Kuspit dismantles Fuller's assessment by noting the generalizations he makes concerning American culture as well as the wobbly ground on which his assumptions about Pollock's apparent political apathy rest. Asserting that Pollock's work contains more than self-commentary, Kuspit contends that Fuller is guilty of 'bifurcation … with its automatic assumption of content being an objective matter and style a realm

[5] Max Kozloff, 'The Critical Reception of Abstract Expressionism', first published in *Arts* magazine (December 1965); cf. David and Cecile Shapiro (eds.), *Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record* (Cambridge, 1990), 150.

[6] Berger passes over 'the pretentious incantations written around the kind of painting [Pollock] fathered' and celebrates the artist's canvases for their 'colour, their consistency of gesture, [and] the balance of their tonal weights', 67.

[7] Peter Fuller, 'American Painting Since the Last War', first published in *Art Monthly* (May-June 1979); cf. Shapiro and Shapiro (hereafter referenced as Shapiros), 172.

of subjective implications'.[8] Thus, thinking according to a 'perverse species of false consciousness … Fuller mechanically assumes Pollock's style is necessarily subjective.'[9] Such is the polarization between Greenberg and Rosenberg's priorities in approaching Pollock.

The same might be said of psalm criticism's own record of bifurcation between objective and subjective methods of analysis. While form-critics devote themselves to textual classifications of a psalm's constituent parts, faith guides isolate nuggets of truth for daily reflection and make the psalm useful for personal prayer. With the groundwork for form-criticism laid by Gunkel in *Die Psalmen* (1926) and his posthumously published *Introduction to the Psalms* (1928-33), scholarship has classified the psalms according to types (*Gattungen*)—and according to newfound systems of classification—and it has fixated on the cultic poem's *Sitz im Leben*. Its Greenbergian concerns have been each psalm's formal and structural qualities, and how a psalm adheres to or strays from the standard hymn or lament, though most fail to follow a typical structure.[10] Within this identification system, critics inquire about a psalm's cultic setting (how it was sung, and was it pre- or post-exilic), debate about the potential royal identity of a speaker, prove illness is the reason behind a plea, and even propose that the individual lament represents a sacral trial.

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[8] Donald Kuspit, 'Abstract Expressionism: The Social Contract', first published in *Arts* magazine (March 1980); cf. Shapiros, 186.

[9] *Ibid*. A year earlier, Kuspit identified bifurcation in Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1971): endorsing what she called 'an erotics of interpretation', Sontag wrote, 'To interpret is to impoverish; content is a hindrance', and in this she echoes Greenberg in emphasising art's physical or sensational properties and finding 'meaning' or interpretation to be mere obfuscations; cf. Donald Kuspit, 'To Interpret or Not to Interpret', first published in *Arts* magazine (March 1979), in Shapiros, 383-84. Kuspit finds description alone to be 'prosaic' (386) and traces Sontag's reductive separation of it from interpretation back to Descartes (388). A more comprehensive perspective emerges only through an adequate account of what art does for consciousness and the horizons it suggests.

[10] John Day's Introduction to *Psalms* (Sheffield, 1992) reiterates how little to expect from a form or type's unity: of the communal event, 'there is no fixed order in what follows'; in the individual lament, 'there is no absolute regularity'; and in individual thanksgivings, 'Again there is no absolute regularity', 12.

While form-criticism does a beneficial thing for aesthetic analysis in addressing the structure and vicissitudes of prayer, for some researchers the discipline's dissection of pages in the hymnbook of the Second Temple leaves appreciation along the lines of Calvin's more passionate description regrettably out of the frame. In contrast to form-critical pursuits, devotional guides thus address the personal nature of the individual psalms to provide faith-readers with mood-boosting morsels, with reflective pieces that will make them feel better. They illuminate the life-applicable (or Rosenbergian) qualities about the object-psalm's more philosophical avenues of awareness. When space or appropriateness restricts, the unsavoury portions of the laments that ask God to blot out the enemy are either evaded or conceptualised as triggers for Christian forgiveness.[11]

But both scholarly and faith-based commentaries (and there are many grey areas within the bifurcation of approaches here) emphasise the individual lament's function as a conduit through which the speaker pours out his soul and make at least a vague allusion to its expressive style. Gushing with feelings of hope and despair, laments wash over us and are easily watered down. They invite the reader to partake in an invigorating outbreak of sensation and to take imaginative leaps as the heart pours out its emotions to a God it conceives of in metaphorical terms.

Enter: Psalm 13. Calvin's David is 'overwhelmed with long and manifold miseries heaped one upon the other'—a rendering that conveys a tortuous terrain of physical duress (pinched, even) and the relentless sense of one tribulation slapped on top of another. Calvin pinpointed the kind of never-ending strain the psalmist (and

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[11] A recording of the American spiritual theologian, Eugene H. Peterson, was played at a seminar for Glasgow's Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts and exhibits an endemic tendency of preachers to turn a psalm's 'message' into theologically palatable putty. The recording of his sermon on Psalm 108 was presented as proof that, after the mention of God's promises to 'divide up Schechem' (v. 7) and make Moab his 'washbashin' (v. 9), the psalmist's plea to cast his shoe on and so bring him 'close to' Edom (vv. 9-10) is a Christian rally for forgiveness.

subsequent readers) experienced in these six deceptively short verses. The lashings of despair and hope and the parallelisms in the poetry unfold in impassioned pleas that spill over the boundaries of what is read or spoken and into the realm of the speaker's experience of uncontained grief. Calvin's reckoning of the psalm portrays miseries heaped one upon the other, like thickly dripped colours. Yet there is a final stroke of jubilant colour ('he has dealt bountifully with me'), and the psalm ends on a generous note about God's gratuitous beneficence.

In an aesthetic sense the parallelisms that give the psalm its textual tautness run like whorls of paint on a canvas, poured deftly across the surface of the hymn. Like Pollock's 'surging serpentines', they wind their way through and connect the verses into a 'thickly intertwined but transparent'[12] matrix of equivalences and oppositions. In the third of Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1753), he identified an 'artifice of composition' he would later call Parallelism. The patterns of Hebrew poetry, he found, 'treat[ed] one subject in many different ways' and 'express[ed] the same thing in different words, or different things in similar forms of words'; the sentences conform around making 'equals refer to equals, and opposites to opposites'. By resorting to this mannerism of style, Lowth's psalmist 'seldom fails to produce even in prose an agreeable and measured cadence' that he imagines 'must have imparted to [the] poetry … an exquisite degree of beauty and grace.'[13]

Sadly Lowth's subdivision of parallelisms into three types has overshadowed his aesthetic sensitivity for parallelism's intrinsic beauty, but Adele Berlin reminds us that Lowth 'was right about the essence of parallelism; it is a *correspondence of one*

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[12] Anonymous review, 'Jackson Pollock at Art of This Century', in *ARTNews* (Feb.1947); cf. Shapiros, 364.

[13] Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews (*first published in 1753; London: 1835).

thing with another.   Parallelism promotes the perception of a relationship … of correspondence.'[14]   Berlin explains how this correspondence is formulated via repetition, substitution, equivalence, opposition and contrast, and she subscribes to a 'much broader' definition of parallelism 'than that found in most biblical studies' by seeking out verbal equivalences beyond the context of the usual two or more consecutive lines.   She incorporates Roman Jakobson's 'more encompassing definition' and considers phrases and larger segments of text in order to 'unify phenomena whose relationships have not been perceived.'[15] In other words, she looks at longer streams of text and begins the process of seeing how they overlap to form a more 'global view'.   Parallelism's 'poetic function … projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination [so] … that "similarity" is superimposed on contiguity' (i.e., the linear logic).[16] If we develop Berlin's direction in drawing parallelisms out beyond their two-verse structure, the parallelisms in Ps. 13 are shown to overlap in poured patterns that crystallise into a matrix of expressive vocabulary and emotions.

A diagrammatic translation illustrates how the parallelisms in the text form an interlacing skein, like streams of words poured all over one another:

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[14] Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington, 1985), 2.
[15] *Ibid.,* 3.
[16] *Ibid.,* 140. Berlin has assessed several of Jakobson's works to establish this point.

How long, <u>O LORD</u>? Wilt *thou* forget **me** forever?

How long wilt *thou* hide *thy face* from **me**?

How long must *I* bear pain in *my soul*,
  and have sorrow in *my heart* all the day?

How long shall *my enemy* be exalted over **me**?

Consider and answer me, <u>O LORD</u> *my God*;
  lighten *my eyes*, lest *I* `sleep` the `sleep` of death.

Lest *my enemy* say, '*I* have prevailed over him',
  lest *my foes* rejoice because *I* am shaken.

But *I* have trusted in *thy steadfast love*
  my heart shall rejoice in *thy salvation*.

I will sing to the <u>**LORD**</u>,
  because *he* has dealt *bountifully* with **me**.

The application of different fonts and sizes highlights the continuing threads that wind their way through the verses like streams of paint across one of Pollock's surfaces. The fourfold repetition of 'How long' creates a bold initial splash, while 'sorrow', 'exalted', and the double appearance of 'rejoice' in 20-point suggests a thematic flow of emotions. The subject 'I' provides another fluid line from v. 2 through to v. 6, while the emphatic number of times an italicized 'me' or 'my'-something appears shows how deeply the strands of the self interlace in the psalm. In a plane higher than the subject's own, God's qualities are pointed at in italics again from below: 'thy face', 'thy steadfast love' and 'thy salvation' streak through the composition in

superscript. One can trace the wandering line between the occurrence of the oppositions, 'thou' and 'me', 'my soul' and 'my enemy', and 'my foes' and 'thy steadfast love'. The psalmist's use of parallelism thus establishes multiple streams of consciousness by allowing contrasts to overlap one another and the self to negotiate a circuitous correspondence with the divine realm.

The mingling of sentiments in this short but dense psalm is woven from competing and passionate colourful veins. Anger, resentment, hope, desperation, insistence and doubt permeate one another and spill off the page and into the reader's world. While following a straightforward course of invocation, complaint and praise implies a complete and dramatic transformation at the last stage, the expansive density of this psalm demands that it not be subdued by the shift to hope in v. 5 and that instead grief and hope be held expressively in continuous tension, as a contiguous totality.

Aside from its overlapping verbal and emotional layers, the psalm shares with Pollock's characteristic work an aversion to distracting detail. Day's summation of the 'vague and general terms' in which the individual laments are so commonly couched holds true for Ps. 13: '… many of the individual laments are phrased in such general, stereotyped terms that it is no longer possible to deduce exactly what the complaint is.'[17] The sufferer does not spell out the terms of his grief by describing objects or events in detail and instead conveys the extreme degree to which he ails. Like the specifics of the reader's personal situation, detail exists outside the edges of the psalm. The psalm does not put into literal words the particulars of an isolated historic experience and so to a degree disowns verbal, narrative or other fixed forms of imagery.

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[17] Day, 29.

Pollock and many of his contemporaries avoided explaining their work for reasons not always understood by their detractors. While the founding Director of the Museum of Modern Art Alfred Barr admitted the painters did 'nothing to make "communication" easy',[18] Pollock defended his reticence on the premise that 'any attempt to explain it could only destroy it.'[19] Similarly the painter Clyfford Still wrote in a letter, 'to interpose any literary illusion is to establish a serious block to communication';[20] and the sculptor David Smith announced on a 1952 radio program that words were not essential to understanding his work and advocated in place of them a 'return to origins, before purities were befouled by words.'[21] While we must of course question Smith's construction of 'pure' pre-verbal origins and his assumption that language corrupts human encounter, several art historians have noted the New York artists' suspicion of French Surrealism's literary roots as well as the ways in which realism came to be equated with totalitarian programs and the propaganda art that had been commissioned by Hitler and Stalin.[22] So their anti-verbal methods reflect a resistance to dictatorial art. In the case of Ps. 13, the vague language may have more to do with making the piece appropriate for public liturgy (it universalises the 'I'), but a correlation can be drawn between the Modern artists' elusive aesthetics and a psalm composed of symbolic words and poetic structures that aim to propel the reader away from the material smallness of descriptive detail and toward the realm of sensation.

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[18] Alfred Barr, introduction to *The New American Painting* exhibition catalogue (New York, 1958); cf. Shapiros, 196.

[19] As cited in Ann Gibson, 'Abstract Expressionism's Evasion of Language', first published in *Art Journal* 47.3 (Fall 1988); cf. Shapiros, 196.

[20] Clyfford Still, letter excerpted in *Tiger's Eye* 7 (March 1949), 60; cf. Gibson, 195.

[21] David Smith in a WNYC radio program broadcast on 30 October 1952, in Garnett McCoy (ed.), *David Smith,* (New York, 1971); cf. Gibson, 195.

[22] Gibson, 197.

To proceed to a point where it can be agreed that the short psalm in fact functions like a large drip-painting, we project Pollock's *Cathedral* (1947, 181.6 x 88.9cm, Dallas Museum of Art) opposite Ps. 13. The vertical configuration of this imposing (almost 6' high) canvas is unusual for Pollock, who more commonly exploited the horizontal axis as a means of creating an expansive image. Its title provides an actual subject (rather than a mere 'Number') and one that is closer to home for the theologian than the works covered in the other chapters of this dissertation. The painting is not however a representation of an actual cathedral and was not painted on the pavement of an Italian piazza. Instead Pollock chose to convey something like a sacred space by means of a mesmerising depth of field and light.

The colour scheme and overlapped composition are classic Pollock: on top of a cream canvas are splashed black, white, aluminium, and faint skeins of yellow, orange and red—most from household paints rather than artist's oils. 'Thus the paint surface becomes a series of labyrinthine patinas—refined and coarse types intermingling',[23] and as the colours and poured patterns play off one another locally and to no conclusive end, 'overarching forms do not emerge … no compositional architecture subordinates small incidents to bigger ones'.[24] Although Pollock remembered in an interview with the *New Yorker* in 1951 how his painting had been criticised for not having 'any beginning or end', he took this as a compliment.[25]

One quarter of the Psalter consists of individual laments—proof that it was common practice in ancient Israelite worship to complain. Insisting (in bifurcated

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[23] Parker Tyler, 'Jackson Pollock: The Infinite Labyrinth', first published in the *Magazine of Art* (March 1950), cf. Shapiros, 365.
[24] Carter Ratcliff, *The Fate of a Gesture: Jackson Pollock and Postwar American Art* (New York, 1996), 65. Many however argue that the repeating patterns formulate underlying structures for the drip paintings, establishing an order out of the chaos.
[25] *Ibid*.

terms) that one sentiment must be subdued to another, Willem Prinsloo's entry on Psalms in the *Eerdman's Commentary on the Bible* (2003) claims that the supplicant's petition 'never … dominates the psalm'.[26] The experience of pain and prayer of complaint do not constitute a strictly linear affair, for they are overlapped and fluctuating. The psalm may well end in praise, but the sufferer is not necessarily fully settled on a downy bed of hope, because agony can repeat itself and the 'How longs?' can be heard again and again depending on demand.

The recitation of Ps. 13 follows a temporal sequence, but as a grievance it formulates a self-justified objection to being hidden from God's face. Before any shift to confidence occurs, the reader is exposed to the sensation that the pain could be endless. The swirl of hope poured on as a last coat (see the bold-faced and distinctive font of '*bountifully*' in the diagram) offers a thematic explanation mark and temporary distraction from the darker reality of the day, but the first half of the psalm maintains a forceful presence. The reverberant emotions are enmeshed together in ways the traditional compositional architecture does not allow: they are bound in an intermingling labyrinth of no definite end. This is where the individual comes to complain—to a place where the soul can be poured out in a partly unstructured process of absorption, with no definite end.

Aldous Huxley was one of several who questioned the apparent indeterminacy of Pollock's work, claiming *Cathedral* most aptly suited 'a panel for a wallpaper which is repeated indefinitely around the wall.'[27] While others condemned Pollock's

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[26] Willem Prinsloo, 'The Psalms', in James Dunn and John Rogerson (eds.), *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Cambridge, 2003), 368.
[27] The painting was likened to a 'pleasant design for a necktie' by a distinguished Yale professor and to 'a most enchanting printed silk' by a curator of the Victoria and Albert Museum; Ellen Landau, *Jackson Pollock* (London, 1989), 179.

work as anarchic,[28] Greenberg praised its implicit symmetries and Rosenberg found, 'It joined painting to dance and to the inward action of prayer'.[29] The art historian Robert Rosenblum added that the painting's boundlessness stood within the tradition of the Sublime by evoking the overwhelming beauty of nature.[30] A disciple of both critics, Parker Tyler finds Pollock's paint stream:

> … has the continuity of script but escapes the monotony of calligraphy. It is as though Pollock 'wrote' non-representational imagery … an alphabet of unknown symbols; a cuneiform or impregnable language of image, as well as beautiful and subtle patterns of pure form.[31]

It is the engulfing nature of *Cathedral*'s vertiginous matrices that illuminates the multiple layers of the psalmist's despair, and the gestural language that advances our understanding of the broad and boundless context of the psalm's sweeping sense.

Individual laments and postwar art share a similar fate in having been easily appropriated: Pollock's oblique drip-work proved to be easily hang-able, just as Ps. 13 is remembered as either the prime example of its class or a devotional no-brainer. Perhaps it is the repeating gestures inherent to both that make them so palatable. Where Pollock's rhythms easily multiply into a delightful print, the psalmist's word-streams and use of stock imagery help blur the edges and maintain an intoxicating, even comforting motion.   Like the effect of the drip painting upon a spectator, the rush of the image overwhelms the reader of the psalm.   In Pollock, the tension between order and chaos pulls the viewer between different depths of the field on the surface plane.   The appealing swirls of colour are met in the psalm's turbulent aesthetics.

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[28] See Hilton Kramer, 'The Month in Review: Jackson Pollock', first published in *Arts* magazine (February 1957); cf. Shapiros, 368-71.
[29] Harold Rosenberg, 'The Mythic Act', first published in Harold Rosenberg, *Artworks and Packages* (Chicago, 1969); cf. Shapiro, 375-81.
[30] Robert Rosenblum, 'The Abstract Sublime', first published in *Art News* 59 (February 1961), 38-41, 56-7.
[31] Tyler, in Shapiros, 365.

Yet there are obvious differences between our objects of comparison, not the least of which is that between the large scale of Pollock's canvas and the modesty of the petite six-verse lament. Pollock and his critics have preferred to speak of 'the Sublime' when talking of Modern painting's spiritual destination, but from an anthropological perspective I think it is fair to say that the psalmist and the Modern painter are talking about the same thing—a source of power greater than the self whose resources can be called upon in times of need. And if the textual surface of the psalm is neither 'rough, unfinished, [nor] sloppy',[32] it is nevertheless both as 'brutal' as Pollock's painting in the reality it expresses regarding the limits of human knowledge, while also remaining attractive in its open appeal. Remembering Prinsloo's warning that '…as persuasive texts, these psalms implement hyperbolic and exaggerated terminology and … cannot be interpreted literally',[33] the argument that the psalm be treated 'abstractly' gains further ground on which to stand.

Kuspit's voice helps to re-configure the interaction between the 'I' and 'thou' in Ps. 13. In 'Abstract Expressionism: The Social Contract' (1980), he concludes that Pollock's 'apocalyptic vision of reality assumes the non-hierarchical if unstable unity of exterior and interior realities, to the point at which they seem undifferentiated. This unity,' he adds, is 'essentially that of the profane and sacred',[34] and provides a paradigm for how we encounter the psalm and the opposition of 'I' and 'thou' it seemingly suspends in a 'unity'. Kuspit also emphasises how Pollock's vision posed a protest by bringing different 'realities' together onto a single picture plane. Parallel to this, the psalmist lodges a complaint by intimating an oppositional equivalence between the deity and the subject 'I' and by holding God accountable on 'my' level.

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[32] 'Introduction', Shapiros, 1.
[33] Prinsloo, 370.
[34] Kuspit (1980), in Shapiros, 193.

Further friction comes from the opposition of the speaker and his enemies/foes, whose presence threatens the unity of his experience.

A large preoccupation of the psalmist's prayer centres around the fear that his enemies will triumph over him and mock him. As in Pollock's mystical mural, the viewer is at once drawn vertically up to the one entity that can and should put a stop to the torment, but is simultaneously pulled laterally across the human spectrum by his earthliness and the menacing closeness of his foes, be they Philistine, Greek or just plain sinister.[35] The righteous and the ungodly, as in any lament, are set apart but forever entangled together in reality. And the psalmist slings his paint to protest this.

Thus, laments (and the performance of them in ornamented sacred spaces) incorporate ways for the community to act out their opposition to the ongoing conflict with bad neighbours, by expressing an alternative reality of how things ought to be. Whether Ps. 13 was first about death, sickness, or a trauma of a more social nature, it works within an established system of complaint that allows the sufferer to 'pour out' his soul (cf. 42.4). It abstractly expands beyond that system by splattering on a revolving labyrinth of doubt and hope. Counteractively and like Pollock's ambitious aesthetic, in failing to pin its meaning down to more concrete forms of imagery it loses something of its shock value. The further it drifts from its author, the closer it approaches a banal comfort zone that allows the work to be used as an echo chamber for other people's emotions and ideas. Freed of the requirement to illustrate pictures, a diluted spirituality takes the place of the psalm's natural defiance.

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[35] This 'private' lament has been dated to the early monarchy and to the post-exilic period.

Figure 5. Detail of *Cathedral*.
Reprinted from Varnedoe, 224

The style

In the preface to his *Manual of the Book of Psalms*, Luther appreciates the 'expressive manner' in which 'the Psalms of temptations, or of complaints' are relayed.[36] Pragmatic approaches to Ps. 13 on the other hand tend to recount aspects of the 'threefold lament structure'[37] and trace the steady though predictable course it follows. There are no notable thematic complexities and no unusual vocabulary to cause anyone to detect turmoil in the textual surface. Delitzsch recalled the sensational flavour when summarising the flow of its parallelisms in terms that revive Luther's sense of the expressive style:

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[36] Martin Luther, *Manual of the Book of Psalms* (first published c. 1512-19; London, 1837), 9.
[37] Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (*Ausgewählte Psalmen* first published in Göttingen, 1984; trans. J.R. Porter; Edinburgh, 1989), 69ff.

> The hymn as it were advances in waves that are constantly decreasing in length, until at last it is only agitated with joy, and becomes calm as the sea when smooth as a mirror.[38]

These same scholars also acknowledge the veiled nature of the speaker's specific circumstances. Westermann for instance notes how 'the details of suffering are not given', and Craigie adds, 'We never learn what was disturbing the supplicant'.[39] The psalm refuses to give us concrete 'realist' images but instead resorts to abstraction in order to suggest things the eye does not see in the physical world. In v. 1 the psalmist mentions the face of the LORD but does not describe the lines and contours of it. He speaks of his soul's suffering (v. 2) rather than of wounds carved in his flesh by an Edomite or any other enemy that might fasten his trauma to a single historical moment. He asks that light be given to his eyes (v. 3), a more poetic form of the usual and more literal opening of eyes used elsewhere in the Bible, to convey visual or spiritual awakening. And though his singing to the LORD in the final verse indicates a literal action, the parallel of this is his metaphorical rejoicing heart (v. 5), which is the consequence of his generalised woes.

In contrast to the rigid route most critics chart of the psalm's shift from complaint to praise, movement actually occurs along any number of non-linear avenues. The future hope expressed does not fully negate the fact that adversity has not yet ceased. The total experience of the psalm is therefore a continuously intertwining mixture of tenses and sensations. The fact that the psalm, like other individual laments, offers no review of past events contributes further to an overall fluid aesthetic experience, for it does not merely progress from past to present. 'The tension which exists between past experience and future hope'[40] seems more properly

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[38] F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* I (Edinburgh, 1880), 252; cf. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-150* (Dallas, 1983), 141.
[39] Westermann (1989), 72; cf. Craigie, 58.
[40] Craigie, 143.

described as a less determinate reality than a strict reversal of the speaker's situation. And as with *Cathedral,* the pouring out of the medium before the viewer's eyes creates a revolving tension between self-concern and the ultimately unknown divine plan.

As Berlin might explain it, the effect of the parallelisms that oppose God against the speaker and the sufferer against those who mock him, is 'to provide ambiguity or disambiguation, or to serve a metaphoric function':

> Parallelism does not have meaning; but it structures the
> meaning of the signs of which it is composed… The result is
> that the elements in the text, which of necessity occur in a
> linear sequence (contiguity), are then perceived as equivalent
> or contrasted (similarity).[41]

In Ps. 13 equivalences and contrasts hover on the surface through the swift sweeps of parallelisms that rush through the verses, like poured strokes on Pollock's canvas.

In both works, swiftness of style whisks away objects and ideas that could otherwise have dragged the viewer/reader down into a literal quagmire. Much in the vein of Erich Auerbach writing on Genesis 22 in 'Odysseus' Scar' (1953), Italo Calvino offers reflections on literary brevity that shed light on our psalm. In a lecture he wrote on 'Quickness' just weeks before he died in 1985, he registers his preference for the laconic quality of folklore to the more detailed recountings of legends by Renaissance writers, for in 'the bare résumé … everything is left to the imagination and the speed with which events follow one another conveys a feeling of the ineluctable.'[42] Economical language can be executed in both prose and poetry, can give greater pleasure than the excesses of description, and can occur via the repetition

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[41] Berlin, 138.

[42] Italo Calvino, 'Quickness', in *Six Memos for a New Millennium,* The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, trans. Patrick Creagh (first published by Harvard University Press, 1988; New York, 1993), 33. Calvino's preference resembles that of Auerbach's own for the style of Genesis 22 to Homer's description of Odysseus' return, in Erich Auerbach, 'Odysseus' Scar', in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Culture* (first published in Berlin by A. Franke, 1946; trans. Willard R. Trask; Princeton, 1953).

of phrases or ideas (via parallelism). Among the sources he includes to illustrate this point, Calvino quotes from the diary of the poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798-1837):

> Speed and consciousness of style please us because they present the mind with a rush of ideas that are simultaneous, or that follow each other so quickly they seem simultaneous, and set the mind afloat on such an abundance of thoughts or images or spiritual feelings that either it cannot embrace them all, each one fully, or it has no time to be idle and empty of feelings.[43]

Such enumerations on the speedy style are relevant both to Ps. 13 and to Pollock's *Cathedral*, for the quickness with which Pollock splattered his paint on the canvas endows his field of expression with a gymnastic force that illustrates the physical density and conciseness of the psalmist's lament. Exuding the sensation of movement through which it was created, *Cathedral* provides a counterpart for the quick gestures the psalm renders through its parallelisms and textual brevity. Calvino's observation about the 'secret' to this style's success reads like a visualization of Hebrew poetry's structure: 'the events, however long they last, become puncti-form, connected by rectilinear segments, in a zigzag pattern that suggests incessant motion.'[44]

> See again the sweeps of repetitions and parallelisms in:
>
> . 'How long?' – 'How long?' – 'How long?' – 'How long?' (vv. 1-4)
> . 'thou' – 'thou' vs. 'me' – 'me' (v. 1)
> . 'thy face' (v. 1) – 'my soul' (v. 2)
> . 'my soul', 'my heart' (v. 2) – 'my enemy' (v. 3) – 'my eyes' (v. 3) – 'my
>   enemies' and 'my foes' (v. 4) – and 'thy steadfast love' (v. 5)

In addition to these moving segments, the subject 'I' winds in and out of the central verses, staggering between the various compromising positions in which the self is expressed: bearing pain (v. 2); possibly dying (v. 3); being shaken (v. 4); and finally trusting (v. 5) and singing (v. 6). At the middle of this string of 'I's, the subject shifts

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[43] 'Casual Thoughts' in his diary of 1821; cf. Calvino, 42.
[44] Calvino, 35. The passage could just as easily apply to the 'rhyming sentences' of biblical parallelism.

uncomfortably to the enemy, who assumes the first-person in daring to say, 'I have prevailed over him' (v. 4). The swift overlaying of the self via the first-person pronoun and the possessive pronoun conjugates into an overall fusion of patterns and feelings that multiply in a self-driven, action-packed painting.

In Pollock's case, 'the physicality of his process' has been determined to be a critical component in the revolutionary impact of the final work—the gesture 'a kind of social force' that disrupts the existing order and 'debunks the harmonious surface'.[45] Does the traditional lament really express such discontent? The proliferation of commentary that has staged the complaint as 'typical' diminishes the fact that it is not necessarily radical but nonetheless disruptive in nature. In a few swift verses, the lament rages and simultaneously insists on the possibility of salvation from sorrow. The token 'How long?' strains to a rhetorical peak and is inter/overlaid by the final declaration that there will, one day, be cause for rejoicing. Like Job, the psalmist fiercely demands that his Redeemer lives; his tone presents a challenge rather than a quiet pause for contemplative resolution.

Through dripped tracery that forms ethereal fields wrought from his personal laying on of patterns, Pollock's *Cathedral* achieves the sensation of a temple or church, creating a medium through which the self can both lose and find itself. The creation of both the painting and the psalm constitute events in which the painter/psalmist pours himself into a performance. Bucking the trend of scholars to read the psalms as private wisdom texts, Susan Niditch focuses in *Oral and Written Word* (1996) on the oral and performed origins of much biblical literature.[46] Commentaries include information about speakers, their potential identities, liturgical

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[45] Kuspit (1980), in Shapiros, 189.
[46] Susan Niditch, *Oral and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature* (London, 1996), 117-20.

notations, and where responses might have been inserted, but little attention is given to the nature of the environment in which they were recited.

While a long line of scholars have committed volumes to determining the *Sitz im Leben* for the psalms, the significance of the actual temple setting has been neglected in terms of the visual and sensory impact it might have had on the speaker when reciting them. If we are to revive a sense of the psalms as performative texts, it seems important to remember and even attempt to imagine the original environment(s) in which they were enacted. The ornamental nature of Pollock's painting provides a suitable visual stimulus to help reactivate this lost sense of an enchanted space created by indefinite repetition, as in the performed lament. It creates a sense of the 'total artwork' (*Gesamtkunstwerk*).[47]

Do not all of the psalm's emotionally interlaced, artfully poured subjects and themes in fact bear an intrinsic artistic affinity with the decorated environment in which they were once expressed? The criticism that downgrades Pollock's work for looking like a pattern begs the question of why something ornamentally appealing should be considered less worthy than a 'legitimate' work of art.[48] The Hebrew Bible tells a different story, as the elaborate instructions for the building of both the tabernacle and the temple illustrate. Adornment and pattern were considered to be appropriate, even necessary, finishings for the Lord's palace.

Descriptions of the tabernacle and temple can be found in Exodus, Kings, Ezekiel and Chronicles. The texts never digress into the impulses behind God's choice in décor, but the grounds on which these structures are built hold that YHWH

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[47] Richard Wagner coined this term in the essay 'The Artwork of the Future' ('Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft' first published in Zurich, 1849) to speak of how several art forms can cohere into a harmonious whole, as in Greek tragedy, grand operas and in a spatial sense architecture.
[48] In decorative art theory from the eighteenth—twentieth centuries ornament rarely if ever receives legitimate consideration for its potential to relate God's presence or catalyse a divine encounter, yet many entries included in Isabelle Frank's 2003 anthology of European and American writings on the subject give evidence to its inspirational qualities in language that all but utters the divine name.

requires the most glorious accommodations possible; the house had to imbue a space with a 'wow-factor' powerful enough to convey His holy presence. The architects of the first temple in Jerusalem sought to achieve this via the leading Phoenician style of the day, which was not so far from the emerging classical taste of their neighbours to the west. Windows had 'recessed frames' (1 Kgs. 6.4), 'side chambers all around' (v. 5) formed a protective buffer to the inner sanctuaries, and ascending staircases (v. 8) would have created a sense of processional grandeur. More extravagantly, every inch of the walls was panelled in cedar (one can only imagine the heavenly scent) and 'carved in the form of gourds and open flowers' (vv. 15-18). The floors were laid in cypress. Different from the common cathedral, 'not a stone was seen' (v. 18).

Solomon then gilds the whole inner sanctuary in gold leaf, and the altar to match. Cherubim, palm trees and more open flowers are carved on other parts of the walls. Presumably columns would have punctuated the outer walls, guiding the eye in the direction of the entrance to the inner sanctuary. The repetitive effect of so much recession and relief would have caused the space to appear to expand. The capitals chosen for the vestibule of the temple are 'lily-work' (lit. 'open flowers': פטורי צצים) —an Israelite form of cornicing to distinguish it from the papyrus and lotus patterns that topped the pillars of Egypt perhaps, but one that repeated itself about the deity's domestic setting in a way that gave the sensation of infinity.

One might argue that the biblical historian's intention in recording such details was to preserve precisely how the first temple looked, whereas the excesses Solomon commits when building his private palace are included to foreshadow the end of the united monarchy and the centuries of fallout that followed. Yet the considerable amount of text committed to such details of design preserves the importance of visual sensation in temple worship. At the risk of oversimplifying several thousands of

years of architectural history, the basic features described in 1 Kgs. 6-7 can be experienced in structures around the world. Cathedrals, temples and synagogues across cultures might include at least a row or two of pillars to articulate the space, recessed windows for more atmospheric lighting, a clear boundary defining where the sanctuary begins and ends, and some form of tracery, painted decoration, or elaborately carved wood or stonework to enliven the setting for worship. The temple at Jerusalem was distinctive in setting apart an unseen space that obstructs the congregation from fully visualising its God. It prevents the psalmist from knowing exactly what the face God hides from him looks like, and it acknowledges the limits to humankind's comprehension of the deity. Prayer is a one-sided affair, obstructed by a literal wall that requires an abstract imagining of the deity beyond it. Pollock's *Cathedral* hangs alongside Ps. 13 to activate the sensation of being in the temple, to restore a sense of the lament's excessive style, and to regenerate the environment beyond words in which God and the individual communicate.

The style of the psalm is thus, like Pollock's impression of a cathedral, an ordered chaos that spills over with visual and emotional sensation. Advancing in waves while as 'smooth as a mirror',[49] it operates beyond a linear sequence and casts swift strokes of echoing phrases through the text. Where Pollock's viewer feels engulfed by the sheer size of the canvas, the reader of the psalm is humbled by the timeless nature of human complaint with God. Action painting and lamentable protest, the psalm objects to personal tragedy, alienation, and the presence of others. Whether or not in doing so he exhibits a radical style is not the issue. It is the compression of sensation he achieves in expressing the complaint, and the impassioned attempt to unify God and the individual, that make him Modern.

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[49] Delitzsch, 141.

The self

The psalm does not capture the explicit circumstances of the 'original' author's (or David's) tribulation but has been loosely re-enacted by individuals in public and private worship for over two thousand years. Written in the first-person, it situates the reader as the central subject, so that the identities of the original self and the reader become momentarily fused. Equally, *Cathedral* is roughly the size of a man (5'9" is a nice, average, unisex height) and allows the viewing self to empathise with Pollock's personal experience as a reticent painter. These works are in this way self-important. As an individual 'complaint', the psalm asserts the self's right to shake its fist heavenward and to feel that the individual has a right to be heard. It seems a logical conclusion to find the self-focus of each enterprise renders them easily adaptable to personal experience and therefore easily consumable.

While Kuspit has been keen to prove Pollock's work ventured beyond the subjective, the artist himself admitted the personal and emotional nature of his work. He gave credence to Greenberg's notion that art is the embodiment of the painter's self [50] in his widely referenced artist's statement of 1947, 'My Painting'. Describing first how working with the canvas stretched on the floor allowed him greater contact with the painting, he subsequently elaborated upon how the ritual of walking around the work became a process of immersion:

> When I am *in* my painting, I'm not aware of what I'm doing … I
> have no fear about making changes, destroying the image, etc.,
> because the painting has a life of its own. … It is only when I lose
> contact with the painting that the result is a mess. Otherwise there

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[50] It was Greenberg who insisted that painters 'must *find* themselves'; cf. Kozloff, in Shapiros, 141.

is pure harmony, an easy give and take, and the painting comes out well.'[51]

In an interview he later told William Wright that he and his contemporaries no longer had to 'go to a subject matter outside themselves. Most modern painters work from a different source. They work from within.'[52]

Working from within, Pollock revealed his inner self, the workings of his subconscious, and his modern self. A troubled alcoholic, he typically brooded about and was suspicious of new faces, and it is difficult not to read something of the anguish of his addiction in his poured paintings, as if the drops of colour are not also a record of his tears. If his alcoholism provided the classic means to wash away an inner loathing, he nevertheless let his friends know that he thought he was the best painter of his time. He animated his stocky physique with the posture of a cowboy,[53] occasionally brawling but mostly not speaking at all. De Kooning once summarised Pollock's demeanour by remembering how '[he] would size people up and look at them as if to say "Fuck off".'[54] Is this how we can imagine the speaker of the psalm, or does this individual always have to be politely pious? Pollock does not direct his painting toward God but rather directs himself toward the painting, but the viewer's immersion in the painting parallels the reader's process of give, take, and grievance with the lament. In this sense at least Pollock as the speaker seems partly to fit.

As a student under Thomas Hart Benton when he first arrived in New York in 1930, Pollock absorbed some of his swashbuckling master's appreciation for the sentimental regionalism of American Scene painting. But Pollock eventually turned

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[51] Jackson Pollock, 'My Painting', first published in *Possibilities I* (Winter 1947-1948); cf. Shapiros, 357. Note how Pollock's conception of harmony involves a chaotic and disruptive surface. Here and in other statements he incidentally qualifies the shamanistic aspects to his action-painting.

[52] Jackson Pollock in 'An Interview with Jackson Pollock', by William Wright; first published in Francis V. O'Connor (ed.), *Jackson Pollock* (New York: MoMA, 1967); cf. Shapiros, 359.

[53] Pollock in fact spent most of his younger life near and in Los Angeles but played up his birthplace in Cody, Wyoming, causing him to fashion himself as a Buffalo Bill.

[54] James T. Valliere, 'De Kooning on Pollock: An Interview', first published in the *Partisan Review* (1967); cf. Shapiros, 373.

away from the Depression painter's mission to distinguish a defiantly separate American tradition from European modernisms, and instead he turned inward. Pollock resisted authority from a young age. He attended Communist meetings, professed to oppose totalitarianism in all its forms, and by retreating into his subconscious world refused to fulfil the expectations of others. Though his style and legacy would succumb to commodification, he was at all costs his 'own man'. His *Cathedral* demonstrates his rampant individualism at its best and allows his Modern world view to refocalise the psalmist's subjective position as a fully Modern self.

We return once more to Walter Pater, who located the birth of the modern self in the Renaissance. His collection of lectures on selected artists and philosophers orients their achievements around a common cause—the advancement of the 'modern spirit'. Having developed an early preoccupation with the 'elusive inscrutable mistakeable self',[55] Pater once explained the historical basis for regarding inward response as a legitimate form of perception: 'Modern thought is distinguished from ancient by its cultivation of the "relative" spirit in place of an "absolute" … To the modern spirit nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions'.[56] Personal impressions made by the intellect or imagination were primary for the receptive and essentially anthropocentric sensibility. Pater's humanist view, while tinted with equal doses of self-doubt and insouciance, criticised religious orthodoxy and the prejudices of contemporary, scientifically-minded thought (like Helmholtz before him and Gadamer after), as well as the inflexible modern methods of analysis. In *The Renaissance* (1873) he rejected traditional structures of historiography and attempted instead to capture the 'spirit' of the age via a

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[55] As cited by Adam Phillips in his Introduction to the OUP edition of *The Renaissance* (first published in 1873; Oxford, 1986); original reference not cited.
[56] Walter Pater, 'Coleridge'**,** *Westminster Review* (January 1866), opening page.

deliberately subjective method. The introduction to the 1986 Oxford Classics edition summarises:

> [while Ruskin had stressed] the meticulous education of the eye was the way to a kind of moral authenticity … Pater would elaborate on the artist's internal world of moods and ideas; and by doing so would make vagueness, informed vagueness, intellectually respectable.[57]

In almost every essay, Pater styles the artist or thinker as a subversive Christian whose dalliance with paganism and classical culture manifested his faith in the pure hedonistic pleasure of the creative vision.

Pater defines Botticelli, for instance, as the type of genius who 'usurps the data before [him] as the exponent of ideas, moods, visions of [his] own; in this interest [he] plays fast and loose with those data, rejecting some and isolating others, and always combining them anew.'[58] Is this not what one can do with an individual lament—take the verses, images and thoughts and, projecting personal experiences onto them, fixate on the familiar while downplaying the not so relevant? Their importance lies in how they affect and relate to us as individuals. Is this modern valuation of the self not implicit in Ps. 13?

In another essay in the collection Pater fashions Michelangelo as a Platonist, staging him not as a formal believer in immortality but as one concerned with 'the consciousness of ignorance—ignorance of man, ignorance of the nature of the mind, its origin and capacities.'[59] The speaker in our lament may *hope* for salvation (or, for Catholic critics, immortality), but the number of times he asks 'How long?' throws up a veil of unmistakeable vagueness. He is conscious of his ignorance, and his prayer

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[57] Phillips, Introduction to *The Renaissance*, xv.
[58] Pater, 35.
[59] *Ibid.*, 61.

revolts against this fact of life and provides a tool for demanding a fairer deal in the universe for his 'elusive inscrutable mistakeable self'.

The modern and/or ancient reader's use of the psalm justifies itself on the validity of the individual's experience, always chanting the inner cry 'This is Me! Me! Me!'[60] expressed by Pollock and the Abstract Expressionists. Though one must distinguish between the psalmist's sense of himself and 'the true image of his identity' towards which Rosenberg said the artist ventured,[61] the forwarding of his needs to the deity is no less extreme in its assertion of selfhood. In its stubborn insistence that the individual matters, the psalm is, as Alfred Barr once wrote of the new American painters, 'as uncompromising as … the religion of Kierkegaard'.[62] And where Pollock painted in order to scourge private demons, so does the psalm bring rebellious impulses to the surface in order to let justice be done to his situation. The speaker is dependent upon God but not without vocalising his autonomy and visualising a time when he will no longer be the laughing stock of his neighbours. He directs God's attention to his plight and distances himself from the corrupt (or complacent forces) of society in a manner Nietzsche would have applauded.

The use and preservation of laments is proof that struggle continues in every generation and that personal dissatisfaction deserves a space in which to release itself. Shifting between Pollock's *Cathedral* and the lament, the self as a reference point hovers vaguely between author, text, community, history and the unknown. Seeing the psalm in parallel with the painting, the self is splattered about and granted the freedom to practice a questioning, self-referential faith.

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[60] 'Introduction', Shapiros, 2.
[61] Rosenberg said the Expressionists were 'partaking of the last draughts of an extreme strain of Romanticism'; cf. Shapiros, 2.
[62] Barr, in Shapiros, 96. Barr's reference to Kierkegaard exemplifies how many art historians and artists have lapsed into religious language in order to communicate the power of their subjects. This again undermines the greater trend to separate modern art from religion.

The nations

The resentment of others provides yet another streak of colour in the rendering of Ps. 13 as an abstract cathedral. Just as Pollock translated his general misanthropy onto the canvas, the musings of the psalmist against his adversaries may be imagined as splashes of paint that attempt to blot them out. His fate depends on God staving off any real or imagined humiliation and, presumably (as in other laments), bringing him to a place where he may rejoice from the high ground over *their* fallen state. The parallelisms between verses 4 and 5 overlay the speaker's enemies ('my enemies': איבי ; and 'my foes'**:** צרי) rejoicing over him with his heart rejoicing (יגל) in the LORD's salvation. And his enemies are his last concern before the haphazard application of the layer of hope.

In *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* (1987), Steven Croft outlines the history of criticism relating to the antagonists in the laments and supports S.N. Rosenbaum's conclusion that 'the terms wicked [רשעים] and enemy [איבים] are not synonymous in the Psalms but refer to two different groups… Israelites who have gone astray and foreign enemies respectively.'[63] Croft further stipulates that the wicked are generally not a direct threat to the individual, whereas the enemy always is. The lament in Ps. 13 is against the foreign enemy, and this colours the event with a tint of nationalism.

While Craigie dates the psalm at the onset of the Hebrew monarchy,[64] Croft and others have discussed the ultimate late post-exilic context, which leads the mind

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[63] Stephen J.L. Croft, *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms* (Sheffield, 1987), 18.
[64] Craigie, 141.

to ponder about the life of the psalm under the threat of Hellenism. Whatever the original and subsequent contexts in which it was read, the mention of foreigners binds personal salvation up with the need to be triumphant (or at least dignified) in the face of the nation's foes. Westermann writes of how the mention of them is a reminder that 'living with God cannot be separated from living with others'.[65] But he also points out that the confession of sin is as uncommon for the individual as an explicit description of the adversary.

As an American painter, Pollock took advantage of his freedom to make a contrary statement. Having distributed subversive broadsides as a student at the Manual Arts High School in Los Angeles and then dodging the draft on the potentially dodgy grounds of mental unfitness, he came momentarily under the spell of Benton and his 'evangelical devotion to the idea of an all-American aesthetic'.[66] In one of many moments in which his long-suffering lover proved herself to be Pollock's personal saviour, Lee Krasner helped lead him out of Benton's shadow by introducing him to the expatriate abstractionist Hans Hofmann. So instead of the presumed pretensions of European art, Pollock was able as an American to focus on a more philosophical enemy.

Max Kozloff records that the villain in both Greenberg and Rosenberg's eyes was not a foreign country but 'a Philistine, implacably middle-of-the-road society, without any historical and cultural consciousness.'[67] The utilisation of Philistine as a pejorative harks back to Matthew Arnold and begs the question of who gets to

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[65] Westermann (1989), 70.

[66] Ratcliff, 22. Lawrence Alloway has written on how the renunciation of nineteenth-century Europe involves a typology of contrasts—between dedication (America) and exhaustion (Europe), vitality and elegance, honesty and learning; in Lawrence Alloway, 'Residual Sign Systems in Abstract Expressionism', first published in *Artforum* (Nov. 1973); cf. Shapiros, 157-68. Alloway adds that the literary critic Benjamin T. Spencer has pointed out, when writing about America, 'Emerson resorted to metaphors which implied primal energies rather than mature ideologies'—metaphors such as 'a colossal youth' and 'a brood of titans', 158; cf. Benjamin T. Spencer, *The Quest for National Identity* (Syracuse, 1957).

[67] Kozloff, in Shapiros, 141.

determine who is uncouth and in need of enlightenment, but it is convenient for highlighting an inherent opposition. The expression of 'what is *emotionally real*' to the painters, Rosenberg found, provided 'the standpoint for a private revolt against the materialist tradition that [did] surround them.'[68] So although a London critic would remark in 1959:

> Abstract Expressionism radiated the world over from Manhattan Island, more specifically from West Fifty-Third Street, where the Museum of Modern Art stands as the Parthenon on this particular acropolis[69]

it would be wrong to say that Pollock's abstraction was developed in defence of the American imperialist enterprise. Nevertheless Kuspit directs our attention to the implications of Pollock's 'gestural tongues' by arguing that he was speaking as much within a social contract as he was within a personal milieu. With Gottlieb and Rothko opting for a 'timeless and tragic art' in order to defy an American society they found 'all too concerned with things temporal and banal', Pollock was likewise 'desperate … to escape from American ordinariness, its lure of banality'.[70]

Though the manic energy Pollock invested in his abstract *Cathedral* does not target an embodied opponent through figural representation, the protest it wages against an unquestioned life unleashes a loathing for ordinariness, as well as a pride at being a free American man. As an exercise in which the speaker rouses himself from enervation, the psalm initiates active resistance against the drudgery of others and the otherness of God.

The pliable language of the psalm invites the reader to enter into the role of the first person and appropriate the circumstances as his/her own. The psalm is a

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[68] Harold Rosenberg, 'Introduction to Six American Artists', in *Possibilities* 1 (Winter 1947-48); cf. Kozloff, in Shapiros, 141.

[69] Fuller cites a 1959 article in London's *Times Literary Supplement* but does not list the exact date; cf. Fuller, in Shapiros, 179. Note again the religious language critics use to talk about art's signifigance.

[70] Kuspit, 191.

place where one can resent one's enemies and not have to regret it. Like the *Cathedral*, it generates an open vision that is at once vague and physically tangible; it alludes to experiences extending beyond the picture plane (and beyond borders) and creates a space for personal reflection, projection and identification, and finally the resentment of others.

Pollock's resistance to authority and ordinariness sheds further light when one casts the first-person psalmist, as Smend did in 1888, as the personification of Israel against the philistine nations.[71] Perhaps such a move is unnecessary given the abundance of communal laments, but the idea of this representative function appeals in terms of intensifying the sense of resistance to the overbearing intrusiveness of other nations. Repressed feelings toward enemy nations, though modern liberal minds would wish there were none, are vented via generalised expressive language. The conclusion of the psalm ('I will sing … because he has dealt bountifully with me' [v. 6]) might then be said to be the thin stream of red paint that, from out of the depths of the heavier and more despondent layers, puts the power back into God's hands. And it is this layer that reminds the hater of nations that he can fling his anger around all he wants, but the God who draws out lines of order in the midst of the chaos is the one who determines everyone's fate.

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[71] See R. Smend, 'Über das Ich der Psalmen', in *ZAW* 8 (1888), 49-147.

The end?

The final stream of red hope at the close of the psalm eases the pain(t) of the opening verses and allows us temporarily to forget the immediate source of strife, but the initial splash of 'How longs' continues to project itself to the foreground. And so experience is rushed, repeated, and not forgotten. The question 'How long?' begs attention in today's busy world as it did in temple times. Westermann deserves a mention for determining how the repetition of this phrase indicates 'time itself [as] a destructive force, wearing down a man's ability to hold out and intensifying the suffering to an inhuman level.'[72] Elsewhere Westermann mourns how time has accelerated at the expense of personal and cultural memory:

> We live in an age whose most distinctive and perhaps most important characteristic is *speed*. The tempo of today's traffic is only one example of the speed with which events of a technical, intellectual, or political nature develop—attracting us and carrying us along as individuals as well as groups. The pace of these developments corresponds proportionately to the *forgetting* that occurs … Because people are limited in their ability to perceive and digest sensory impressions, the only way they can deal with today's constant stream of stimuli is by forgetting most of what they experience.[73]

The cynic might ridicule these reflections as nostalgia for the slower pace of decades and centuries past, but Westermann's concern with pace and processes of remembrance is relevant to how we hang the abstract psalm. Time grinds away at the sufferer's endurance, but the six short verses hasten the moment of agony without speeding it along. As contemplative pieces, *Cathedral* and Ps. 13 relive the psalm's sorrows and counter the degenerative threat of forgetting. The painting and the psalm

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[72] Westermann (1989), 71.
[73] Claus Westermann, *The Psalms* (*Der Psalter* first published in 1967; trans. Ralph D. Gehrke; Minneapolis, 1980), 6-7.

are as 'quick' as Calvino would have preferred them to be, but they take time and memory to digest in order to counter the forgetting of pain.

More morosely, the 'sleep of death' in v. 3 underscores the entire composition with a deathly chord. Craigie treats אישן המות (lit. 'I will sleep the death') as a metaphor, but Dahood entrusts that the phrase refers directly to mortality.[74] Our abstract expression of it conceives of it as Death, capitalised here to encompass both meanings: the loss felt by God's absence and the existential preoccupation with the endless sleep. In the psalm's closing verse, the speaker is situated in a place in which he is 'infinitesimally small',[75] for it is God who is shown to have the exclusive means to grant all blessings and desires. And it is God who 'remembers that we are dust' (Ps. 103.14).

As much as Pollock's gesture came 'from within', he did have occasion to envision it as an important moment in the flow of history. In his personal statement for his 1947 application to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, he remarked on the liminal state of his work:

> I intend to paint large movable pictures which will function between the easel and mural … I believe the easel picture to be a dying form, and the tendency of modern feeling is toward the wall picture or mural … The pictures I contemplate would constitute a halfway state, and an attempt to point out the direction of the future without arriving there completely.[76]

Traditionally mounted and painted on the walls of civic lobbies, chapels and cathedrals, the mural originates in a public context, and Pollock's transition toward it reflects his desire to release painting from the confinement of the gallery and make it an active agent in the world at large. Positioned at the halfway state between private

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[74] Craigie, 142; Dahood, 76.
[75] Westermann (1980), 9.
[76] As cited in O'Connor, 39-40; cf. Henry Geldzahler, *New York Painting and Sculpture: 1940-1970* (London, 1969), 22.

and public consumption, the short lament equally exists in a mode of increasing de-privatization. It hangs as a small picture of personal pain and as a moving mural to be beheld by all. Up on the wall, the psalm's ornamental tendrils overlap one another and meander along endless emotional arcs, like arabesques of foliage on a decorative panel. Relief from grief comes from following the intertwining subjects and the sentiments of despair, resentment and hope. Complaint is given a beautifully patterned and energetic plexus that expands into Pollock's dream of limitless space.

Krasner knew that 'misery was capitalism's leading product',[77] and Pollock's *Cathedral* attempts to break beyond the wretchedness of modern life. His 'apocalypse', as Kuspit has called it, ushers in a bountiful display of colour, form, light, sensation and emotion, and it inclines the viewer away from the material world. Pollock's 'gyrating labyrinths' plunge us into 'divine fury' and to a place beyond 'superhuman turbulence'.[78] The stream of hope in a God who will deal bountifully with the supplicant broaches the boundlessness of a Kantian Sublime through more direct theological language. If Pollock's painting gives us 'a pictorial equivalent to the American infinite' and draws us into a world of 'primal energies',[79] so does the psalm open the door to planes in which the vitality of chaos disrupts the classical symmetry and smoothness of the complacent acceptance of the text. The silence that emerges out of the fray, the sound of God's absence, is met by something more challenging than passive plaintiveness.

Stepping back from the image, one can observe a concatenation of parallelisms and a pretty piece of protest in miniature. A literal approach confines interpretation to the four sides of the six verses on the page, but the abstract vision

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[77] The hunger of the Depression proved this. Ratcliff, 29.
[78] Rosenblum is speaking of *Number 1* (1948), but the description fits the similarly splattered *Cathedral;* Rosenblum, in Shapiros, 357.
[79] Ratcliff, 3.

blurs the boundaries and lets the text spill off the page, intersecting with our Modern ways of seeing. If the stare of Manet's *Olympia* brought to light the break between the artist and the world—and if *avant-garde* painting from then until now chose to stare back at us and intrude upon our space—then so does the lament capture the reader in its gaze. In the manmade cathedral, movement is restricted unless we choose to interact with it and accept the beauty in the tortuous interconnection of weariness and anticipation. The abstract argument for the psalm's decorative weight grants a vision beyond the relative darkness of more formal literal readings. To fail to see beyond the literal world—is that not something like the sleep of death?

V

WISDOM'S CONCEPTUAL GAME

V. *Monte Carlo Bond*, Marcel Duchamp, 1924
Reprinted from Schwarz, 315

THE AFFAIRS OF QOHELETH
SON OF DAVID
KING IN JERUSALEM:

² Meaninglessness of meaninglessnesses, *says the Assembler*,
meaninglessness of meaninglessnesses! All is meaningless.

³ What gain is there to a man from all his work
with which he toils under the sun?

⁴ A generation going, and a generation coming,
and the earth stands as always.

⁵ And the sun rises and the sun sets;
then breathlessly it hastens to the place it rises.

⁶ Blowing to the south and turning to the north,
it turns, it turns, it blows, the wind,
and because it turns, it returns, the wind.

⁷ All streams run to the sea,
yet the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they flow again and again.

⁸ All words are wearisome,
no one can get a word in;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
and the earth is not full with hearing.

⁹ Whatever has happened will happen again,
and whatever has been done will be done again.
And there is nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰ Sometimes there is a phenomenon of which they say 'Look, this one is new!'
but it has happened before.

¹¹ There is no remembrance of people of long ago,
nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come
by those who come after us…

Qoheleth 1

INTRODUCTION TO A DANDY:
QOHELETH'S TURN, WITH DUCHAMP IN MONTE CARLO

> He turned over many maxims in his mind and sought how best to suit them out.
> He chose his words to give pleasure, but what he wrote was the honest truth. (*Qoheleth* 12.9b-10)

> Artists throughout history are like gamblers in Monte Carlo and in the blind lottery some are picked out while others ruined … it all happens according to random chance … even posterity is a terrible bitch who cheats some and reinstates others, and reserves the right to change her mind every 50 years. (Marcel Duchamp, cited posthumously in 1973)[1]

> There have been hundreds of systems devised, and books and pamphlets explaining them, whereby it has been believed that one may assure himself of winning at roulette. But mathematically none of them is supportable. In the long run the bank will get its percentage of whatever money is bet against it, whether systematically or not. (*The New Complete Hoyle*, 1964)[2]

This final section turns to that especially slippery genre known as wisdom literature. The opening of Qoheleth introduces a text that easily lends itself to consideration as a work of conceptual art, a variation on art 'at the service of the mind'.[3] While I hesitate to abide by critical tendencies that might simplify more orthodox texts as unthinking, Qoheleth does seem to ask readers to engage actively with and *think* about theological inconsistencies, rather than submit to foolproof answers dictated from above. The superscription alone, which identifies the speaker as 'the son of David', obliterates the possibility of passive acceptance of the book as an easily rendered text, for it is clearly a ruse[4] that requires us from the outset to beg to differ, to jot a question mark in the margin, and to listen to what follows with a wry smile. To bow down in obeisance to the text as if it were the words of wise old Solomon would be a

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[1] Marcel Duchamp as quoted in Anne d'Harnoncourt and Kynaston McShine (eds.), *Marcel Duchamp,* exhibition catalogue (New York, 1973), 297.

[2] Alfred H. Morehead, Richard L. Frey, and Geoffrey Mott-Smith, *The New Complete Hoyle: The Official Rules of all Popular Games of Skill and Chance with the Most Authoritative Advice on Winning Play* (first published in 1947; third edition; Garden City, NY, 1964), 528.

[3] Duchamp as quoted in James Johnson Sweeney's 'Eleven Europeans in America', *MoMA Bulletin* 13 (1946), 20; cf. Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *Duchamp in Context* (Princeton, 1998), xix.

[4] To join the ranks who have quoted Delitzsch on this issue, I add: 'if the book of Koheleth were of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language'; in Franz Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (first published in 1872; trans. M.G. Easton; Grand Rapids, 1975), 190.

tremendous disservice to God's hopes for the human mind, modelled apparently in His own image, and to the text itself.

Scholars have approached Qoheleth from a wide range of perspectives.[5] Many commit themselves to proving the author(s) of this book to be either an optimist or a pessimist.[6] Those concerned with determining a date of composition either locate him in Jerusalem[7] or along the Phoenician coast under Ptolemaic rule, while some argue that his Mishnaic intonations in fact sound like far earlier northern inflections.[8]

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[5] Douglas Ingram notes how on the one hand Delitzsch considered the book to be 'the quintessence of piety' ('Das Hohelied der Gottesfurcht'), while on the other Heinrich Heine called it just the opposite: 'the quintessence of skepticism' ('Das Hohelied der Skepsis'), in *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (London, 2006), 44. Early Christian scholars allegorized Qoheleth's imperative to eat, drink and be merry as a call to the Eucharistic feast; see Jerome's commentary on 2.24 'Commentarius in Ecclesiasten', in J.-P. Migne (ed.), *Patrologiae Latine*, vol. 23 (Paris, 1863), 1070; cf. Tremper Longman, III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, 1998, 30). Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349), as well as the Reformers and Puritans, envisioned it as an 'evangelical lifting of [the] heart from worldly to heavenly things' (cf. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary* [Leicester, 1983], 36); and in the twentieth century M. Jastrow dubbed the author 'a gentle cynic' (M. Jastrow, Jr., *A Gentle Cynic* [Philadelphia, 1919]). H.W. Hertzberg took a more extreme route by calling the book 'the most staggering messianic prophecy to appear in the Old Testament', in *Der Prediger* (Gütersloh, 1963); cf. Ingram, 44. Such reckonings contrast vividly with the wealth of criticism that casts Qoheleth's theology (or lack thereof) in less pietistic terms.

[6] Graham Ogden determines that Qoheleth ultimately advocates a positive acceptance of 'life as God gives it', in *Qoheleth* (Sheffield, 1987), 15. Ellen F. Davis echoes this understanding in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs* (Louisville, 2000). Likewise, while he does not intend to brush aside the negative sentiments expressed throughout the book, R.N. Whybray finds that a number of passages (2.24a; 3.12, 22a; 5.17; 8.15a; 9.7a, 8, 9a; 11.9, 10a; 12.1a) form the theoretical brackets within which the darker material must be placed, and he thus concludes that Qoheleth is a 'preacher of joy', in 'Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy', in *JSOT* 23 (1982), 87-98. At the opposite end of the spectrum, critics such as James Crenshaw (in *Ecclesiastes* [London, 1988]), Tremper Longman (*op. cit.*), and Michael V. Fox (in *Qoheleth and His Contradictions* [Sheffield, 1989], among other works) find the stress falls on the book's skeptical or pessimistic overtones. William P. Brown determines the polarization of approaches reflects absurdity itself by advising: 'Arguing over whether Ecclesiastes is either optimistic or pessimistic is sort of like trying to determine whether Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* is happy or sad. Such profound works cannot be shackled to simple categories', in *Ecclesiastes* (Louisville, 2000).

[7] This is the apparently widespread view of Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger (ed.), in *Das Buch Kohelet: Studien zur Struktur, Geschichte, Rezeption und Theologie* (Berlin, 1997), 24-25; cf. Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary,* trans. O.C. Dean (Minneapolis, 2004), 19.

[8] By means of offering the simplest reconstruction of scholarship to date, I offer the following chronological summary, starting with the earliest possible datings and ending with the latest (more commonly accepted) identification of origins in the third or second century. First, the opinion of M. Elyoenai was that Qoheleth was none other than the figure of Tokhath from 2 Chronicles 34.22, whom he equates with the seventh century Tikvah of 2 Kings 22.14, a figure thus having lived in the First Temple days of Josiah; in M. Elyoenai, מחקרים בקהלת ובמשלי, Jerusalem, 1977, 10-21; cf. A. Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth* (Leuven, 1992), 11. Fredericks proposes, 'Qoheleth's language should not be dated any later than the exilic period, and no accumulation of linguistic evidence speaks against a pre-exilic date'; in D.C. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language: Re-evaluating Its Nature and Date* (Lewiston and Queenston, 1988), 262. Considering Fredericks places so much emphasis on the Persian influences on Qoheleth, it seems

Addison Wright's numerological approach to the 'riddle' of the book's structure epitomizes attempts to delineate the book according to a sensible outline[9]—all apparently to ward off the unacceptable idea that the compilation of thoughts might be a more circuitous phenomenon.[10] Others make it their mission to explain the speaker's royal pretensions and apparent familiarity with luxury as an indicator of his elite social status,[11] but some might maintain the subtler opinion that his implicit criticism of economic opportunists marks his sympathies as more plebeian than patrician. Interest in the identity and intentions of the frame narrator versus those of the character who speaks within that frame reflect how important understanding the king/Qoheleth's persona is to coming to terms with the overall message. And not a

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strange that he should insist they infiltrated the Hebrew *before* Persia came to rule over Babylon and Palestine, and few have supported his conclusion. Seow locates the book 'in the Persian period … specifically between the second half of the fifth and first half of the fourth centuries B.C.E.', in Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (New York, 1997), 21, while the traditional view has been that the linguistic and grammatical evidence indicates the transition into Mishnaic Hebrew and therefore composition under later Greek rule. This was the opinion of Delitzsch (*op. cit.*) and of George A. Barton, in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes* (Edinburgh, 1908). However, while not always offering a specific time frame for construction, many have disputed any Persian or Aramaic colourings and instead contended that particularities in language signify a northern dialect and/or Canaanite-Phoenician influences. Dahood for instance found a number of Qoheleth's spellings and choices in syntax resembled those found in Phoenician literature, in Mitchell Dahood, 'Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth', *Biblica* 33 (1952), 30-52, 191-221. Schoors meanwhile offers a balanced view by acknowledging both the evidence of a northern dialect and particularities which point towards a transition into Mishnaic Hebrew, in Schoors, *op. cit.* Zimmermann's proposal that the book was a translation of an Aramaic original should also be mentioned (Frank Zimmermann, 'The Aramaic Provenance of Qoheleth', in *JQR* 36 [1945], 17-45)—a view that was overturned however by Robert Gordis in his 'Koheleth—Hebrew or Aramaic?' in *JBL* 71:2 (June 1952), 93-109. So to conclude the brief summary of such disparate views, I add Longman's reminder that 'language is not a certain barometer of date', *op. cit.*, 15.

[9] Wright's research provides an archetype for how scholars devise structural and thematic charts and numerological solutions in order to prove the book's order and coherence, in Addison G. Wright, 'The Riddle of the Sphinx: The Structure of the Book of Qoheleth', *CBQ* 30 (1968), 313-34, and 'Additional Numerical Patterns in Qoheleth', *CBQ* 45 (1983), 32-43. Fox observes how authors who propose such structures are frequently the only ones persuaded by them, in *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, 1999), 148.

[10] At the opposite end of the spectrum, Eaton finds the book to be a more random sequence of sentences that can at best be divided into four major thematic sections; *op. cit.* Crenshaw agrees, pointing out the 'degree of manipulation' required by solutions such as Wright's; *op. cit.*, 47.

[11] Sneed has characterised Qoheleth as a 'filthy rich individual', in Mark Sneed, 'The Social Location of the Book of Qoheleth', in *HS* 39 (1998), 41-51. Crenshaw on the other hand outlines the similar opinions of von Rad, Whybray and Gordis—who each located skepticism and other intellectual traditions in the ancient leisure class—but he insists that such ideas were more widespread and 'belonged to Israel's thought from early times', in James Crenshaw 'The Birth of Skepticism in Ancient Israel', in James L. Crenshaw and Samuel Sandmel, *The Divine Helmsman: Studies on God's Control of Human Events, presented to Lou H. Silberman* (New York, 1980), 5.

commentary goes by without considering the meaning and purpose of *hebel* ('futility':

הבל) and *pega* ('chance': פגע), among other signature terms, as integral to

interpretation.

Critical readings of Qoheleth (and of the Bible in general) therefore tend

frequently to fix the book within certain extra-biblical codes. Even the helpful

distinctions Crenshaw draws between skepticism (denial and affirmation as 'doubt

grounded in faith'), pessimism (the absence of hope and 'indifference to conviction')

and cynicism ('contempt for everything') ultimately lead to the conclusion that

Qoheleth's thinking falls strictly within the first category.[12] In his 1988 commentary,

he cautions against 'assuming consistency', yet as he recounts the diverse and

inconsistent genres contained within the book, he classifies its content according to

'truth-statements', 'rhetorical questions' and other kinds of sentences. Consigning the

book to a 'dominant literary type' he calls 'reflection arising from personal

observation', he effectively renders the text as a series of parsable parts.[13]

Michael Fox is less prescriptive, foregrounding the book's contradictions over

any sense-making diagrams of its contents or literary form. He determines Qoheleth's

primary concern to be 'the rationality of existence' (defining *hebel* not as

'incomprehensible' but instead as 'absurd' or 'meaningless')[14] and astutely observes

how the book's contradictions 'state rather than solve problems' and how the

author/book 'uses contradictions as a lens through which to view life'.[15] Fox's study,

and the influence it has on his 2004 JPS commentary, offers a constructive

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[12] Crenshaw (1980), 1-2.
[13] Crenshaw (1988), 28ff.
[14] Fox is responding to predecessors who related the elusive term to the unknowable nature of the divine will and counters them by finding it refers 'not to the mysterious but to the manifestly irrational or meaningless', in Fox (1989), 35.
[15] *Ibid.*, 11.

contribution by resisting the temptation to conclude Qoheleth as either a positive, negative, or strictly skeptical persona/body of work.[16]

Douglas Ingram's recent monograph advances from here and adds a necessary voice to Qoheleth studies. *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (2006) first distinguishes between the potential 'ambivalence' in Qoheleth's rationale (i.e., the inconclusive opposition of positive/negative meanings) and the more precise 'ambiguity', which accepts an 'indeterminacy of meaning'.[17] Ingram finds that Qoheleth ventures toward an ambiguous attitude to wisdom and so resists as a critic from settling upon a premise to which everything recorded in the book can be subordinated. Other than an intentional indeterminacy, there is no supreme rule or theme to make sense of the disparate and controversial views held within the book. Therefore 'what is centred and what is margined depends on the reader's interpretive strategy'.[18]

To make sense of the book's irregularities, most commentaries begin by attempting to determine its genre. Yet, as Jennifer Koosed has noted, the very concept of genre rests on expectations of purity that do not entirely account for the idiosyncrasies of Qoheleth's construction.[19] Qoheleth has commonly been classified as a loose collection of sayings framed by a first-person narrative. Its contradictions might be explained as changes in an author's thought or as the discordant unity of his mind at one time.[20] Redaction along the lines of A. Fischer's 'first epilogist', later editor, and 'second epilogist' might also explain apparent discrepancies.[21] We might however take on board Krüger's consideration of its coherence as a 'discursive'

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[16] Fox tempered his 1989 perception of the book's overall negative message in *A Time to Tear Down*.

[17] Ingram, 12.

[18] *Ibid.,* 50.

[19] Jennifer Koosed, *(Per)mutations of Qoheleth: Reading the Body in the Book* (New York and London, 2006), 25.

[20] Gerrit Wildeboer, 'Der Prediger', in *Die fünf Megillot* (Tübingen, 1898), 109-168.

[21] Alexander Achilles Fischer, *Skepsis oder Furcht Gottes? Studien zur Komposition und Theologie des Buches Kohelet* (Berlin, 1997).

document formed by 'an ironic playing around with the traditional genres and themes'.[22] In this light Qoheleth's trains of thought allude to 'contemporary texts and concepts' while also operating 'with intended ambiguities, in order to provoke readers to a repeated reading and to the formation of their own judgment.'[23] In answer to the logical structures scholars have fashioned for the book,[24] Krüger rightly raises the difficultly of reconciling the book's more solitary statements with an overall schematic agenda—a message he conveys by addressing the diversity of proverbs, admonitions, longer speeches, purely rhetorical questions, and didactic poems. He describes the compilation as 'a series of (more or less) short argumentatively and rhetorically cohesive units' that challenge the reader to engage intellectually with them.[25]

Still others have found satisfaction in understanding the book as 'an ongoing dialogue that bears strong polemical traits'[26] and that records the views of Qoheleth as well as his opponents, as is the case in Egyptian autobiographical reports and Hellenistic diatribes. By 1905 this in fact old-fashioned view of the text as a dialogue was apparently coming into vogue again.[27] Even now Christoph Uehlinger sees the juxtaposition of bite-sized genres and 'the occasional quite abrupt transition from one to another (for example from reflection to song in 9:7) [as] best understood against the

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[22] Krüger, 16.

[23] *Ibid.*, 18.

[24] Krüger finds Wright's division 'too wholesale' while drawing similar conclusions about Lohfink's 'linear-dynamic arrangement' and Schwienhorst-Schöberger's configuration of 1.3-12.7 as the four parts of 'classical ancient speech': *proposito* (1.3 – 3.22), *explicatio, refutatio, application*; in Krüger, 7-8; cf. Norbert Lohfink, *Qoheleth*, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis, 2003), 7.

[25] Krüger, 5, 9.

[26] This view is proposed by Walther Zimmerli in 'Das Buch der Predigers Salomo', in H. Ringgren and W. Zimmerli (eds.), *Sprüche/Prediger* (third edition; Göttingen, 1980), 128; cf. and trans. Krüger, 11.

[27] See Krüger, 17, for Adolf Gerson's recognition that some scholars seem to have taken to this idea in order to discredit the 'false teachings' of Qoheleth's 'intellectual opponents', in *Der Chacham Koheleth als Philosoph und Politiker: Ein Kommentar zum biblischen Buch Koheleth* (Frankfurt, 1905), 125.

background of the symposium (as the real *Sitz Im Leben* and/or as a fictive-ideal constellation).'[28]

Perry's division of the book into a dialogue between two opposing voices simplifies the parliamentary debate to one between specific opponents—K the Pessimist and P the Presenter or Antagonist. While others have distinguished between the voice of the frame narrator and that of a speaker enclosed within it, Perry's delineation understands that the book's discrete sequences to alternate between the competing views of the two speakers. Therefore, rather than offer definitive conclusions on topics such as vanity, profit or labour, the book in fact seems to present an 'agenda for discussion' by declaring a number of 'tentative formulation[s] that … become modified considerably as a result of the ensuing debate.'[29] Perry's motivation is to prove that the book cannot be pigeonholed as a definitively pessimistic treatise, but the suggestion that it operates according to a more discursive model opens it to consideration as a Modern work. This is not a book with a singular moral message but rather a more open-ended conceptual piece that functions as if to say: 'All is vanity. Discuss.'

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Koosed's interest in the self that is both embedded and embodied in the text leads her to consider the book as a form of autobiography—a 'fictional autobiography'.[30] Defending this premise, she notes that the definition of autobiography 'as a product of the Enlightenment' too hastily excludes ANE texts,

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[28] Christoph Uehlinger, 'Qoheleth im Horizont mesopotamischer, levantinischer und ägyptischer Weisheitsliteratur der persischen und hellenistischen Zeit', in Schwienhorst-Schönberger, 234; cf. Krüger., 14.
[29] T.A. Perry, *Dialogues with Koheleth: The Book of Ecclesiastes, Translation and Commentary* (University Park, PA, 1993), 43.
[30] Koosed, 16.

and she links anxieties over the genre itself to cultural assumptions about the 'scandal' that occurs when fiction invades autobiography.[31] The subjective nature of the genre of course makes it an unreliable medium from the start, but its omissions and embellishments can reveal more to the reader than the cold light a biographer might profess to cast on the subject.[32] The author speaks in his/her own voice and creates an impression of a unique persona.

Autobiography has its roots in the self-justifying apologia, the *Confessions* of Augustine (398) and Rousseau (1782), and Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (1811-1833). But as a Modern phenomenon, autobiography has evolved into a literary form defined by isolated introspection, not to mention self-promotion. Contemporary autobiographies therefore offer some unlikely food for thought in a discussion of Qoheleth. The celebrity today cultivates a marketable identity, discloses his/her versions of tabloid tales to set the record straight, and invites the reader into his/her world like a deity granting a vision of its unknowable being. There are many extremes: from the swift wit of Katherine Hepburn's *Me: Stories of My Life* (1991), in which she admits her remembrances to be selective musings (and ultimately of little value), to the ghost-written banalities found in the new sub-genre of memoirs by glamour models, reality stars and sportsmen. Occasionally, and to avoid lawsuits, the autobiography is even written in the third person, with the characters' names changed but the action the same—a process that unwittingly says a lot about how people (and not just celebrities) fashion an identity as an object separate from themselves. These latter contributions, typically telling the rise to fame of a subject who has yet to reach

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[31] Koosed, 31, references Ann Jefferson, who wrote: 'the conjunction of autobiography and fiction in actual writing practice is still apt to be felt as something of a scandal', in Ann Jefferson, 'Autobiography as Intertext: Barthes, Sarraute, Robbe-Grillet', in Michael Worton and Judith Still (eds.), *Intertextuality* (New York, 1990), 108.
[32] On the same page, Koosed also mentions the conviction of Timothy Adams that 'lies' in this genre can be as significant as the 'truth', which Adams defends in *Telling Lies in Modern Autobiography* (Chapel Hill, 1990).

thirty years of age, aim to inspire that cure-all quality 'confidence' and demonstrate

that as long as you never give up trying you too can be rich and famous. If there is a

unifying feature to them, perhaps it is that they are all written with the expectation

that they will in some way be instructive—that, and they all seem to intend to leave

the reader awestruck by the incredible journeys related within them.

The more palatable contemporary autobiographies seem to me so because they

tell a larger story than the personal narrative. Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood* (2000)*,* for

instance, was as much an account of the changing social and economic conditions in

North Wales after World War II as it was a rendering of her family's tumultuous

history. But perhaps to assign a higher value to such a script too hastily insists that a

life-story should reflect coherently and objectively on the wider social setting. And

perhaps it would be helpful to distinguish between the autobiography and the memoir,

or to designate ghost-written pieces as 'ad hoc autobiographies'.[33] Except the point of

this detour is to highlight the hubris behind any such project. It takes a certain degree

of self-obsession—healthy or otherwise—to write about oneself. Even the diary,

never intended to be read by others, is composed with the assumption that one's life

and thoughts are worthy of recording. The life story must be told, and maybe

someday a biographer will read it.

Intertwined with the gesture of self-preservation is an anxiety to communicate

one's experience so that it may be recognized and remembered by others; the genre is

by nature 'infused with death.'[34] Add to this the reader's potential suspicion over the

unreliable and often edited (or censored) first-person, and the autobiography unravels

as an unstable construct. As Koosed has commented, because the self stands on shaky

ground, 'The very subject who is supposed to guarantee the unity and stability of the

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[33] The critic and biographer Paul Delaney coined this term.
[34] Koosed, 32.

text is neither coherent nor constant.'[35] With these things in mind, it is easy to grasp the double-edge to Oscar Wilde's Aesthetic aphorism at the opening to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890): 'The highest, as the lowest, form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.'[36] It is high because it values the individual and low precisely because the individual is by nature an inadequate critic of him/herself.

If it can at all be considered an autobiography or memoir, the book of Qoheleth assumes an unusual form, and one that might be called Modern. For the speaker does not rest or pontificate upon the authority of God—as a prophet transmitting something the Lord has thus said—but rather unleashes a series of ideas that directly undermine traditional conceptions of piety and wisdom. The book adamantly defies the canon by brushing aside unquestioned faith in God's purpose in everything in favour of the radical notion that unpredictability and unfairness are the more likely governors of human existence. The speaker's experience, which drives the entire 'confession', invalidates everything that has been said by others before him. It ends with the conservative advice to 'fear God and obey his commands' (12.13), yet this appears as a last-minute summation, as a last straw to grasp after the debilitating effects of the admonitions that proceeded it.

Given the apparent disparity between the voice of the speaker (or collator) of the frame and that of the figure whose alternative voice seems to fill the space in between, one cannot help but to question authenticity and suppose at the very least some sort of ghost-writer determined the final form. He assures us repeatedly of how devoted he has been to the truth, yet it sometimes seems as if extracts were taken from more than one person's memoirs, so discrepant are the opposing opinions. But presented as it is, the book is indeed a form of fictional autobiography—a personal

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[35] *Ibid.*, 28.
[36] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (first published in 1891; London, 1994), 5.

account that does not always or necessarily tell the truth and that leaves meaning to chance.

Stylistically speaking, how one characterizes the language depends on whether or not the Hebrew is taken to be a late transitional form or an earlier northern dialect. Whatever its origins, it is strange, and scholars have proposed that the overall flavour transgresses traditional boundaries, the laws of classical Hebrew. Eaton posits that the particularities of the prose might indicate a style 'adopted for pessimism literature',[37] while fifty years earlier J. Carlebach determined the book to have been written in 'the popular language in contrast with the poetic style and pathos of the prophets.'[38] Prior to this G.A. Barton found the late forms to be reflective of 'the decadent character of the tongue.'[39] But the most colourful assessment to precede these was that of Bishop Lowth, who in 1753 lectured:

> The language is generally low, I almost call it mean or vulgar; it is frequently loose, unconnected, approaching to the incorrectness of conversation; and possesses very little of the poetic character, even in the composition and structure of the periods.[40]

It is interesting how much speculation the book's vocabulary and syntax have caused, due to its uncomfortable irregularities that make it so difficult to classify. The debate about life's purpose and meaning is not carried out via lofty or lyrical poetry but rather in what critics find to be a common mode of diction. If we pursue Eaton's idea that this kind of literature required a new way of speaking, we can think of Qoheleth in terms of the new language Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) introduced to the world of art when he began converting common objects into art-objects that could not be discussed for their formal qualities or aesthetic values, and thus required a new

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[37] Eaton, 17.
[38] J. Carlebach, 'Wir sehen vielmehr im Stil des Buches, die echte, zu allen Zeiten im jüdischen Volke gängige Volkssprache', in *Das Buch Koheleth* (Frankfurt, 1936), 64; cf. Schoors, 5.
[39] Barton, 22.
[40] R. Lowth, *De sacra poesi Hebraeorum,* Lecture 24 (London, 1753); quoted from the English trans. of 1835, 275, by Schoors, 1.

lexicon of criticism. Duchamp shocked viewers for being so unapologetically 'low'

and frequently base. His defaced postcard of the *Mona Lisa*—onto which he

scribbled a moustache and goatee and captioned it 'L.H.O.O.Q.'—offers a quick

illustration of this phenomenon, for the sounding out of the letters in French vocalizes

what translates as, 'She has a hot ass'. Being a bit crude, Duchamp and Qoheleth turn

accepted concepts on their heads. Both employ antitheses to form ironic gestures of

attitude and speech and to overturn convention. When commenting on the polarised

ways of life—joy and despair, production and its uselessness—both witness

everything under the sun and are compelled to produce absurdities.

What kind of person asks so many questions without apparently intending to

answer them? What kind of person looks back on a rich life and finds it amounts to

nothing? And what kind of sage tells his audience not to spend too much time

studying? In whom did the stir, the genius, present itself in this instance? Told in the

first person by an individual who identifies himself as the son of David, the book

forces the reader to wonder about the persona of the narrator. What seems clear

throughout Qoheleth's autobiography is a general attitude to life that dismisses the

concept of theodicy as a trite construction. As one becomes acquainted with the

speaker in the first two chapters, it might at first appear as if this figure has resigned

himself to a point of no return: 'Everything is meaningless' (1.2); 'all things are

wearisome' (v. 8) and simply keep repeating themselves (v. 9); 'it is a sorry business

that God has given men to busy themselves with' (v. 13); 'the more a man knows, the

more he has to suffer' (v. 18); and 'the wise man and fool die the same death' (2.16,

all *NEB*). The observations that follow lament the lack of comfort granted to the

oppressed and the lack of satisfaction the rich man can feel after having experienced

the best things on earth, but elsewhere more conventional advice comes as the reader

is encouraged to avoid excess (7.16-17) and to banish discontent from his mind (11.10).

Mark Sneed has made a convincing case for how Qoheleth conforms to certain codes of thought, in terms of his reliance on binarisms and the control he seeks throughout his reflections.[41] Qoheleth ultimately accepts standard wisdom tenets and assumes the posture of disdain towards folly. As king of his own 'homosocial bachelor pad'[42] like one Beau Brummell shaving before his chums in his dressing room at 4 Chesterfield Street, Mayfair, he also looks at women as objects for sexual fulfillment. Further noting his gripe with the lack of retribution in this life and the moderation he cautions, Sneed seeks to prove Qoheleth is not the hell-raiser we thought he was: 'Qoheleth attempts to look and discover an order in the universe that will put everything in its place, to mitigate his own dissonance and provide him and the other male sages with the control they desire.'[43]

Frequently, however, what sounds like a straightforward proverb reveals itself to be a reversal of the expected scenario. Contradicting the divine declaration in Genesis 1.26, Qoh. 3.19 declares, 'man has no advantage over beasts'. In chapter 7 we learn that mourning is better than laughter (v. 2) and that God chose to make some things flawed from the start (v. 13). Whereas Proverbs 10.3 insists, 'the Lord does not let the righteous go hungry', Qoh. 9.11 counters this idea by stating, 'Bread does not belong to the wise'. Contrary to what other parts of the Bible might say, 'time and chance govern all.'

For Fox and others, the book's contradictions embody a philosophical perspective that grapples with the rationality of existence. Qoheleth 'uses

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[41] Mark Sneed, '(Dis)closure in Qohelet: Qohelet Deconstructed', in *JSOT* 27.1 (Sept. 2002), 115-126.
[42] Brent Shannon, *The Cut of His Coat: Men, Dress, and Consumer Culture in Britain, 1860-1914* (Athens, GA, 2006), 132; cf. Auslander, 90.
[43] Sneed, 122.

contradiction as a lens through which to view life' but is ultimately disappointed that wisdom's 'excellences are not properly compensated'.[44] Fox also observes: 'Having confronted the failure of meaning, Qoheleth affirms the grasping of *inner experience*, emotional and intellectual, as the one domain of human freedom.'[45] For my purposes, Fox's evaluation of the importance Qoheleth places on the individual experience is significant not because it reflects part of a particular system of thought but because it provides an avenue by which to approach the *attitude* of a speaker who is anything but conventional and who is in fact rather Modern.

As opposed to speculating on the philosophical conception of the speaker, to think in terms of his attitude ventures to conjure the airs he appears to wear. Rather than debate the contradictions he proposes between cause and effect, we summarize his general posture as one who finds life to be no more predictable than a game of roulette. The text abounds with references to his privileged circumstances, with servants, wine and women at his disposal, and although his narrative bears the shadows of one who has witnessed and lived through grief one cannot help but hear in his testimony the disaffected tone of one who has seen and had the best of it all. He is a king, or at least pretends to be one, yet he has lived enough to conclude it is all utter nonsense. As one who gathers a group before him to hear his worldly wisdom, he is like the host of a salon at which the brightest young things gather to meet a great and ageing talent. His 'career' has established for him a notable reputation. This is not a down-pressed pariah of a prophet but an adulated figure who, for all of his associations with Solomon, is easily likened to a Modern celebrity.

It is not that the text ever refers directly to his fame in the way 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles 1 and 9 make reference to the worldwide awe at Solomon's wealth and

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[44] Fox (1989), 11.
[45] *Ibid.*

wisdom. Instead, it is the tone that assumes an audience of more than a mere circle of students. And more significantly, it is his attitude to all that is before him and all he has seen—his ability to dismiss the strivings of men with the wave of a hand. In the midst of all of this, he can be bleak but good-humoured. He provides witty propositions in the face of apparent pointlessness, and he is not rendered mute by unfairness.

However aggressively unpleasant, vulgar or low his writing might seem in comparison to other more pious tracts, he confesses his appreciation for language in 12.10: 'The Teacher sought to find pleasing words, and he wrote words of truth' (*NRSV*). Teaching the people knowledge, 'weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs' (v. 9), he consciously arranges his riot of thoughts into something aesthetically appealing and entertaining for his clever company. In short, the biographical details and personal reflections contained within the book point towards a character who can confidently be fashioned as a dandy. And if the dandy's natural environment is the gentleman's club or the casino, it is a natural leap to imagine Qoheleth placing his chips before the roulette wheel and arching an eyebrow at his fellow gamblers who so desperately pray that the ball will land on their colour or number.

Marcel Duchamp gained notoriety as a Modern dandy by establishing his artistic reputation on a cultivated persona and by making a spectacle of his indifference. By the time he shot to fame with his cubist contribution to the New York Armory Show in 1913, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), he had already decided to abandon conventional forms of painting and drawing, preferring to explore mechanical aesthetics and the laws of chance in place of the sheer meaninglessness of most art. From this point onwards he primarily worked with the form known as the

readymade, in which he would choose a common object and only slightly modify it. In this way he is partly responsible for the role of the Modern artist as 'a kind of organizer, bringing together the far-flung elements of a new, more technologically based workshop organization'.[46] And although he was an assembler not of people but of objects, Duchamp fulfils a parallel function to Qoheleth, for what is the Book of Qoheleth but a collection of observations that have been assembled with a witty irreverence for conventional wisdom?

Figure 6. Photograph of Duchamp in New York, Yves Poupard-Lieussou, 1917
Reprinted from Renaud and Oterelo, 10

In the last decade of his life Duchamp summarized his attitude to accepted artistic ideals in the following terms:

> the choice of these readymades was never dictated to me by some sort of aesthetic delight. This choice was based on a response of visual indifference, combined at the same time with a total absence of good or bad taste . . . in fact, a complete anaesthesia.[47]

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[46] Martha Buskirk, 'Thoroughly Modern Marcel', in Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (eds.), *The Duchamp Effect: Essays, Interviews, Round Table* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1996), 201.
[47] Marcel Duchamp, 'À propos des readymades' (1961), in Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe,* writings edited and introduced by Michel Sanouillet (Paris, 1994), 191.

One readymade, or, to be more art-historically correct, a 'rectified and imitated readymade', reflects the artist's interest in the laws of chance and provides an example of the ambiguous identity he cultivated as an artist. *Monte Carlo Bond* (*Obligation pour la Roulette de Monte Carlo*, 1924, 31.5 x 19.5cm) consists of a roulette card Duchamp lithographed himself with two added features: a cut photograph of his head covered in foam, which has been placed at the centre of the roulette wheel; and two signatures intended to give authority to the mock document. The artist has signed his own name on the lower right as an Administrator, while to the left appears the more flamboyant (on a diagonal) autograph of the 'President of the Administrative Council', Duchamp's alter-ego Rrose Sélavy.

Duchamp performed the role of this feminine counterpart in countless contexts throughout his career—posing in drag for Man Ray in a 1920-21 photographic portrait and shortly thereafter altering a fragrance bottle with one of the studio shots and rebranding it *Belle Heleine, Eau de Violette*, to name just a few of the incarnations.[48] The figure of Rrose provides an analogue to the gendered ambivalence surrounding the 'Preacher's' feminine-participle of a name (to be discussed below), but two further things are significant: 1) like the aural play that provides the joke in *L.H.O.O.Q.*, the sounding out of her name results in '*Eros, c'est la vie*'; and 2) the artifice involved not just in assuming a feminine identity but in electing his two selves to positions of authority in a Monte Carlo casino resembles the gesture Qoheleth makes in calling himself the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Duchamp's humour in dressing up and in scribbling pranks in graffiti draw attention to Qoheleth's own ability to crack a joke. Duchamp reminds us that Qoheleth is having a laugh.

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[48] In 1939 he also printed 'readymades' under the title *Rrose Sélavy* that he described as 'printed, modified puns… kicks in all genres'; Interview no. 4: 'I Like Breathing Better than Walking', in Pierre Cabanne (ed.)*, Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (London, 1971), 82.

Duchamp made the roulette card (one of thirty) at a time when he swore he would dedicate the rest of his life to chess, and it represents his attempt after much mathematical and statistical research to devise a system that would beat the house. He explained his intention for the bonds to bring a twenty percent dividend and how he eventually abandoned the enterprise, having gained nothing:

> Unfortunately, the system was too slow to have any practical value, sometimes having to wait a half hour for the propitious figure to appear in the succession of blacks and reds. And the few weeks I spent in Monte Carlo were so boring that I soon gave up, fortunately breaking even.[49]

Had *The New Complete Hoyle* (1964) been published a few decades earlier, Marcel might never have tried to break the bank, for he could have heeded the words that appear at the opening to this chapter: 'In the long run the bank will get its percentage of whatever money is bet against it, whether systematically or not.' Ultimately his production of readymades, the ways in which he recycled them for the rest of his career, and the manner in which he undermined everything high art had valued to be true, point toward conclusions made by the biblical skeptic. The roulette card signifies that one cannot win against chance. The reuse and reframing of common objects, such as a bicycle wheel turned upside down and left to spin uselessly while attached to a bar stool, illustrates how everything repeats itself and is inherently absurd. But most of all, the attitude Duchamp affected in his role as readymade-maker and as Rrose exhibits the air of indifference held by the dandy we hereby call Qoheleth.

And so this final chapter projects Duchamp's roulette card alongside and onto the opening verses of Qoheleth in order to fabricate a Modern identity for the speaker from the artifice found in the autobiographical text. The *froideur* he maintains in his

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[49] Duchamp as quoted in d'Harnoncourt and McShine, 297.

self-punned introduction to the reader justify his casting as a persona who has succumbed to disenchantment but who continues to play the game and to let the wheel spin before him. To impose the rubric of roulette serves to illuminate the lack of strategy—or the failure of any impulse to try and outwit the rules of life—that characterizes this *avant-garde* form of wisdom. Even winning numbers, landing on the spot that brings the spoils of kingship, are at the fickle mercy of where the ball happens to land. The game of roulette is another spin on the unflappable conclusion of the no-nonsense sage that 'All is wind', for the players experience the breezy turn of the wheel as chance and fate. Yet as Duchamp no doubt confirmed in continuing to play chess into his later years, it is better to play than not to have a place at the board.

The attitude of Duchamp and the 'Preacher' leads to the realization that interpretation itself is a matter of chance and, like everything else under the sun, potentially meaningless. Playing roulette with interpretation, we hereby place our bet and hold up the Monte Carlo card. We dispel the notion that the book expresses strictly a positive or a negative attitude to truth, we spin the wheel and find the expectation that judgment in either direction is problematical, and we introduce the figure who is bodily and intellectually expressed in the Book of Qoheleth as a well-dressed, well-versed, well-fed, but essentially well-over-it Modern dandy.

Different dandies

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) once described the dandy of the early nineteenth century as 'a Clothes-wearing Man, a Man whose trade, office and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes. Every faculty of his soul, spirit, purse, and person is heroically consecrated to the wearing of Clothes wisely and well: so that others dress to live, he

lives to dress.'[50] This epigrammatic employment of antithesis mirrors the use by

Wilde and Qoheleth, but more to the point, Carlyle's envisioning of this social figure

has informed the dominant characteristic most people today think of when they

imagine a dandy.[51] By 1879 the dandy had become the parody of a gentleman, and

one who greatly displeased Mr. and Mrs. Beeton for the way he strutted about and

cluttered the store counters to flirt with shop girls: 'Their talk is all lisped nothings.

Their eyes sparkle as they lisp the silliest things; they laugh and make merry, and

cause people to turn in wonder that any human being could make himself so

thoroughly ridiculous…'[52] Yet the life of George Bryan 'Beau' Brummell (1778-

1840), the inventor of the modern suit and arguably the first and foremost

immaculately dressed dandy *par excellence,* proves even Regency-era dandyism was

about more than clothes.

Beau Brummell's obsessive attention to sartorial perfection forms part of a

larger picture about restraint, class, the rejection of bourgeois values, and an accepting

if aloof awareness of the absurd way the world works. He did indeed make a ritual of

hygiene and knotted his neckcloths with a 'monklike discipline',[53] and his greatest

horror was the thought that his appearance might attract too much attention by

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[50] Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (first published in 1833-34; Boston, 1924), 197.

[51] The dandy's attention to dress (also known as a love for clothes) was first a class issue—with middle-class men disavowing the pretensions of aristocratic flamboyance 'in favour of … straight lines, practical fabrics, and dark tones'. Many nineteenth-century writers had portrayed the dandy as 'a dangerous and unattractive upper-class gentleman: vain, ostentatious, idle, sexually predatory … characterized by his outer appearance and conspicuous consumption … a satirical symbol of improper, transgressive masculinity.' Gradually his qualities were appropriated by the middle- and working-classes—his affectations mainstreamed as they fed on new markets in cosmetics, fitted clothing, and corsetry. So as time went by, shopping came to be seen as an emasculating pursuit. And after the Oscar Wilde trial of 1895-96 overdressing reeked of perversion and homosexuality. All citations are from Shannon, 25, 123-129, though Shannon is drawing on observations gleaned from Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, 2000).

[52] Samuel Beeton, *Beeton's Manners of Polite Society: For Ladies, Gentlemen, and Families* (London, 1879), 126-27.

[53] Such 'refinement and restraint' was 'meant to represent … what the fin-de-siècle essayist and fellow dandy Max Beerbohm later called his "exquisite ordering"'; Shannon, 130; cf. Max Beerbohm, 'Dandies and Dandies' (1896), in *Works and More* (Grosse Point, 1969), 22.

appearing too fashionable; he confessed such things amounted to nothing less than 'the severest mortification which a gentleman could incur'.[54] The true dandy never subscribed to the bandwagon mentality of fashion and instead maintained a more timeless silhouette inspired by classical lines and a limited palette of buff, blue, black, and white. Like Qoheleth would have reckoned, he saw the vagaries of trends and unnecessary embellishment as the empty wind of public taste. Care and restraint in dress reflects a mind that likes to arrange things and put them in good order—to 'suit out' proverbs with aesthetic passion.[55] Furthermore, Qoheleth's encouragement to 'Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head' (9.8, *NRSV*) allows us to dress him in starched white collars and suggests his favourable attitude to ointments and ablutions, no?

Dandies were typically middle-class by birth but aristocratic in lifestyle. Brummell was only second-generation middle-class by virtue of the fact that his grandfather had been a valet to an MP and his father the private secretary to a prime minister, but his Eton education helped refine his flawless manners and develop a conversational repertoire that could only have been formed by an elite upbringing. A social-climbing *poseuer*,[56] he became so intimate an acquaintance of the Prince of Wales that he was able to slight him to his face without risking social suicide.[57] In

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[54] As cited in Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (London, 1960), 34. This idea still held force in 1881, when *The Glass of Fashion* warned: 'Do not indulge in violent colours; let your walking-dress be a "quiet" tweed uniform shade.' Twenty years later Mrs. Burton Kingsland's *Etiquette for All Occasions* (1901) similarly maintained: 'The best dressed men are only conspicuous because of the extreme quietness of their attire'; cf. Shannon, 27-28.

[55] See 12.9 and Krüger, 207, n. 9e, for the sense of תקן as 'put into a good order, arrange a collection of proverbs (thus *HALOT*)' ... and thus my 'suit out'.

[56] 'With no occupation and no obvious source of income, the dandy consciously set himself in direct opposition to the "new bourgeois domination of society" and strove to maintain "an aristocratic lifestyle in a bourgeois world"'; Shannon, 130; cf. Leora Auslander, 'The Gendering of Consumer Practices in Nineteenth-Century France', in Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough (eds.), *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, 1996), 91.

[57] Brummell did eventually cross a line by encountering the Prince at a party and asking the person alongside him, 'Who's your fat friend?' This shows he put himself on equal footing with (if not a step above) the future king.

1799 Brummell came of age and inherited one third of his father's estate.[58] In today's terms worth £2.5 million, his fortune was by most standards as great as any Solomon's, but within a decade he had lost most of it to gambling. Fleeing to France in 1816, he left behind insurmountable debts accrued by a life of theatres, balls, courtesans and clubs to spend his remaining years destitute and syphilitic.[59] His biography was thus for the early Victorians the ultimate morality tale of excess and decline, and he experienced every extreme under the sun. Yet as his biographer has noted, 'Even as his world crumbled around him, Brummell's instinct as a writer was to hone sentences of elegant and lengthy density to crack a joke.'[60] And it was through his wit and humour that he most expressed his arch distance from the meaninglessness of social codes and the triviality of life in general.

In keeping with the dandy's aspiration to a status beyond what he was granted at birth, Brummell made a conscious effort to renounce contemporary middle-class values: 'the bourgeois pillars of utility, thrift, and hard work'.[61] His sardonic perspective made him indifferent to politics, while his 'stage-honed ear for comic cadence and the well-placed line' earned him a reputation and nothing short of 'a cult based on his perceived personality'.[62] Kelly encapsulates his *je ne sais quoi* is the following terms:

> Brummell's indefinable something was to be self-confident, and self-evidently great company … [He was] warm, complex … evasive often, pretentious and annoying frequently, brilliantly witty with revivifying regularity and chillingly tragic. But never dull. … He rarely said anything directly, or without taking the opportunity to

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[58] It was unorthodox for Brummell's father to have overwritten the laws of primogeniture in his will and split his estate equally among his daughter and two sons.
[59] Ian Kelly's post-mortem in his biography of Brummell, *Beau Brummell: The Ultimate Dandy* (London, 2005), offers convincing evidence that he suffered and died from syphilis.
[60] *Ibid.*, 16.
[61] Shannon, 130.
[62] Kelly, 7.

make an elaborate comedic meander. He refused to take anything seriously, including … himself.[63]

The English dandy would evolve significantly in the decades following Brummell's peak of fame[64] and is represented in the figures of Byron, Edward Bulwer Lytton, Wilde, and Max Beerbohm, who each in his own distinct way was remembered for giving pleasure through words, for being a well-heeled arbiter of taste, and for 'telling the truth' by turning accepted social wisdom on its head. 'So it was', wrote Count d'Aurevilly, 'that Frivolity could show its head amongst a people [the English] with strict codes of behaviour and crude militaristic tendencies, as Imagination demanded its rights in the face of a morality too prescriptive to be true.'[65] In exercising a capricious will and having the audacity to transcend social status by being irreverent even to royals, 'dandyism is quintessentially a modernist pose.'[66]

A number of scholars have described Duchamp as a dandy, not for his dress sense (photographs reveal an unfussy sobriety, *sans* the starch) but for his detachment and his contempt for convention. Moira Roth, Giovanna Zapperi and Françoise Coblence have aligned his dandy pose with Baudelaire's *flâneur*, capitalism's idle observer and commentator,[67] and shown how Duchamp's artistic achievement is determined not by the aesthetic value of the object but by the arbitrary whimsicality of his attitude. In the readymade, by resorting to commonplace objects, Duchamp

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[63] *Ibid.*, 7-9.

[64] In the third trilogy of Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*, Sir Lawrence Mont sums up a relation of his as the 'last of the dandies'. He clarifies for the sake of his young niece, who has come of age in the 1920s: 'All the difference in the world, Dinny, between the "buck", the "dandy", the "swell", the "masher"… There's been a steady decrescendo. By his age Jack belongs to the "masher" period, but his cut was always pure dandy—a dyed-in-the-wool Whyte Melville type.' John Galsworthy, *Flowering Wilderness*, in *The Forsyte Saga,* vol. III (first published in 1932; London, 2001), 314.

[65] Kelly, 21; cf. Count Jules Amédée Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Du Dandyisme et de George Brummel* [*sic*], first published in 1844.

[66] *Ibid.*

[67] These critics all draw upon the portrait of the dandy/*flâneur* configured by Baudelaire in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863). See Moira Roth, *Difference/Indifference: musings on postmodernism, marcel duchamp and john cage* (Australia, 1988); Giovanna Zapperi, 'Marcel Duchamp's Dandyism: The Flâneur and the Beginnings of Mass Culture in New York During the 1910s', and Françoise Coblence, 'The Commonplace and Genius'—both presented at the *Arts and Societies* seminar (Po, February 2005).

dehumanizes his role by stripping the final object of a personal style and renounces the value capitalism places on production. By doing so he elevates his independent vision through the construction of an ambiguous persona.

Rrose Sélavy personifies Duchamp the dandy's foray into 'the world of feminine experience'.[68] Throughout his work, masculinity is situated in crisis, so typically for him androgyny threatens the sexual politics hinted at in the *Monte Carlo Bond.* Given the social anxieties that surrounded the figure of the unwed man (like Brummell most dandies never married and had no known heirs), it is worthwhile noting that Duchamp remained a bachelor until the age of forty, for 'the rhetoric of the day not only supported families but denounced bachelorhood, effectively comparing it to homosexuality, which was at that time a crime. "The bachelor was, by implication, morally deficient and suspect."'[69] In his most monumental work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even,* also known as *The Large Glass* (1915-23), he emasculates the bachelor figures by rendering futile the mechanisms of their sexual performance: they are doomed to revolve in a kind of onanistic chain-gang as their attempts to project their seed into the bride's realm collapse in a cycle of unfulfilled repetition. Likewise, the Duchamp historian Arturo Schwarz has spoken of the artist's interest in both gambling and cross-dressing as a 'manifestation of his tendency toward self-preservation, which according to Freud is a compulsion for masturbation'.[70] Masculine identity and production are continually problematized, and even objects that seem to bear no immediate sexual connotations are imbued with the threat of impotence; the bicycle wheel spins but is functionally barren. The roulette wheel in the *Monte Carlo Bond* implies a similarly masturbatory innuendo

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[68] Michael Beyer, 'Duchamp is Dandy!', qualifying MA paper for the University of Illinois (2004), 6.

[69] Beyer, 11; cf. Jeffrey Merrick and Bryant T. Ragan, Jr. (eds.), *Homosexuality in Modern France* (New York, 1996), 218.

[70] Arturo Schwarz, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp* (London, 1969), 206.

and offers a way to reconsider the turning that occurs in Qoheleth's introduction. For though the world spins round and round, its life-continuing cycles are shown to be the backdrop against which the human urge to reproduce merely goes to waste.

Within this fatalistic view of human activity, we see the dandy: 'With no past and future, he situate[s] himself on the fringes of any meaning of History ... Independent of causes and effects, he promise[s] neither efficiency nor profit'.[71] Like Qoheleth, no dandy would ever be defeated by the lack of purpose that overshadows life. On the contrary, the dandy makes it his justification to be a *bon vivant*—eating, drinking, and enjoying the best things money can buy (see 2.3, 24; 3.12; 5.18; 8.15; and 9.7-10). Such pleasures may all amount to nothing when one dies, but it would be more absurd to abstain from cultural delights than to indulge in them while one has the chance. After all, one never knows when the wheel will stop spinning or where the ball will drop.

Before the vanity

One afternoon on a ride through Hyde Park, Brummell was chatting to friend and fellow Regency A-lister Lady Hester Stanhope, when she attempted to provoke his jealousy by flirting with a passing officer. Brummell took the bait: 'Yes, but who ever heard of his father?' Peering at him from her carriage, Lady Hester did not miss a beat: 'And who ever heard of *yours*?' Brummell responded with a charming smile and a tip of the hat:

> Ah, my dear Lady Hester, who indeed ever heard of my father, and
> who would have heard of me, if I had been anything but what I am?
> It is my folly that is the making of me … and if the world is so silly

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[71] Julie Ramos, 'Dandy Ambivalences', *Arts and Societies* seminar (Po, 11 February 2005), 2.

as to admire my absurdities, you and I may know better, but what does that signify?'[72]

Such insouciant disregard for his own importance (or lack thereof) inflects not just the ways in which Duchamp obfuscated his presence as an artist in his readymades, but also the style in which Qoheleth referred to his own experiences. True, he is hardly modest in acquainting the reader with the magnitude of his riches and the epicurean horizons of his lifestyle, but on several occasions he indicates that this all might mean something to *some* people, but in the end all of one's riches will be taken away and from then on will be utterly pointless (see 6.3 and 9.7-11).

Equally interesting at this moment in the comparison is the issue of how his character is perceived by others. Biblical criticism has gone so far as to suggest the Preacher is not who he says he is, but most of it shies away from speculating about who the speaker *actually* is or how his legacy might have established itself in order to be worthy of preservation in the form of a wisdom book. Commentaries allude vaguely to the character of the speaker or the 'organizing consciousness of the sage'[73] but naturally avoid language that presumes to know the actual person whose presence might be embedded within the text.

Koosed's study is thus the most revolutionary of approaches for attempting to come to terms with the speaker's physical self. She takes readers' identification with an individual in the book[74] and develops the ways in which Qohelth's body inhabits the text, enticing his onlookers to come into contact with him as a tangible presence. Through the myriad references to his eyes, ears and heart, Koosed shows how his

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[72] As recounted in Kelly, 224.

[73] Fox (1989), 159.

[74] Martin Hengel found there to be a 'marked "individuality" of authorship' in Ecclesiastes, in *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic Period* (Philadelphia, 1981), 116. Shannon Burkes adds that Qoheleth uses a pseudonym but 'his personality is fully present', in *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period* (Atlanta, 1999), 112. And E.S. Christianson and William Brown talk of the reader's experience of 'sensing a self' and how Qoheleth 'shares his personal discoveries and bares his soul', in E.S. Christianson, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (Sheffield, 1998), 177, and Brown, 121.

body 'is encoded in form, structure, and syntax, so that the text becomes a body with organs, systems, and even a life of its own.'[75] Further along, she cites Elaine Scarry's *Dreaming by the Book* (1999) to argue that although 'verbal art is almost bereft of any sensual content' words in fact produce vivid images that evoke visual perceptions; and she asks, 'How do words construct people—in both body and soul, their physicality and their personality? How is it possible for a reader to have such a clear picture of Qoheleth?'[76]

Naturally, the ways in which the body is conceptualised affect Koosed's analysis.[77] But more relevant here is how she highlights Qoheleth's creation of a place that appeals to all of the senses and the underlying sexuality that frames it. Qoheleth acquires earthly delights for his 'Dandiacal Body'[78] as a conqueror does plunder—with a penchant for excess (see the building of stately homes, possession of flocks, and accumulation of slaves, singers and silver in 2.4-8). Despite the initial good-riddance he gives all such things at the opening to his memoirs, he is quick to impress upon the reader that he has had all that is desirable, as if to seduce us.

Like a dandy, Qoheleth is 'instructive not in his achievements but in his person'.[79] He is from Jersusalem, a city dweller, and bears the world-weariness of an erudite urbanite. Given the conclusions he draws about the trappings of wealth, it fits to imagine him renouncing ornamentation and excess in favour of simplicity and

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[75] Koosed, 2, references Martin Gliserman, *Psychoanalysis, Language, and the Body of the Text* (Gainesville, FL, 1996). She finds the book forms a picture of Qoheleth through a language of selfhood and autobiography, but also through the construction of his body in the text. As occurs in the Song of Songs, a text 'creates desire through ambiguity of meaning and interpretation' (11) and therefore utilizes its capacity to be seductive.

[76] *Ibid.*, 5; cf. Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (Princeton, 1999).

[77] Koosed unpacks the mutual exclusivity between biologism and sociologism, otherwise known as essentialism and constructivism, and she cites Judith Butler who, at the opening of *Bodies that Matter* (1993) found she could no longer 'fix bodies as simple objects of thought … [for] bodies indicate worlds beyond themselves … this resistance to fixing the subject [is] essential …', 7.

[78] So were the men nicknamed who called at Chesterfield Street and sat in awe of his morning grooming rituals.

[79] Kelly, 9.

understatement. He also acts like a king but is, like Brummell, an impostor. While he may really have been as rich as he says he is, as one who only poses as a king he is living on borrowed terms and inflating his social importance for our amusement.

If we accept Crenshaw's rendering of 1.12 in the past tense ('I, Qoheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem'),[80] he is seen as a retired king, stripped of his power, with no mention of actual offspring or heirs of his own, and in a state of never-ending stasis. This might explain the grudge he bears against unworthy sons inheriting the fruits of their fathers' labour. He finds that a man with one hundred sons who cannot enjoy life would have been better off stillborn (6.3), so he is preoccupied with children, death and inheritance and therefore much like the dandy in being 'terrifying in [his] nonreproductivity'.[81]   Additionally, he appears to have been 'educated for consumption rather than production'[82] and to inhabit a cross between a homosocial bachelor pad and a salon hosted by Sélavy.

It is not that Qoheleth has been idle, for he recounts his rigour in acquiring wisdom and in carrying out great works. Rather, it is his attitude to labour that colours him like a Duchamp dandy: 'I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to those who come after me—and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish (2.18-19)?' Regardless of how much effort one might pour into acquiring wealth and wisdom, gain is an unfair matter of chance. Krüger provides a historical context for this attitude by considering the partial autonomy Judea enjoyed during the Syrian wars between the Ptolemies and Seleucids.[83] He finds that while Qoheleth criticises the culture of economic opportunism around him, he also celebrates how individuals were able to 'achieve wealth and prosperity

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[80] Crenshaw (1987), 68.
[81] Auslander, 92; cf. Shannon, 132.
[82] Michael Curtin, *Property and Position: A Study in Victorian Manners* (New York, 1987), 95; cf. Shannon, 132.
[83] Krüger, 19-20.

through work, business, and the joy of risk.'[84] The threat this posed to religious

tradition gave rise to a 'critical individuality' that is the book's driving force.[85]

Before taking a closer look at how the dandy's character is revealed in the

text, the image of Duchamp on the *Monte Carlo Bond* (also photographed by Man

Ray) provides a readymade portrait of Qoheleth, with Duchamp's visage and foamed-

up features conceptualising a face for the name. Several art historians have

commented on the horn-like appearance of the crests he sculpted out of his hair and

shaving foam. Seeing a 'chimerical figure perhaps resembling a faun or devil', one

finds a counterpart to Rrose Sélavy 'masquerading as a hyper-masculine devil',[86]

while others read references to John the Baptist,[87] a 'satyr-bachelor trapped in his

masturbatory circularity',[88] and an attempt to destabilize the document's financial

authority.[89] As something of a diabolical biblical voice, scandalously suggesting

God's system is far from just, Qoheleth's horns would seem to fit.

More recently, Mauricio Cruz has examined the likelihood that these forms

might also have been sculpted to look like the wings on Mercury's helmet.[90] The

Roman Hermes, he is of course the messenger god whose definitive trait is swiftness.

Less recognized among his accoutrements is his purse, symbolizing his commercial

powers. He was 'the Roman god of trade, profit, merchants, travelers, and

shepherds', and his name derives from the Latin *a mercibus,* or merchandise, thus

'under[lying] the term "merchantile".'[91] Ironically, Mercury was also the patron to

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[84] *Ibid,* 21. For Qoheleth finding pleasure well worth it after work, see Robert K. Johnston's '"Confessions of a Workaholic": A Reappraisal of Qoheleth', in *CBQ* 38 (1976), 14-28.

[85] Krüger, 21.

[86] David Joselit, *Infinite Regress: Marcel Duchamp, 1910-1941* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 47.

[87] Peter Read, 'The Tzank Check and Related Works by Marcel Duchamp', in Rudolph Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (eds.), *Marcel Duchamp Artist of the Century* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 72.

[88] Juan Antonio Ramírez, *Duchamp, Love and Death, Even* (London, 1993), 183.

[89] Dalia Judovitz, *Unpacking Duchamp: art in transit* (Berkeley, 1995).

[90] Some pre-classical and classical Greek vases even depict Mercury with a beard.

[91] Mauricio Cruz, 'Voisins du Zero: Hermaphroditism and Velocity', trans. Patricia Zalamea, in *Tout-Fait: The Marcel Duchamp Studies Online Journal* 5 (2003).

'artists, impostors, and all dishonest folk.'[92] These connotations help to draw out the potentially devious dimensions of Qoheleth's character, for he is both an advocate of material profit as well as dishonest in his self-presentation.

The foam on Duchamp's face also makes us think he has been having some fun shaving, and it links us to Brummell once again. Rather than trust his valet with the razor, Brummell shaved himself. 'Kings by birth were shaved by others,' Napoleon once said to Tallyrand, 'but he who has made himself *Roi,* shaves himself.'[93] But the presence of foam—and the invention of a well-groomed Qoheleth lathering himself up before the vanity—contributes to the discussion on a still more conceptual level. The cultural theorists Fred Botting and Scott Wilson have stretched the boundaries of even their own discipline by framing their article about creative production and prosthetics with the image of Pamela Anderson rising like Venus out of the waves—a new Aphrodite and a 'Post-Adoration Machine' (PAM).[94] Botting and Wilson's purpose is to show how technology has accelerated the multiplication of luxury goods and other cultural froth, and Anderson is to them the prosthetic goddess whose image has been multiplied into an enormous cloud of foam. To this end they appropriate foam as a metaphor with which to overcome the static polarization of liquids and solids that my previous chapters have shown to be prevalent in psychoanalytic and gender criticism. For instance, even 'Irigaray's opposition, and partial undermining, of solids and fluids returns psychoanalysis and machines to homeostatic models of operation, governed by the "*principle of constancy*" identified by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*'.[95] The transitional state between the two,

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[92] *Ibid.*
[93] Kelly, 162.
[94] The acronym was coined by the research collective SHaH, in 'Incorporating the Impossible: Towards a General Economy of the Future Present', *Cultural Values* 1.2 (1997), 180ff.; and adopted by Fred Botting and Scott Wilson in 'Venus in Foam', *New Formations* 46 (Spring 2002), 64-84.
[95] Botting and Wilson, 66-67.

foam is full of air but froths over and clouds our vision of the 'purer' states of matter, preventing us from seeing and thinking in terms of binarisms and hierarchies. Botting and Wilson turn to the 1950s and add:

> Roland Barthes discussed how soap-powder advertisements articulated the domestic economy and the multinational order through the play of signs and the significance of foam. In promoting the luxuriousness of foam, its apparent lack of 'any usefulness, its abundant, easy, almost infinite proliferation', the consumer is encouraged 'to imagine matter as something airy'. Foam becomes a 'sign of a certain spirituality, inasmuch as the spirit has the reputation of being able to make something out of nothing'. All that is solid melts into foam.[96]

With the wind blowing so much *hebel* throughout Ecclesiastes, and with Qoheleth ever musing on life being like a puff of air, there is an awful lot of foam drifting about the book. Foam obscures existing certainties about the book and the restrictive ends to which the speaker's personality is characterised. In foam one finds a symbol for *hebel*: it oozes luxury while lacking any usefulness; it proliferates endlessly while transforming matter into something airy; it makes something out of nothing while all that is solid and certain dissolves into it. Applied to Qoheleth as he performs his *toilette*, foam signifies the frivolity of material things, of all that is folly, and of the eventual injustice of death.

The roulette wheel onto which the photo of Duchamp is overlaid provides a comic halo for the figure. The irreverent use of this sanctifying shape helps cast off positivist readings and enables us to take Qoheleth a little less seriously than tradition might allow. Popular reception has cast the book in a golden glow by drawing upon the palatable bits and packaging them like cosy Sunday-school lessons. The most commonly appropriated portion, 3.1-8, has provided the lyrics for pop songs by bands like the Byrds and the ornately scripted copy for inspirational posters (cue: seagulls

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[96] *Ibid.,* 68; cf. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (London, 1973), 27.

silhouetted against an amber sunset). For everything there is a season, because God has a purpose in everything, they lead us to believe. But Duchamp's head in the roulette wheel puts a spin on such sugar-coatings and finds them to be interpretations fit strictly for the birds. The skeptic in Qoheleth denies that God is all goodness, and the face of Pan/Mercury with a roulette halo brings into focus his slightly enervated reaction to the seasons' cyclical return. Wisdom may be recycled and turned on its head, like a readymade, and it is always worth the amusement of trying, but there is little to no value in anything under the sun. Judgment itself is therefore problematical, and Qoheleth's vision seems in tune with Duchamp's utterance: 'to talk about truth and real, absolute judgment—I don't believe in it at all.'[97]

Playing roulette with Qoheleth

The rules of roulette provide a fitting metaphor for Qoheleth's attitude to life. Played by as many players as can fit around the board, bets are placed against the house and fate set into motion by a *tourneur,* who functions like God in a world gamblers hope is ruled by a form of theodicy known as statistics. Although everyone knows there is no controlling where the ball lands, strategists such as Duchamp ultimately count on it favouring those who persevere long enough for their numbers to come up. Depending on the continent, the *tourneur* either spins the wheel clockwise (US) or counter-clockwise (Europe) and sends the ball in the opposite direction. It is of course nothing but the wind—and the resistance of the ball to it—that determines in which of the three arcs it lands: *Voisins du zero* (Neighbours of Zero); *Orphans* and *Orphelins* (Orphans and Orphaned); and *Tiers du cylindre* (Third Cylinder). None of these outcomes sounds particularly inspiring.

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[97] As cited in Cabanne, 70.

The Book of Qoheleth is often broken up into a number of thematic segments, but the effect on the reader is of jumping from one extreme to another, from red to black, or from any number between zero and thirty-six. It opens with a superscription that sets the arbitrary wheel in motion: 'The affairs[98] of Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem (v. 1)'. G.A. Barton rightly described the term 'Qoheleth' as a 'crux',[99] and its complexity poses a conceptual riddle within the first breath of the book. Krüger and others encourage readers to think of it not as a signifier of authorship but rather as a 'claim of authority'.[100] Likewise, its aligns the author 'with the prototype of all the wise men in Jerusalem, namely Solomon'.[101] In any event, 'Qoheleth' is a pseudonym with the literal meaning 'one who assembles' or 'assembler'. Given the 'collected' nature of the writings and reflections that follow, and given how successfully he gathered wealth and wisdom, it seems safe to think of him as an assembler of ideas—an artist of the readymade.

To make sense of the pseudonym, translators have come up with a variety of options: teacher[102] (NRSV), preacher (Luther), citizen (LXX), gatherer (Seow), collector (Crenshaw), assembler (Q. Rabbah), proper name, cryptogram, or title. Referencing Derrida, Koosed reminds us how 'any single choice of word suppresses the others' as well as the term's inherent ambiguity.[103] She directs our attention to the work of J. Hillis Miller on how the etymological retracing of a word's origins and meanings does not place it on solid ground but instead renders it as 'unstable,

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[98] We choose this sense of *dabar* over the more usual rendering of 'words' to emphasise that the speaker is less a lecturer than a man of much experience.

[99] Barton, 67.

[100] Krüger, 39; cf. D.G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (Tübingen, 1986) and Otto Kaiser, *Der Gott des Alten Testaments: Theologie des AT,* part 1: *Grundlegung* (Göttingen, 1993), 243.

[101] Lohfink, 35.

[102] This can be understood as a teacher 'to the public'; Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia, 2004), 3.

[103] Koosed speaks of Derrida on 'iterability' and 'the impossible union of a singular occurrence and a general law'; see Derrek Attridge's 'Introduction to Derrida and the Question of Literature', in *Acts of Literature* (New York, 1992), 1-29; cf. Koosed, 17-18.

equivocal, wavering, [and] abysmal;'[104] and she finds that the name Qoheleth 'obstinately refuses to yield its meaning'.[105] Thus, the variations on the title Qoheleth and his 'conspicuous artificiality'[106] in using it only complicate rather than formulate a clear picture of his identity. They smother his face in foam.

The verbal construction of this term adds additional confusion, for it introduces the speaker as a bi-gendered subject. While BDB lists קהלת as a masculine noun,[107] most commentators acknowledge the form as a feminine *qal* participle, which is otherwise unattested in the Hebrew Bible.[108] Elsewhere the feminine participle indicates an occupational name (cf. Ezra 2.55, 57; Nehemiah 3.57, 59),[109] which is supported by the addition of the prefixed definite article in 12.8. But as a feminine form for a masculine speaker it goes beyond a mere job description and allows us to think of Qoheleth as a dual-natured being, as a Duchamp-Sélavy.

On the basis of Qoheleth's claim to be a son of David and king in Jerusalem, Koosed equally observes: 'I can only conclude that Qoheleth, whoever he is, is lying to me.'[110] To proclaim himself the son of David is an act of artifice, a 'royal fiction', as Perry has called it.[111] In his entry on Ecclesiastes in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, H.L. Ginsburg seeks to avoid the confusion surrounding Qoheleth's royal identity (and the oddity in v. 1 of him being a king in Jerusalem, rather than over Israel) by

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[104] As Miller says, 'All etymology is false etymology', in J. Hillis Miller, 'Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line', in *Critical Inquiry* 3 (1976), 70; cf. Koosed, 24.

[105] Koosed, 17.

[106] Eaton, 24.

[107] BDB admits the feminine form (with a *taw*-ending), but insists on a masculine speaker because a 'great collector of sentences' is based upon an Arabic construction in which feminine endings are used to intensify meaning, thus 'realizing the idea in its completeness', 875.

[108] Renan said it was a cryptogram (like 'Rashi' for Rabbi Shelomo Yizkhaki, etc.), but this was not practiced during any of the times Qoheleth could have been written. Fox says the word is not a participle but a noun (e.g., 'cowherd' from 'cattle' and 'vintner' from 'vineyard') and calls him the 'assembler', but noun-derived nouns can deviate considerably from their parent nouns; cf. Koosed, 18-19

[109] Persian has feminine-ending nouns to denote office, and some have suggested cultic overtones to this usage.

[110] Koosed, 24.

[111] Perry, 38.

proposing the phrase מלך בירושלם be rendered as 'property owner in Jerusalem'.[112]

I do not claim that this is necessarily the most historically accurate way to treat the phrase, but it offers a nice crossover to envision Qoheleth as more bourgeois than monarch and to flesh out the portrait of the speaker as a land-owning dandy who lives on private means that are not linked to an aristocratic heritage.

Krüger, Murphy and Fox are among those to categorise v. 2 as the book's 'motto' that forms an *inclusio* with 12.8 and constitutes the thematic summary of the frame narrator and compiler.[113]   There is no shortage of commentary on the construction '*hebel-hebelim*',[114] and translations therefore vary:

> *Utter futility – said Koheleth –*
> *Utter futility! All is futile!* (Fox)[115]
>
> *Vanity of vanities! says Qoheleth,*
> *Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!* (Murphy)
>
> *Emptiness, emptiness, says the Speaker, emptiness, all is empty.* (*NEB*)
>
> *'Completely meaningless,' Qoheleth said, 'completely meaningless!*
> *Everything is meaningless!'* (Longman)
>
> *Futile and fleeting, said Qoheleth,*
> *futile and fleeting! All (that) is futile.* (Krüger)
>
> *'A breath, a puff of breath ... a breath, a puff of breath,' Qoheleth used*
> *to say, 'they are all a breath.'* (Lohfink)

Lohfink, Longman, and the *NEB*'s choice of prose for the opening verses serves to distinguish them from the poetic unit that follows but counters the decision of most scholars who follow the Masoretic formatting. Despite its unfashionableness for appropriating the wording of the King James Version, Murphy's is actually the only

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[112] H.L. Ginsburg, *Encyclopedia Judaica,* vol. 6 (Jerusalem, 1971), 354a.; cf. Longman, 58.
[113] Fox notes that this opinion goes back to Rashbam, 3.
[114] Or *havel havelim.*
[115] As he is after all writing for the JPS Bible Commentary series, Fox in fact follows the house-translation for the 1988 Tanakh. The *REB* amplifies the sense intended by the superlative construct by expanding it to 'Futility, utter futility, says the Speaker'.

one of those listed above to render the superlative sense of the construct Hebrew form. Granted 'vanity' in English implies a frivolous kind of self-love that does not seem to have been the original author's intention (but that certainly applies to the dandy), but it works. And it encapsulates Fox's view that *hebel* more accurately refers not to the incomprehensible or mysterious but to 'the manifestly irrational or … absurd'.[116] Although the terminology in the prologue that follows v. 1 supports Krüger's insistence that *hebel* also implies the 'fleetingness and transitoriness' of the human life span 'in regard to distant time',[117] I prefer the more literal syntax of the 'vanities' version and employ a synonym chosen by Longman to propose: 'meaninglessness of meaninglessnesses'.

It seems important to maintain the construct form for two reasons: 1) because it functions as a subversive antithesis to the usual biblical superlatives found in 'Song of Songs', 'Holy of Holies', and 'heaven of heavens', etc.; and 2) because it preserves the alliteration that in itself sounds quite absurd. First, what is presented as the best of this wise man's words is not the 'truth of all truths'[118] but a witty inversion of the expected wisdom, as if instead of the best of the best we get the worst of the worst. The second justification can be correlated with the fine print that repeats itself and forms the background of the *Monte Carlo Bond,* which reads, '*moustiques domestiques demi-stock',* and means nothing at all but 'domestic mosquitoes half-stock'. It is not that Qoheleth frames the entire book with a nonsensical phrase, for *hebel-hebelim* does mean something. Rather, this somewhat tongue-twisting phrase effectively opens the book with a catchy line that declares the meaninglessness of everything—and that is quite simply fun and onomatopoeic to say.

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[116] Fox (1989), 35.
[117] Krüger, 3.
[118] The adverb *aval* (אבל)*,* meaning either 'verily', 'of a truth', or in later Hebrew the adverse sense of 'howbeit' or 'but' (BDB, 6) makes me wonder if there is not in fact a homonymic pun at play here.

When the speaker proceeds in the next verse to ask, 'What gain is there to a man from all his work with which he toils under the sun?' (v. 3) the reader can hear the sighs of Qoheleth's indifference that echo Duchamp's 'lightness of spirit' as a *respirateur*.[119] Qoheleth does not speak of mere material or financial profit but instead of יתרון, which appears only in Ecclesiastes and is best understood as 'gain' or 'advantage'. The question of what advantage a man has after all his labour is particularly poignant to the self-made but spiritually bereft figure Qoheleth indicates of himself later in his memoirs.

Verse 3 also introduces the first use of the phrase 'under the sun', which will appear another twenty-eight times in the book[120] and brings to mind work in the field under a sweltering sky. Duchamp's haloed head situates him like a sun-god surveying the frenetic activity below him, so as we read we interject this disinterested solar orb every time the phrase occurs. 'Under the sun' is a way of expressing terrestrial activity (which originally stood for all there was in human life, before the concept of an afterlife came into the picture), and therefore scholars have been quick to insist that Qoheleth is not commenting on the heavenly realm. But by imagining Duchamp as a sun-god traversing the chapters, I seek to add a heterodox above-it-all character, a Helios or Ra-like presence, to the unorthodox dandy's presentation.

The roulette wheel begins to spin with v. 4, the numbers of our ages blurring into indecipherable oblivion: 'A generation going, and a generation coming, and the earth stands as always.' Several scholars have elucidated the spinning sensation

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[119] Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp, A Biography* (London, 1996), 15-16.
[120] The phrase is also exclusive to the book, though it also appears in Hellenistic writings as well as Elamite and Phoenician inscriptions, and even in the Epic of Gilgamesh; cf. Longman, 66.

evoked by דור (generations),[121] the root of which (*dur*) originally connoted circular movement.[122] While Ogden argues that it evokes the cycles of nature and therefore intimates the smallness of humankind in relation to the earth's never-ending seasons, Fox finds the use of הארץ maintains a focus on humanity rather than the wider physical world.[123] The unexpected order of 'go' and 'come' (as opposed to 'come' and 'go'), marks something of a Duchampian twist; the reader is flung into the motion not at the expected point but in the midst of the cycle, heightening the sense of disorientation.

The spinning continues in v. 5: 'And the sun rises and the sun sets; then breathlessly it hastens to the place it rises.' As Longman observes, 'the repetition of the subject *sun (sĕmĕsh)* … highlights [the] repetitive monotony'.[124] The verb in the second half, שואף, literally means 'to pant'[125] with/from either desire or exhaustion, indicating the sun's burden as a metaphor for the fatigue humans feel under its ceaseless setting and rising. This hardly implies the comforting stability most associate with the universal order established in Genesis and instead illustrates a complaint over how tedious the relentless repetition of night and day can be.

As for the wind: 'Blowing to the south and turning to the north, it turns, it turns, it blows, the wind, and because it turns, it returns, the wind' (v. 6). The wind blows about in a less cyclical fashion than the sun, rather like a cat chasing its tail, but produces a similarly intoxicating effect to the verses that precede it. While Longman, Lohfink and Whybray assume a strictly circular orbit, Krüger finds the wind's

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[121] See G.S. Ogden, 'The Interpretation of *dwr* in Ecclesiastes 1.4', *JSOT* 34 (1986), 91-92; M.V. Fox, 'Qoheleth 1.4', *JSOT* 40 (1988), 109; Crenshaw (1988)*,* 62; and Longman's summary of their thoughts, 67-68.
[122] BDB, 189.
[123] Fox (1988), 110.
[124] Longman, 69.
[125] See Longman, who transliterates it as *šā'ap*, 69.

'irregular motion' serves as a contrast to the sun's predictable movement.[126] Both the sun and the wind end where they started, but as Crenshaw has pointed out, the verbal repetitiveness in v. 6 enforces the sense that the wind especially is caught in a rut it cannot escape.[127] The wind is like the bachelors in *The Large Glass*—ever striving but going nowhere.

In the seventh verse, 'All streams run to the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again and again.' Contrary to psalmist and prophetic conceptions of the teeming sea as a manifestation of the Almighty's magnitude, the sea is conceived of as only half-full. And all of those streams that pour into it simply flow over and inconsequentially over again. Which is a bit like words themselves—'wearisome' (יגעים) to the point that there is nothing left to say (v. 8). This verse can be read in two ways: דברים can be either 'words' or 'things', so most have translated to indicate that Qoheleth is speaking of the exhausting nature of all things, which would appear to agree with vv. 9-10. But the present verse is concerned with what is heard and what is seen, and it is in the nature of the dandy to mock himself. So the one who seeks to find pleasing words acknowledges how tiresome it must be to listen to him. Words are after all 'inadequate to communicate the immensity of the repetitions in which the world is locked',[128] so the verse would read: 'All words are wearisome, no one can even speak; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, and the earth is not full with hearing.' Only *BHS* also suggests a probable repointing to the effect of 'no one stops talking' (לֹא־יְכַלֶּה), which conjures the

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[126] Krüger, 50; contra Longman, 70; Norbert Lohfink, 'Die Wiederkehr des immer Gleichen: Eine frühe Synthese zwischen griechischem und jüdischem Weltgefühl in Koheleth 1,4-11', *Archiva di filosofia* 53 (1985), 137; and R.N. Whybray, 'Ecclesiastes 1.5-7 and the Wonders of Nature', *JSOT* 41 (1988), 108.

[127] Crenshaw (1988) determines this on the basis of the repetitive participles *holek* ('going', twice) and *sobeb* ('going around', three times), 64.

[128] Fox (2004), 6.

dandy losing his patience with the chattering crowds, so I have taken liberties to include a vernacular variation, 'no one can get a word in'.

While the speaker's philosophical scope has meant commentary almost exclusively speaks of the eye's dissatisfaction and ear's emptiness as examples of the human condition, Koosed's work encourages us to imagine Qoheleth's own body and therefore his own physical unrest and insatiability. The eyes, ears and heart of Qoheleth surface and resurface, and when English translations transform ראה into 'observe', 'consider' or 'examine' they reduce the sensual nature of his visual experience and prevent us from seeing Qoheleth as an embodied man. Wolff prioritises hearing over seeing, finding that eyes in the Bible are generally opened through the hearing of the word, but Koosed convinces us that in Qoheleth seeing is equally if not more important than hearing.[129] She therefore agrees with Dhorme in recognising the eye as 'the principal instrument of knowledge'.[130] It is therefore an organ through which emotional knowledge, including pleasure and enjoyment, is formed, and therefore a unique vessel through which to understand the speaker's feelings and attitude. The eyes are also what the dandy uses to size someone up, and it seems significant that the dandy Qoheleth's first mention of his eyes occurs in an observation that both undermines and affirms their importance: the eyes are not satisfied, but they should be.

Qoheleth reveals his displeasure with what he sees and confesses that he has heard enough. In the one who finds words fatiguing but keeps on speaking and who finds a visual void in all he sees but keeps on seeing, it is easy to detect a feeling of not belonging in the world. Despite having riches, he is unfulfilled by pleasure and

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[129] Koosed, 40.
[130] Trans. Koosed, 41; cf. Edouard Dhorme, *L'emploi métaphorique des noms de parties du corps en Hébreu et en Akkadien* (Paris, 1963), 77.

mentions death enough times to prove a near obsession with it beneath his cool façade. For all of the delight his eyes give him—the power to behold his houses and vineyards and to possess women through his gaze—he appears to confess an existential loneliness that befits the fate met by other dandies who ended their days in exile and in despicable circumstances. Similarly, Duchamp's demeanour and reduction of human life and interaction to the functioning of mechanical parts has been categorised by art historians as a cerebral vision and the foundation of 'conceptual' art, yet beneath the deadpan approach and the portrait in the roulette wheel that gives nothing away, lies a disconcerting familiarity with the darkness of futility. Neither Duchamp nor Qoheleth could be sufficiently described as a defeatist, but each man's lightness surely masks something more wretched.

So it is with a smile that Qoheleth goes on to reduce history itself to redundancy: 'Whatever[131] has happened will happen again, and whatever has been done will be done again. And there is nothing new under the sun (v. 9).' This is further proof that our eyes deceive us, because though things appear to change, Qoheleth's superior vision can see that in fact they all stay the same. This obviously contravenes the predominant biblical view that human events progress according to a redemptive history and that God does new things, creates new covenants, and promises a new heaven and a new earth.[132] Longman observes how the repetition of words within the verse itself 'heighten[s] the idea of the cyclic repetition of human events',[133] and the recurrence of the phrase 'under the sun' (echoing its initial use in v. 3) contributes to this effect.

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[131] See Murphy on מה־שׁ, which occurs nine times in Qoheleth, indicating the 'indefinite "what(ever)"'—as opposed to the standard אשׁר, 6, n.9a. The 'indefinite whatever'—is that not what Qoheleth would call *hebel*?

[132] See David Hubbard, *Beyond Futility* (Grand Rapids, 1976), 20-21, and Hertzberg, 72.

[133] 'There is a double repetition of *mah-še* (*whatever … what*) as well as *hû'še,* in addition to the recurrent use of the verbs *hāyâ* ("to be") and *'āśâ* ("to do")'; Longman, 72.

In Perry's dialogic restructuring of the book, the second half of the verse reflects P reply to K's pessimistic statement about everything being doomed to repeat itself with a question: 'But is there nothing new under the sun?' The next verse continues in this voice: 'Surely there is something new about which one can say: "Look, this is new"' (v. 10).[134] While not everyone will agree with Perry's particular division of the script, it does seem possible that the dandy expects his listeners to ask this question in response to his hyperbolic conclusion. Mocking himself and not taking himself too seriously, the wit after all makes dramatic statements for the sake of sounding shocking… and giving people things to talk about.

The first part of v. 10 can alternatively be read as introducing a common expression (i.e., 'There is a word that says') or as Fox proposes, 'Sometimes there is a phenomenon of which they say "Look, this one is new!"' The latter gives a nice sense of Qoheleth not buying into novelties and being able to see plainly that every latest thing 'occurred long since, in ages that went before us':[135] 'There is no remembrance of people of long ago' (v. 10a). Here again the speaker shows his separateness from his contemporaries, for unlike them he can put the present generation into the perspective of all of the generations that proceeded it. He expresses contempt for the masses who take pride in the newness of things and who allow themselves to be hoodwinked by popular opinion. He condemns them for forgetting (or not even knowing in the first place) the thoughts and actions of those who came before them, and he consigns them to a trivial place in history by concluding his prologue with the foreboding message: 'nor will there be any remembrance of people yet to come by those who come after [us]' (v. 10b).

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[134] Perry, 58.
[135] Fox (2004), 7.

In the remainder of the chapter (vv. 12-18) Qoheleth impresses us with all of the knowledge and wisdom he has acquired as king. He seems guilty of 'a kind of self-worship' that Baudelaire determined to be the defining characteristic of dandyism—'the love of astonishing others and the delight of being astonished oneself'.[136] For he confesses that the consequence of his impressive achievements is not the expected realization that wisdom brings rewards but the rather astonishing formulation: 'For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; / Increasing knowledge increases grief' (v. 18). In this sequence and in its conclusion, Qoheleth introduces the heavy heart beneath his lightness of being. Koosed observes that English loses the impact of the words לב and לבב throughout the rest of the book by opting for 'mind' or 'myself'; but '"heart" occurs 42 times, a frequency greater than other characteristic words such as *hebel* and *'amal* ("toil").'[137] This does not result in emotional indulgence, for the Hebrew heart was not strictly the organ of feeling but of perception.[138] That these two modes of experience are bound together does nonetheless allow us to cast the speaker and the book in a more human and less stoic light. It shows the impact too much knowledge has had on him and gives the impression that watching the roulette wheel spin can suck the wind out of one's sails, so to speak.

Qoheleth's relationship to Duchamp and his introduction of himself to the reader—in the prologue and throughout the book—involves more than the clichéd idea that life is like roulette, for Duchamp's bond card attempts to *win* at roulette rather than simply accept its unpredictability. Invoking Mercury, electing himself and his alter-ego as the authorities over the casino, and devoting himself to conquering the

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[136] Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), in *Selected Writings on Art and Artists,* trans. P.E. Charvet (Cambridge, 1972), 420; cf. Shannon, 132.
[137] Koosed, 46.
[138] See Fox (1999), 78, and Dhorme, 128; cf. Koosed, 48-49.

game, Duchamp sets himself apart from the common player. His role in inventing the readymade is not merely to democratize art by granting mundane objects the status of high art. In contrast to the opinions of art historians who have said his achievement was to erase the presence of the artist, I propose that the artist's choice of object and subtle transformation of it are as much if not *more* about the artist's personality than any personalized painterly style. For in turning the urinal upside down and signing it with an ironic pseudonym (this time 'R. Mutt'), Duchamp shows us how clever he is. The average person on the street wouldn't think to do this, because 'average' people limit the value of a thing to its usefulness.

Likewise, Qoheleth's persona has eluded readers but he is very good at letting us know how uncommon he is by being the one who laughs over their heads, and this is what makes him the epitome of the dandy. Humans are to him mere creatures of the earth. Qoheleth refers to man as אדם forty-nine times, appropriating the dirtiness of 'man' found in Genesis 2-3 and insinuating, 'the dirt clings to [him] wherever he goes'.[139] He also reminds us of the similar fate that befalls both man and beast (Qoh. 3.18-21). But his testimony seems to protest his place in such a lot by showing how he has risen above the lowly drives and desires of being human and witnessed their futility from a higher vantage point. Qoheleth has amassed and possessed objects, animals and people, but he was never consumed by consumption, because he never lost his wits: 'my wisdom remained with me' (2.9b). And yet slips of the tongue indicate how he has been caught up in the spinning of the wheel: in 2.3 for instance the verb *tûr* is commonly translated 'explore' or 'try' but has an original sense of 'turn',[140] so he is actually saying: 'I *turned* in my heart/mind to cheer myself with wine'; his head spins but he stays grounded in wisdom, and again he 'turn[s] to

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[139] Koosed, 37.
[140] BDB, 1064.

consider wisdom and madness and folly' in 2.12. As the book's poetic passages are commonly structured by antitheses (see 7.1-2, *et passim*) and its individual prose passages keep revolving around the idea that life is absurd, the wheel of wisdom gains a mesmerising momentum. In fact, the whole structure of the book seems to turn from one subject to another, turning over ideas, overturning things that have been said, turning to new topics, and returning to the old ones all over again.

Nowhere does Qoheleth seem more caught up in the cycle than in the highly repetitive 'Catalogue' of times in 3.1-8, itself a stylistic repetition of 1.4-11 and thematic reiteration of the themes in 1.4-11; 1.12-2.13; and 2.24-26.[141] While the poetic section (vv. 1-8) is popularly considered to be a moving reflection on God's comforting omnipotence in apportioning of a time for everything, no one has suggested that its 'lilting rhythm, with its near constant use of the infinitive construct form … and with the repetition of the first word, "time"',[142] might actually be understood as something more altogether droll. Immediately followed by a treatise on toil, the rigidly structured passage goes endlessly back and forth between opposing pairs, and the dandy sounds as if he finds the subject matter tedious. It is as if Qoheleth is rattling off a list, testing our attention span so that we can experience the wearied truth that, once again, everything keeps happening over and over again according to a pre-determined schedule. Certainly the question that breaks the cycle—'What profit does the worker get from his labour?' (v. 9)—disrupts the sentimental sweetness most have ascribed to the poem. Qoheleth is too sharp-tongued to be saying this without his tongue in his cheek. Furthermore, the rocking rhythm of the passage creates an erotic undercurrent that has been noted by Athalya Brenner and

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[141] Lohfink (2003), 59.
[142] Longman, 111.

by Seow,[143] while the stones that are cast in v. 5 have been likened to testicles by Gordis and others.[144] If this passage seduces us, then the joke is on us, because it ends in rejection. Both Brummell and Duchamp were notorious flirts, and like them Qoheleth teases the Other with the possibility of harmony or unity before pulling away and resisting possession or fulfilment. He does not let us in on his personal life and leaves us wanting more, as if enacting how effort and the pursuit of desire brings neither profit nor gain.

Throughout the book, the reader is thrown into cycles of binary oppositions: pleasure and pain,[145] rest and toil, wisdom and folly, the red spaces and the black spaces on the wheel of fortune. While in Sneed's opinion Qoheleth's adherence to these conventions makes him not so radical after all, Qoheleth personifies the dandy by putting on a persona, keeping his cool at Monte Carlo, and finding the humour in life being like roulette. He is as much of the product of the old boys' club as the next posh geezer, but he is a rare and dying breed. As a Modern dandy he creates a mercurial state in which he ousts the reader from complacent positions provided by conventional wisdom, plunging him/her into the bleak depths of despair and then catapulting him/her out, and into a realm of gaiety.

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[143] See Brenner's chapter on Qoheleth in Athalya Brenner and Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden, 1993), and Seow, 161.
[144] Gordis (1968), 230; cf. Koosed, 70.
[145] Scarry considers the perennial partnering of pleasure to its opposite pain in Western culture, in Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, 1985), 69; cf. Koosed, 67.

Famous last words

The critic Martha Buskirk has commented on Duchamp's legacy and his 'participation in the construction of various Duchamp myths'.[146] Though he claimed to abort all artistic production after 1923, he did not stop making readymades and threw himself into chess with artistic compulsion. Part of his influence lives on in the idea of the artist as a collector and organizer of things (and of concepts and sayings), as one who turns around behavioural norms and social values. An equally important part of Duchamp's legacy endures in the persona he helped create for himself as an urbane eccentric who said worlds through his work while remaining poker-faced with regards to his personal life.   Whether playing it straight in a photographic portrait in profile (fig. 7), camp in Rrose's hat and stole, or godlike in wings of foam, he established a public image that eluded his public and secured his reputation.

One episode from Calvin Tompkins' biography of Duchamp illustrates how much the artist's fate was due to the fickle temperament of one Guillaume Apollinaire, the *de facto* 'king' of the artistic community in Montparnasse. Shortly following a media scandal involving the theft of the *Mona Lisa* in 1911—in which Picasso had evaded police scrutiny by denying knowing Apollinaire, the critic who had made him famous—Apollinaire was introduced to Duchamp by Francis Picabia and swiftly shifted his allegiance to the making of a new star. Circumstance, chance, and the fickle crowd were the lords of Duchamp's reputation, as indeed they no doubt were for Qoheleth's.

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[146] Buskirk, 192.

Figure 7. Photograph of Marcel Duchamp, Edward Steichen, 1917

Duchamp's elusive presence in his readymades inspires fascination with his work, as is the case with Qoheleth's curious identity and 'conceptual' approach to God and humankind. Qoheleth poses as something he is not and would agree with Wilde's teaser, 'All art is quite useless.'[147] At the same time, he does not abandon aesthetics but uses pleasing words (12.10) to turn conventional wisdom on its head. As a 'sage' he not only weighed, examined and corrected many sayings (v. 9) but also composed and arranged a collection of ideas into a particular order. By making the effort to find pleasing expressions (whether nicely phrased, intellectually engaging,

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[147] Preface to *Dorian Gray*, 5.

simply curious, or just plain provocative), Qoheleth devoted himself to bringing delight through the unexpected aesthetics of his composition. He aspires to elegance and truth, and no doubt enjoying the admiration of his audience (and simultaneously seeking their approval), he is a highly social creature.

Yet despite the advantages of companionship (see 4.7-12), Qoheleth maintains an emotional detachment and interacts with an 'archness and a personal attractiveness [that is] cruelly mixed with misanthropy'.[148] As a Jew living most likely under Hellenism, he is 'indifferent to politics, above the vagaries of fashion' and at times seems only to want 'to be envied and to make people laugh.[149] He can charm a crowd, but in his heart he sees himself as fundamentally different from (though not necessarily better than) all the rest. Qoheleth is no mere a snob. On the contrary, 'Qoheleth exposes human jealously to public scrutiny, the grasping to have more than our neighbours possess and the insatiable lust for possessions', and he illustrates how 'Those who love money will see it slip through their fingers like quicksilver' through the reverse logic that 'poor labourers have some advantage.'[150] He repeatedly cautions against the insatiable appetite that sets in with the increase in wealth and warns of how people become devoured by the burden of responsibility that property and possessions bring.[151]

Cultured Qoheleth is therefore unimpressed by consumerism, sentimental small talk, and the overblown ramblings of know-it-alls. His life is a paradox: he is well-versed but ends his speech by telling his audience not to read too much (12.12). And on the one hand the fact that some people should have dominion over others riles him, while on the other he is happy to live off his property and inheritance at the

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[148] Kelly on Brummell, 7.
[149] *Ibid*.
[150] Crenshaw (1988)., 120.
[151] *Ibid.*, 120-21.

expense of others. Since the wise and righteous have no advantage over fools, the least one can do is enjoy one's portion and not have too much of toil and labour. As Krüger has summarized, Qoheleth finds poverty to be the result of oppression but the rich have the right to make the most of their good luck.[152]

Even Qoheleth's attitude to death is glib—bleak perhaps, but not completely deflated. On the surface of things, he seems more concerned with what happens to one's fortune when he dies than he is with any conscious fear of dying. He is intrigued by the randomness of it all and can even entertain the idea that non-existence might be better than living to 'witness the evil deeds that are under the sun'.[153] Crenshaw finds that 'the lengthening shadow of death becomes especially dark in [9.1-10]'.[154] But from the passing manner in which Qoheleth slips in lines about the deity's aloof disposition towards life on earth, one might say he almost finds the idea of a common fate for the righteous and the foolish alike too funny for words—like a light joke that dissipates into the empty air. Or perhaps he acts in the image of God by seeing humankind and the universe from above, from whence he can see the divine comedy in the meaninglessness of it all.

Abiding by Wilde's aversion to the 'unpardonable mannerism of style' of 'ethical sympathies' in art,[155] Qoheleth the dandy turns expectations around and makes pacts with an elusive god of fortune. Reading Ecclesiastes like a game of roulette spins on the revolving wheel of ideas that drive the text to its end. In the end, this dandy's autobiography thrives on risk (11.1-6) and relates how the subject has not lived his life moaning about but rather relishing life. There is no need to apologise for

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[152] Krüger, 4.
[153] Crenshaw (1988), 107
[154] *Ibid.*, 159.
[155] Preface to *Dorian Gray*, 5.

the pessimistic closing (God will judge all of your secrets), as the Masoretes did,[156] because however dourly it comes across, it is balanced out by equal doses of the dandy's light advice: get wisdom and avoid acquiring too many things. But also, better though the house of mourning might be than the house of laughter, enterprise, entertainment and the cultivation of one's mind are to be done with all one's might (9.10).

As an 'autobiography', Ecclesiastes speaks directly to the reader's own life. Told in the first-person, it allows the reader to project his/her own experiences onto the text, much like the Psalms. So as the critic in this comparative interpretation, I must unload my own life story and confess why I identify with Qoheleth and why I thus end with him. The last Modern thing I can do is to talk about myself. As the members of my family died off, I saw that all was *hebel*. I became the sole heir to an attic stuffed ceiling-to-eaves with over forty years' worth of accumulated possessions—things we could not let go of, but so much of which amounted to nothing. The burden of possessions lay before me as the record of our consumption: the broken appliances; the clothes and plastic; and the evidence of how caught up we had been in the spin of capitalism. And yet one box after another in the vertiginous journey through my life and family history contained more laughter than it did tears. The stories behind the objects reminded me of our sense of parody and difference from the rest of the world. Together we laughed at the vanity of others, got through family counselling by making a joke of it, and learned not to take society too seriously. Financially, we went through highs and lows, from not being able to afford to have the heating on for much of the 1970s to obscene amounts of presents under

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[156] The Masoretes repeated the second to last verse (about fearing God and keeping His commandments) after the last one ('For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret and thing, whether good or evil'), as they did at the end of Isaiah, the Minor Prophets, and Lamentations. 'Few people can endure words of relentless wrath. Or the conclusion that life is utterly futile!' Crenshaw (1988), 192.

the Christmas tree a decade later. I could see how much my well-being had depended on chance, and I now find Christmas presents meaningless except for the wrapping paper.

As the last one in the family, I was left enough by my father to purchase my first flat—to restore it and so 'build houses' and even attempt a garden like Qoheleth. Obsessed as I have been with creating a place for the few remaining possessions I ended up saving from the house and attic (and here I invoke the spirit of Solomon in defending my right to a well-appointed domestic temple), I am well aware that one day my things will end up in the landfill. Nonetheless, I assert my difference by shunning the minimalist trends of today and letting my grandfather's chair shed its wisdom on the room. It is sheer Aesthetic *hebel* to spend so much time choosing fabric to re-cover it, but Qoheleth tells me it is worth pursuing.

To get to the end of the chapter, I would like to relate the proverbial wisdom of a dandy in her own right, a 97-year-old artist I used to assist who had a cool eye for the total absurdity of things. Born to Jewish refugees and raised in a respectable neighbourhood of Brooklyn, Anne Feinberg (1903-2001) married a concert violinist and led a lively existence in Greenwich Village collecting art, befriending the likes of Mondrian and Balanchine, and travelling regularly to Europe. One afternoon I collected her from her apartment on Sheridan Square along Christopher Street—a downtown thoroughfare that saw many incarnations in the fifty-odd years she had resided there. Her eyesight was ever 'not what it used to be' and she persisted in her observation that it 'just doesn't make sense that it should all come to this'. As I pushed her wheelchair in the direction of Seventh Avenue, she asked me to stop so that she could try and see what was in the shop window next door to her building. I never knew if she actually registered that it was a pair of studded leather underwear

she so earnestly attempted to decipher, or if it was just trunks to her, but with a wave of the hand she directed me to proceed along the sidewalk and offered me this, in her unforgettable accent: 'You know, if you could see the way this city used to be… The answer is: *nevahmind.*'

To insist on connections between Qoheleth, Duchamp and Beau Brummell and to attempt to conflate the biblical writer with the Modern artist is to stand alone, to wax Aesthetic and to look askance at contemporary commentaries. To look at the debates about date and language and say, 'The answer is: *nevermind*', but to mind deeply and in place of them turn the wise sayings about with visual partners as far-ranging as Pamela Anderson and the Regency dandy. As a memoir of my interaction with the Bible and art, the introduction to a dandy ends the dissertation by using wisdom not to take the topic too seriously … and by hoping Qoheleth would be most amused.

CONCLUSION

DÉNOUEMENT

Closing the body of my work with an introduction to Qoheleth follows a subversive

logical order, but so does the autobiography provide a fitting place to start my ending,

for my analysis of the biblical text has been conspicuously subjective and based on

my own ways of seeing. My obsession with the visual has clearly dictated how I read

the Bible, and each section exists because of a pre-disposed association. My use of

Pater grounds the project in Aesthetic ideals, for the Bible is an object whose odd

beauty deserves consideration for how it looks today. My sympathy with Morris

shapes how I have reconstructed Michal, just as my love for the antiquated feel of

woodcuts imprinted itself on my reading of Abraham as an Overman. My

appreciation of Schwitters's and Mendieta's exilic practices structured the

engagement with an otherwise generic piece of prophecy, while the emotional yet

universal nature of Pollock's drip paintings allowed me to shape Psalm 13 as such.

Finally, Duchamp's conceptual wit and self-portraiture affected how I presented

Qoheleth as a dandy. Yet as much as these readings portray parts of the Bible as I

personally see them, as much as they reveal my own preferences and tastes, and as

much as they admittedly *create* metaphorical resemblances in the Ricoeurian sense,

they are also rooted in the belief that I have brought innately Modern aesthetic

features of the text itself to the surface.

  If my slide-show comparisons stray from the methods of those who read

images of biblical narratives as parsable parts, perhaps it is closer to the workings of

comparative literature, which brings unrelated bodies of text together in order to

express something contingent and which operates intertextually without requiring one work to be dependent upon another. And if there is a danger in anthropologists reading cultures through foreign models, we can at least appreciate that by doing so they have hoped to bring something unknown or misunderstood into a context our Modern Western minds can understand. As an 'anthropologist on Mars', I have attempted to read the Bible through artistic models so that those who read Modern art in secular terms might see how many of the things taken for granted as being completely new in fact have correlates and analogues in the ancient text. I have created portraits—of a queen, an Overman, and a dandy—and I have argued that abstract styles can readily reflect a prophet or a psalmist's mode of expression, so that biblical scholarship might be shown fresh ways of conceptualising characters and of thinking about writing. There were further comparisons I hoped to make by adding an 'Apocalyptic Postscript' to Chapter III and explaining the shifts between Hebrew and Aramaic in the Book of Daniel as the placement of one geometric shape over another by the Suprematist painter Kazmir Malevich. My Psalms chapter originally consisted of two additional sections to cover further types: the doleful sculptures of Doris Salcedo were to illustrate the communal lament, while the exuberantly coloured and voluptuously shaped 'Nanas' by Niki de Saint Phalle were to express hymns of praise. But these will have to wait for further sessions in the interdisciplinary lecture theatre.

To return to Gadamer, it should be clear by now that what I have recorded is a critical process of play which I have undertaken with a 'sacred seriousness', despite my periodic and frivolous-sounding salon speak. Yet having imposed my vision of a Modern aesthetic onto the Bible, I must own up to where my interpretive act produces the most successful results and alternately where the correlations might hold less

firmly together. I must continue the reflexive turn taken in the final chapter and direct the focus of the study back onto myself as the subject—to contextualise retrospectively on each of the chapters and answer more confessionally the questions Pater presented at the opening: 'What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me?' In this Aesthetic spirit, I have engaged with the Bible and art to create an artwork that constructs metaphors into a collage of images, texts and criticism. I express my hope in an artful form of criticism and that my personal technique will be found aesthetically pleasing. The critical comparisons present solutions to poorly interpreted texts and are first conceived via personal modes of taste, instinct or concern. They demonstrate subjective reactions to words, people and images and therefore confess a personal element that underscores each chapter. The dedication to my mother, priest and biblical scholar, bears the sign of a collective piece that functions for me, the theologian and artist, as Barthes's *Camera Lucida* did for him.[157] But it is more so a celebration and expression of thanks for the view of the world she helped instil in me, so I cannot claim that despondency or mourning has haunted me throughout the production of the project. Still, the road to completion began and now ends with her original vision of the Old Testament in mind, and it is appropriate in reflecting on the artwork to elaborate on the personal preferences or circumstances behind the comparative method.

Chapter I evolved from the injustice I witnessed as critics sentenced Michal either to mean-spiritedness or to victimhood. Feeling she needed an advocate—or a knight in shining armour—and finding a hopeful example in Morris's version of the Arthurian trial, I styled the analysis as a courtroom drama in order to overrule the

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[157] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (trans. Richard Howard; first published as *La Chambre claire* in 1981; London, 1993).

earlier verdicts. The method employed in this defence is however the most conventional of all the chapters, for I establish similarities between the queens via typologies that read details of Michal's character and situation according to symbols identified in the Pre-Raphaelite painting. Both women are indeed standing by a window and are at odds with a world controlled by men, but I partially treat Guenevere's book, mirror, linens and crown as emblems that can be read allegorically projected onto the biblical message. This was indeed a method espoused by Ruskin and practiced by Victorian clergymen who would decode otherwise secular paintings according to Christian principles.[158] The deconstruction therefore occurs according to a strategy consistent with the painting's own era. Furthermore, in keeping with the Deuteronomistic History's sermonic inflections I thought a more rigorous sermon might be delivered on the subject of Saul's daughter and her self-important husband. My choice of Morris appeals for the Gothic dignity, beauty and drama it brings to the subject and for its weight in winning case against Michal's detractors.

Yet one might wonder whether or not the introduction of the Guenevere portrait was entirely necessary to the defence. Could I not have waged the argument without resorting to a portrait? Does the inclusion of the poetry of Morris and Malory meander too far from Michal's own story? And do I take too large a leap in

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[158] Some of the more favourite paintings subjected to this kind of theological gloss included Barbizon painter Francois Millet's *The Angelus* (1857-59), William Frith's *Road to Ruin* series (1878), and George Frederick Watts's *Hope* (1886), whose blindfolded allegorical figure was determined to represent a life blind to Christ. (This latter painting has more recently resurfaced in the campaign speeches of Barack Obama, as well as in the sermons of his erstwhile mentor Jeremiah Wright.) The homiletic penchant for adding Christian colour to humanist paintings continued into the Edwardian era. The evangelical Anglican preacher and author James Burns, for instance, employed Rossetti's depiction of a fallen woman, *Found* (1854), to illustrate the theme of 'Christ seeking the Lost' (Burns even retitles the painting *Lost*). At the moment her husband discovers her presumably street-walking on the Blackfriars Bridge, he grabs her by the wrist 'to her shame and terror'. Burns continues, 'It was with such a look that Christ walked the streets of Jerusalem peering into the faces of passers-by seeking the lost.' James Burns, *Illustrations from Art for Pulpit and Platform* (London, 1912), 13. That Rossetti had in fact set out to elicit sympathy for a woman who had been cast out by her husband and forced into prostitution makes Burns's reckoning somewhat difficult not to doubt. For a more detailed discussion of the use of art by preachers in both England and Wales, see John Harvey, *Image of the Invisible* (Cardiff, 1999), 49-54.

concluding that she identifies with David and thus expresses a degree of self-loathing when she berates him? I would contend that the use of the image supports the defence in the manner that lawyers put forth earlier rulings as evidence before the court. I imagine a face and a story to suit her role throughout Samuel, and while one must be cautious about over-assigning 'Semitic' features, Jane Morris's mane of dark and unruly curls and her handsome brooding eyes seem more apt than the locks of a lady much more fair. Her own love triangle and that of Guenevere also provide interesting, if not strictly parallel,[159] counterparts to Michal's own soap opera with David, Palti and her father. The anachronistic rendering humanizes her. And without the picture as evidence, it would simply be her word against his.

Chapter II had its genesis in my distrust of Abraham's tears and the text's overemphasis on the land purchase, though I appreciate why it is an important sale! The verses that relate Sarah's death prove that at least he went through the necessary rituals to mourn her, but the real conflict is with the Hittites. My suspicions arose out of my resistance to readings of Abraham that elevate him to outrageous heights as the original father, for I have never been much of a believer in mighty heroes or flawless figureheads. Nietzsche's own masculine idol in the Overman, who merely seemed to replace in his heart the ones he tried to kill off, epitomises the delusions of greatness that are projected onto legends of the male sex. I therefore took the portrait to demonstrate a way for Abraham to step down to a more human level, so that he not longer had to live up to the expectations of a male role model. Rather than compare visual and verbal details one-by-one as I did in the first chapter, I ventured into

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[159] Though I think both may be overemphasising a sense of closure in Tillich's system, Vanhoozer notes how for Ricoeur 'the mediation is never total, never perfect … he would never conceive of a systematic theology because interpretation never ends'. In Ricoeur's words, 'unity of truth is a timeless task because it is at first an eschatological hope.' In Vanhoozer, 5; cf. Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth* (trans. Charles Kelbley; first published as *Histoire et Vérité* in Paris, 1955; Evanston, IL, 1965), 5.

psychoanalytical territory to argue the existence of a patriarchal fear of emasculation. Into this landscape I then incorporated Irigaray's dialogue with Nietzsche and attempted a more poetic mode of criticism to allow Sarah to speak through her death. In order to achieve this, Irigaray's symbolic system had to be reconciled with the biblical text, and as in the case of the womblike cave her choice of words frequently seemed to resonate with Sarah's story and the emerging interpretive event.

While the comparison's purpose beyond overcoming the heroization of Abraham was to enforce the importance of Israel's mother, Irigaray's metaphorical language might overwhelm (or drown out) any sense of Abraham's grief, and perhaps I am somewhat unfair towards him. I have also instigated a conflation of Modern men that verges on essentialism. The German-speaking (and sometimes Jewish) individuals who rose to intellectual or artistic prominence after the death of Nietzsche—namely the Expressionists, Gunkel, Freud and Ginzberg—may only have that much in common. And while masculinity plays its part in the methods of Freud and the Expressionists, the same cannot necessarily be said for the likes of Gunkel and Ginzberg. Many might agree that there is a tone of certitude throughout much Modern criticism (e.g. historical criticism's resoluteness in assigning dates and origins to texts), but this is not true of every Modern man. Historical-critics do admit when they do not know all the answers, so not every man thinks in solids, one could say to the marine lover.

I can however turn the psychoanalytic lens onto myself to explain where my need to set up such a construction might originate. The chosen subject matter for this section of the dissertation does in fact constitute a form of mourning, though one conducted with the perspective of time. Like Derrida negotiating the death of his colleague Sarah Kofman by recalling the words about the death of the biblical Sarah,

my work on the politics of death and gender in Gen. 23 pays homage to the death of my own sister Sarah. And probably, if I am brutally honest with myself, I am purging myself of a resentment I had of my father throughout childhood and in the years that followed Sarah's and our mother's deaths. Ironically, my father was a man of the sea, and as the commander of a nuclear submarine had traversed its depths in ways that do not fit into Irigaray's paradigm of men only ever skimming the ocean's surface. On the other hand, he was the son of a professional American footballer (nicknamed 'Butch') and was raised to adhere to masculine codes of behaviour that were reinforced by the years he spent in the military. At the same time, as my mother used to recall, he did once admit to wanting to be a ballet dancer, and he was fully out as a Broadway enthusiast, so all gender is fluid (or foamy). As his delicately framed son, I suppose I never forgave him for making me join the elementary school wrestling club when I was still in kindergarten and pushing me to play soccer in the years to come. And when my mother and sister died, I felt he was partly escaping a more silent form of grief by busying himself with setting up scholarship funds in their names and compiling a memorial book that he mass-mailed to over two hundred people. Now that he is gone, guilt rightly comes. Eighteen months after we buried my mother and spread Sarah's ashes, he remarried, and at some point prior to my exodus to Britain, I told him I still missed them and wanted to do something with my life to honour their memory.   It was my lack of forgiveness for him when he announced he had 'moved on' that this realization of Gen. 23 finally seeks to overcome. So the piece focuses ultimately on Abraham rather than Sarah, primarily mourning of the father over the biblical mother/my sister after all.

Certainly my sister's death inflected my interpretation of Is. 44 and the work of Ana Mendieta. Whereas the first half of Ch. III visualises the prophecy as a

collage, the performance and earth works gave startling expression to the tragic beauty of my sister's death. I saw in the *siluetas* her body as it was when they found it facing the frozen ground after her flight from the hospital and through a midwinter river, and yet the fertility figures' dissolving forms were reassuring for their expression of our natural relationship to the earth—my sister's *raison d'être* in her macrobiotic lifestyle and brief adulthood. Her identity as someone attempting a pure form of living in a culture consumed by consumption presents itself in the records of Mendieta's performance.   So behind the silhouette of the servant in Isaiah's assemblage lies my respect for her convictions and for identity that is maintained under any alienating or friendly circumstances. The appearance and disappearance of the figurative forms reveals the context in which the prophecy understands that people can live anywhere, belong to the earth, and still be bound together in good servanthood.

The use of Mendieta situates Is. 44 as a performance, while the Schwitters section that precedes it frames the cut-up text and considers its rough textual surface and joyful imagery. At times one could again accuse me of typology as I link the colours of food wrappers to the refreshing waters that flow through ch. 44, but the lines are drawn on the basis of sensation rather than moral sentiment.[160] The *Merzbild* splices together nicely with the text to illustrate the adjustment to exile and the delight and laughter in Isaiah's eyes.

Chapter IV continues the method of letting the Modern painting and art criticism speak for the Hebrew text. It explores the lament as an emotional tool and lets the paint splatter about to look at the self, the nation and death. The tension

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[160] There might also be elements of this projection of symbolism in my mediation between Pollock's dripped paint and the parallelisms in Ps. 13, or between the details of Duchamp's roulette card and Qoheleth as a dandy, but I do not impart a moral message through these readings and proceed more in terms of a common essence. The route through each comparison is never too straight or narrow.

between Pollock's intertwining streams of paint animates the poetic outpouring of the verses and highlights how certain forms of art and poetry are made for universal expression. The individual in the lament serves as an everyman for everyone who experiences unbearable pain. The swirls of colourful feeling additionally conceptualise the tension between having no hope and trusting in love. I have not yet recited the psalm as a personal prayer, only constructed a new visual version of it, but parallelism's intoxicating style allowed me to wax Aesthetic and to post a protest against reading the psalm without vision and without its original highly decorated temple setting in mind. The discursive flow makes an explosive show of the psalm's Modern, abstract and expressive methods.

Finally, Chapter V brings together the prologue to Qoheleth and the witticisms of dandies and Duchamp to present a readymade portrait of the sage and some mutual ideas about life and death. With a dandy's discretion, I refrain from speaking any more on the subject of this as a self-portrait. The issue of Qoheleth's optimism versus his pessimism did however seem trivial to me, because I *understood* him and knew he could lean either way. And his slight air of indifference shows he has kept his sense of humour despite having experienced the absurd pains and joys of life firsthand.

The life work carries out the mission of an artist-theologian who sees himself inhabiting the boundaries of biblical criticism and contemporary culture in general, mainly because my interdisciplinary movement occurs between seemingly unrelated bodies of work. A self-fashioned Modern, I hover between tradition and innovation and owe an enormous debt to the liberal theology of the past two hundred years. Tillich's own 'theology of the boundaries' must be raised in these final pages to add a closing dimension to the study's orientation in life and to lead us back to the Bible's Modern methods.

Tillich, who described his own project as 'fragmentary and often inadequate and questionable',[161] sought creative and indeed Modern integration by systematically correlating existential questions with answers found in the Christian Bible. He identified a Protestant style of self-interpretation in Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) and took issue with Einstein's scientific short-sightedness in chastising religion for its abuses without mentioning its creative significance.[162] And his methodology can be called upon to point again to the human situations from which the art and texts I have covered arise—and to advance each of them and correlate them with theological-aesthetic answers. Each piece reflects both objective and subjective truths while shying away from too much hermeneutic consistency, and each correspondence evokes Modern methods and dialectics that are fundamental to the creation and interpretation of the Bible and art.

If my process of interpretation forces connections, I can confess that some of them seemed to come down the sky from nowhere. Such unconscious happenings describe also how words direct us to visual pictures that then construct how those words are read. Texts do not exist in purely verbal realms, and the Bible's attempt to capture the numinous presence of God in words alone does not seem able to communicate all that can be articulated of something that is both seen and unseen. Ricoeur writes on the condition of the God named YHWH, 'His name is not a name … it cannot be held within the discretion of language' (see Ex. 3.13-14).[163] Words alone cannot describe what the Bible and art reveal and conceal about our 'ultimate

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[161] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 'Life and the Spirit—History and the Kingdom of God' (Chicago, 1963), v. His discipline of reflection and doubt has been described as a 'system of correlation … [that] is never completed', by Robert P. Scharlemann, *Reflection and Doubt in the Thought of Paul Tillich* (New Haven, 1969), xv.

[162] See Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (ed. Robert C. Kimball; Oxford, 1959; 1975 reprint), 68ff. and 128.

[163] Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', in his *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (ed., Lewis Mudge; London, 1981), 94.

concerns' (Tillich). Perhaps the inverse could be argued for art, and Modern art in particular: I for one do not experience art without thinking in words, even if it is a single word 'wow' to express how awestruck I am. And surely Modern art communicates more when one knows the lingo.

But I have probably shown enough pictures and uttered enough words for a single sitting. If the reader remains unconvinced of the Bible's 'Modern Methods', probably no amount of conversation will otherwise prove my premise. Should this be the case, I hope three things at the least: 1) that, when roaming the halls of the Tate, Pompidou or MoMA, one might think of Modern art's place within the history of religions; 2) that one might allow Modern and contemporary images to inform the reading and interpretation of the Bible; and 3) that my hermeneutical card game might at least provide an interesting topic of conversation at the next salon or over the next cup of coffee such a person shares with aesthetically sensitive company. This last achievement might be all Pater's writings on the Renaissance amounted to for many of his more stone-faced peers, but such an underwhelming impact for some would be for me both a scandal and a success.

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