Recovering Jeremiah: A Thesis in Three Acts

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Although Jeremiah is celebrated as the biblical prophet *par excellence*, the book that bears his name is deemed problematic. Courting scholarly attention with promises of a greater biographical and autobiographical content than other prophetic collections, the text is unable to satisfy the hopes of the majority of its commentators. Little concerned with thematic and chronological coherence, Jeremiah repeatedly frustrates readerly expectations—likened to a *veil*, it obscures as much as it reveals.

Thus a dominant thread within scholarship has been a negotiation of the relationship between the veil and the prophet: securing the ipsissima verba of Jeremiah, and identifying where these have been since over sewn (scholars thereby adding to the stitch work in the process). Far from representing a curtain that is to be drawn back to reveal a prophet (and landscape) beyond, however, the book of Jeremiah offers something analogous to a theatrical event—more specifically, the theatre of Bertolt Brecht.

Organising the thesis into three parts or *acts* I begin by considering the formal complexities of Jeremiah, likening its disruptions to the disjunctive style of Brecht's epic plays. As in the theatre of Brecht, the montage of jumps and curves in Jeremiah both foreground the textuality of representation and goad the reader into evaluation and comment. In the second act I focus on three prophetic dramas. As a distinct group of narratives, prophetic dramas are seldom studied, and rarely, if ever, brought into dialogue with contemporary theories of theatre. And so, by applying the insights of theatrical semiotics to the jug-breaking of Jeremiah 19, I can elucidate something of the mechanics of this way of making meaning. I then juxtapose this and the dramas of

Jeremiah 13 and 18 with examples of Brecht's *Lehstücke* (learning plays) to represent the dramas as continuing rehearsals performed before an audience of interpreting reader-writers.

In the final act I turn to the prophet himself as a figure constituted by the incoming word (Jeremiah 1) who sacrifices sexuality for textuality, biological lineage for a verbal heritage (Jeremiah 16) thus becoming a site of discourse and debate. More than a messenger-mouthpiece he is inscribed as word-bearer and his flesh and blood self is replaced by parchment which is then sent out as a scroll (Jeremiah 36). At this point I introduce the writings of Jacques Derrida whose discussion on the iterable (repeatable) mark indicates how writings can outlive their origins and bear repetition in numberless new contexts. It is on these terms that biblical prophecy overtakes its predictions, and rolling beyond them, gather new readings, new interpretations, on route. Thus what might start out as recovery—for example, the search for an historical Jeremiah, or a particular message that is peculiar to this book—is in truth a recovering in another sense of the word (of covering with more text[ile]), since all our uncoverings amount to the generation of more words, more text, to cover other texts.

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Introduction

STRANGER THAN FICTION *OR* A PROPHET AMONG THE POTSHERDS

> Clay tablets wail:
>
> These are bad times, the gods are mad,
>
> children misbehave and
>
> everybody wants to write a book.[1]

> To simply sit down and read Jeremiah through as though it were a novel or
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> an exciting adventure would be quickly disappointing.[2]

Among the twenty-one ostraca (inscribed potsherds) found in the remains of a gate-tower at Tell ed-Duweir, the site of ancient Lachish, at a level representing an early sixth-century BCE destruction,[3] is a reference to a prophet whose message either begins or is summarised with the words 'Be warned!'[4] Another fragment refers to הנביא ...]הו], ('[...]hu the prophet'); הו ('—hu') forming what appears to be the final syllable of a name compounded with יהו ('Yahu').[5] It has been suggested that the prophet may be Uriah (אוריהו) of Jeremiah 26. 23 or even Jeremiah (ירמיהו) himself; but while the tesserae tantalize, they do not provide enough information to construct with confidence a recognizable figure, and so the identity of the prophet,

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[1] Miroslave Holub, 'Nineveh', in *Vanishing Lung Syndrome*, trans. by David Young and Dana Habova (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), p. 37.

[2] Lawrence Boadt, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982), p. xii.

[3] S. B. Parker writes that the identification of Tell ed-Duweir with the site of Lachish 'is certain', and that the language used is consistent with the stated period. S. B. Parker, 'The Lachish Letters and Official Reactions to Prophecies', in *Uncovering Ancient Stories: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson* ed. by Lewis M. Hopfe (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), pp. 65-78 (p. 66).

[4] Letter III. 20. The full citation reads: 'As for the message of Tobiyahu, the servant of the king, which came to Shallum son of Yaddu/Yadda from the prophet, saying: "Be Careful!"—your servant is sending it to my lord'. Parker, p. 70.

[5] Letter XVI. 5. John C.L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. 1, *Hebrew and Moabite Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.32-49 (p. 35).

described as 'one of the most interesting problems of the ostraca', must remain unsolved and seemingly unsolvable.[6]

In comparison with this small collection, the book of Jeremiah—the largest book of the Bible counting by verse rather than chapter—is a corpus of far grander proportions. Its wealth of words, however, provides no unambiguous embarrassment of historical riches; the relation of its traditions to the historical context in which they are situated (the final days and eventual destruction of sixth-century Jerusalem) continues to be a point of contention. Rather, it is the letters of Lachish, contemporary to the events they describe, which possess the virtue of historical primacy and so seem to promise greater access to those events than the later biblical text.[7] However, since the letters lack any clear reference to previously known figures and assume more knowledge on the part of the reader than they supply, their usefulness in relation to the history of ancient Palestine is suggestive rather than solid.[8] Unfettered to historical referents, those figures who are fully named—the subservient Hosayahu ('who am I but a dog?') and his superior, Yaush ('my lord')—have an existence which is little more than literary insofar as they feed the imagination as much as empirical enquiry, seeming not far different in kind from characters in an ancient fiction.

Common sense, however, dictates that letters are indeed different in kind from fiction. Generally speaking, letters are expected to convey information that bears

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[6] Compound names formed with the element 'Yahu' are not uncommon in biblical literature; several characters in the book of Jeremiah bear names of this type (see for example, Jeremiah, 28. 1; 29. 21; 29. 31). It cannot even be presumed that III. 20 and XVI. 5 refer to the same prophet. Gibson suggests that the unnamed prophet of III. 20 is 'no more than a kind of wandering dervish'. Gibson, p. 35.

[7] It is not known when exactly Jeremiah came into existence as a book. Texts from Qumran confirm that it did exist in various forms by the mid-second-century BCE, and while it is reasonable to claim that the traditions within it are much older, the value of these for the construction of actual historical events has been increasingly called into question. See below.

[8] Agreement that the ostraca do date to the time of the Babylonian conquest of Judah is widespread, but while their contribution to scholarly knowledge of the time has been described as 'precious enough', it is of a general sort: that communications with Jerusalem are good; that the commander in chief is heading to Egypt; that preparations for war seem to be in progress. See Gibson, p. 34. Quotation from D. Pardee cited in David J. Reimer, 'Jeremiah Before the Exile?', in *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel*, ed.

some reasonably direct relation to an external reality whilst providing an invaluable source for the thoughts and opinions of their authors, whereas fiction is not to be mistaken for an account of events that really happened and represents the writer more obliquely.[9] Thus in a preface to the letters of Jane Austen, the editor Deirdre Le Faye cites Nathaniel Hawthorne's comment about the novels of Trollop—'just as real as if some giant had hewn a great lump out of the earth, and put it under a glass case, with all its inhabitants going about their daily business and not suspecting that they were being made a show of'[10]—adding that Austen's letters 'are not "just as real"—they *are* real, and as we read them we too can watch the daily business of herself, her family, and friends passing before our eyes'.[11] Since their publication in 1932,[12] Austen's letters have proved useful to both literary critics who 'hunt through them for the most minute details of her opinions, action, family, and friends, as source-material for biographies and for studies on the composition of the novels',[13] and social historians who seek details on such matters as manners and the cost of living in early-nineteenth-century England.

In the preface to his own edition of the letters of Jane Austen, however, R. K. Chapman values them less as a resource for historical research than as literary artefacts and part of an Austen corpus: 'as fragments—fragments of observations, of characterization, of criticism—they are in the same class as the material of the novels; and in some respects they have a wider range.'[14] Thus Chapman makes little

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by John Day, JSOT Supplement Series, 406 (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), pp. 207-224 (p. 211).

[9] That novels may make use of actual historical events and settings and the possibility that letters may not necessarily be written sincerely already blurs the distinction.

[10] Cited in Deirdre Le Faye, 'Preface to the Third Edition', in Jane Austen, *Jane Austen's Letters: A New Edition*, ed. by Deirdre Le Faye (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. xiv-xviii (p. xviii).

[11] Le Faye, 'Preface', p. xviii. Original emphasis.

[12] Lord Braebourne had earlier published a two volume collection of the letters of Jane Austen that had been in his mother's possession.

[13] Le Faye, 'Preface', p. xiv.

[14] R. W. Chapman, 'Introduction to the First Edition', in *Jane Austen's Letters*, pp. ix-xiii (p. xi).

distinction between Austen's representation of members of her family and social circle and her characterisation of Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris in *Mansfield Park*: 'There are public characters. [...] There are brilliant and versatile characters'; characters who beyond meagre references in public records are now only known in terms of their idiosyncrasies, such as 'Mr Robert Mascall' who 'eats a great deal of butter'.[15] Thus although letters are generally written for reasons other than the literary and circumstances more immediate than posterity—to share family news, enthuse about a length of muslin, or convey the warnings of a prophet, for example—posterity may nevertheless grant them unforeseen significance.[16] The concerns which prompt letter-writing are displaced by their continuing existence as writings: as instances of writing they exist in a realm somewhat loosened from the demands of direct reference, and in which they exist alongside other writings—a context in which they can be differently appreciated and in which history, author, text, and reader are, to some extent, mutually defining.

As writings alongside her other writings, Jane Austen's letters are different in kind from her novels in that they contrast with the careful construction of *Pride and Prejudice*, say, and are 'occasional, unstudied, and inconsequent. Their themes are accidental; their bulk, that of a quarto sheet. As a series, though they have connexion, they have no coherence; they straggle over twenty years, and lack plot.'[17] While the writing of Jane Austen, whether it be found in her letters or novels, may be treated in broadly similar terms, the distinctions of genre and form continue to direct the expectations of the reader; what would not do for her novels, the lack of coherence and plot, for example, is acceptable in a collection of her letters. As a corpus, the

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[15] Chapman, p. x.

[16] Of course, with the success of Austen's novels we can imagine that any of her written output was soon deemed significant.

[17] Chapman, p. xi.

ostraca from Lachish are connected by common concerns and recurring names,[18] but

bear nothing of the line of narrative we would expect from a story, however ancient;

published together they present something of a patchwork, and while disappointingly

few are fully readable, their piecemeal form causes little surprise.[19] The book of

Jeremiah, however, is bemusing to the modern reader who must adjust to the rapid

change of genres throughout whilst being unaware precisely how, as a whole, it is to

be read. It contains letters (Jeremiah 29; see also 51:59-64), but also poetry, homily,

narrative and lament; beyond the assumed, but often undeclared association with the

prophet Jeremiah himself (as author of, or actor within the text), it is difficult to

imagine what prompted such a miscellany—a similar effect might be achieved if a

selection of Jane Austen's correspondences were published interspersed with

fragments of her fictional writings and passages of biographical material (and perhaps

a few writings of unspecified origin) without anything but the loosest editorial policy

of chronological or thematic coherence. Though lacking overall unity and plot, the

various parts of Jeremiah are not without *connexion*—again certain characters, such as

the prophet himself, return throughout—but to claim that the events and people

portrayed 'are not "just as real"—they *are* real' does not help the reader to negotiate

its peculiarities: apart from the lack of interest demonstrated in producing coherent

biography (or even history for that matter), the textual existence of these people seems

likely to be of quite a different order from their historical counterparts. Few characters

within the book are mentioned without, and even if it were possible to determine that

הו— ('—hu') was indeed the prophet Jeremiah, while possibly confirming the

existence of the historical man, it would also indicate that the biblical presentation of

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[18] Yaush is the named addressee of letters II, III, and IV. All bar three are written in the same hand, presumably that of Hosiyahu, who is named only once—in letter III. See Klaas A. D. Smelik, *Writings*

the prophet is not a simple reproduction of events, for as Parker notes, 'the words of the [unnamed prophet of Lachish] are taken seriously by the highest authorities (the king and/or his deputies) and passed on to other officials for their consideration or evaluation,' and so run contrary to the biblical depiction of Jeremiah (or any number of biblical prophets who bring words of warning, for that matter) as one who remains unheeded by his community.[20] Thus while David J. Reimer claims that 'the connection between extra-biblical evidence and Jeremiah suggests that [...] old memories (or even sources) [are] being preserved', the scope of these memories and the nature of their preservation must remain uncertain.[21] The evidence cited—the Lachish letters, various clay bullae, and pertinent references from the Babylonian Chronicles[22]—is either fragmentary (a handful of names), or simply suggestive (general information about the Babylonian campaign in Palestine) and so unable to confirm the historical veracity of any of the domestic traditions in the primarily theological narratives. National memories, such as can be identified, may have functioned as building blocks in a critical and creative process that is more a matter of transformation than preservation, tearing loose from the tethers of external reference, and then functioning and developing by textual and intertextual reference instead. Reimer resists Philip Davies's suggestion that 'characters and events within the

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from Ancient Israel: A Handbook of Historical and Religious Documents, trans. by G. I. Davies (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 116-131.

[19] 'Only the first six are preserved sufficiently well to be legible as wholes.' Gibson, p. 32.

[20] Parker is right in arguing that the ostraca tell us more about attitudes towards the prophet than about the prophet himself. The transmission of the of the prophet's message—either heard by or reported to Tobiah who reported it to Shallum ben Yadda then conveyed by unknown means from Shallum to Hoshaiah who sent it to Yaush with a covering letter which is letter III—is a journey worthy of Jeremiah's scroll in Jeremiah 36, but contrasts with the more usual deuteronomistic presentation of the prophet as representative of the divine word shunned by and in conflict with the community. Parker, p. 77.

[21] Reimer, p. 220.

[22] Reimer, pp. 209-214.

historical populations of Palestine'[23] relate to biblical Israel as the historical Julius Caesar relates to the character of that name in Shakespeare's plays, claiming that 'Davies's analogies are not well chosen',[24] but as Robert Carroll has argued:

> The information contained in [Jeremiah] 1.1-3 tells us nothing about when the book was written or by whom. It simply specifies the identity of the speaker as Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, of the priests of Anathoth, and assigns the period of his preaching to the closing decades of life in pre-exilic Jerusalem. [...] But allowance should be made for editorial creativity: e.g. it is not possible to appreciate fully Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* without knowing that it takes place in and around the time of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but it would be extremely foolish to insist that both plays relate in some literal sense to the real Denmark, Elsinore, and Amled. We know and understand the conventions governing drama, even when real names and places are involved; we do not know the conventions of the biblical writers and therefore may not assume that there are any inevitably historical connections between setting and text.[25]

Among the clay bullae which emerged from digs or antiquities markets in the 1970s are several which bear the names of characters from the book of Jeremiah, three from Jeremiah 36 alone—Gemariah son of Shaphan; Jerahmeel son of the king; and Berekyahu (the longer form of Baruch) ben Neriah. Citing J. A. Dearman's detailed study of both bullae and Bible, Reimer writes, 'while this does not lead to the

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[23] Philip Davies, *In Search of 'Ancient Israel'*, JSOT Supplement Series, 148 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), p. 31.
[24] Reimer, p. 220.
[25] Robert Carroll, *Jeremiah* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 11. Barstad makes a similar point: 'The truth value of (large parts of) the book of Jeremiah resembles the truth value of historical novels. We cannot claim that what is described there actually did happen.' Adding, rather weakly, '[w]hat we can assume is that quite a few of these things might have happened.' Hans M. Barstad, 'Prophecy in the book of Jeremiah and the Historical Prophet', in *Sense and Sensitivity: Essays on Reading the Bible in*

conclusion that Jeremiah 36, say, is pre-exilic or exactly contemporary with the events

it narrates, the continuity with the extra-biblical evidence gives strong support to

those regarding it as not only "theological" and "literary", but "historical" as well.'[26]

Walter Brueggemann is also 'inclined to think that Dearman's case for "historicity" is

a compelling one',[27] but in his study on 'the canonical intentionality of the character

Baruch' seems swayed by Carroll's conviction that this is a fictional character who

represents the interests of the Deuteronomists. In his own judgement, 'it matters not at

all whether Baruch is a fictive vehicle for an ideology or an historical personality, in

the background of the present book of Jeremiah. [...] In either case, his presence as a

character within the text is in the service of a specific ideology':[28] the historical figure

has been translated into text, and so takes on a new and independent life and function.

No bulla bearing the name 'Jeremiah son of Hilkiah' has yet been discovered,

not that it would necessarily add to our knowledge of the prophet if it had; for the

time being we must make do with the teasing יה— ('—hu') of the Lachish letters. But

if Jeremiah were to have an existence apart from the biblical tradition,[29] then it would

seem appropriate for a prophet who once preached destruction whilst standing at the

potsherd's gate and smashing an earthenware vessel (Jeremiah 19. 1-13) for it to be

among the shards of broken pottery found in the ruins of a razed city. As it is, he is to

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Memory of Robert Carroll, ed. by Alastair G. Hunter and Philip R. Davies, JSOT Supplement Series, 348 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 87-100 (p. 98).

[26] Reimer, p. 213.

[27] Walter Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection": Reflections on Jeremiah 43:1-7', in *Troubling Jeremiah* ed. by A. R. Pete Diamond, Kathleen M. O'Connor, and Louis Stulman, JSOT Supplement Series, 260 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 367-386 (p. 370).

[28] Brueggemann, p. 371.

[29] Jeremiah is mentioned in both Ezra 1. 1 and 2 Chronicles 36. 22, which make the same claim: that Cyrus liberated the exiles 'in order that the word of Yhwh by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished'. No such prophecy is to be found within the book. 2 Chronicles 35. 25 also states that 'Jeremiah uttered a lament for Josiah', but there is no such lament in Jeremiah. Chronicles 36. 21, however, does seem to be aware of the Jeremianic tradition of a seventy-year exile. Holladay concludes that 'these references are evidence that the Chronicler wished to make good the silence of 2 Kings on Jrm without being able to offer first-hand data about him'. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A*

be found in the shards of a broken *book*: in a collection so piecemeal and fragmented

that its form undermines the very use of the word; were it not for the phrases which

mark its outer limits—'The words of Jeremiah' (1. 1), and 'Thus far are the words of

Jeremiah' (51. 64)[30]—there would be little to justify the use of *book* as a descriptor

for this disparate material.[31] But that grand inclusio serves to frame the collection as

Jeremianic: as a work or opus with definable (nameable) point of origin, an author

figure who, as Roland Barthes observes of an author as such, 'when believed in, is

always conceived of as the past of his own book.'[32] Although it is true that Jeremiah

scholarship has been concerned with the past of this particular book—as Leo G.

Perdue commented in the mid-1980s, 'the stimulus behind most Jeremiah research

during the twentieth century has been the quest to discover the Jeremiah of

history'[33]—John Barton points out that, despite being called the 'historical-critical

method', it should not be assumed that the dominant approach of biblical scholarship

during this period has simply been 'locked into seeking past meanings' to the

exclusion of present ones. Rather, he argues, it is engaged in the business of seeking

the *plain* or *natural sense* of a text—a matter of discovering what a text can or cannot

mean rather than what it did or did not mean, which though historical insofar it deals

with languages at a particular stage in their history, is not necessarily backward

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Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26-52 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 90.

[30] The latter then followed by an historical appendix taken from the end of II Kings.

[31] Carroll considers this to be true of not only Jeremiah, but its neighbours in the prophetic corpus also: 'To the modern reader the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are virtually incomprehensible as *books*. [...] Often the material lacks the kind of contextualising information necessary for interpretation, and is quite unlike the artefacts known as books produced in modern civilisation since the time of Guttenberg. The term "book" is a misleading description of these congeries and they might be described better as a miscellany of disparate writings—a gallimaufry of writings suggests itself as an entirely adequate categorization of this type of collection, except that it lacks a certain technical sophistication.' Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1986), p. 38.

[32] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Music Image Text*, trans. and ed. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148 (p. 145).

[33] Leo G. Perdue, 'Jeremiah in Modern Research: Approaches and Issues', in *A Prophet to the Nations: Essays in Jeremiah Studies*, ed. by Leo G. Perdue and Brian K. Kovacs (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1984), pp. 1-32 (p. 22).

looking.[34] Setting aside the difficulties of defining what might constitute the plain

sense of a text as complex as Jeremiah—comparable, perhaps, to an attempt to define

the plain sense of a poem—it is a concept which has been inextricably linked to the

person of the prophet: the plain or natural sense sliding easily into the *intended* sense

(and so the subsequent questions of who is intending what and to what effect, which

while further determining plain sense, also invites the question of 'when?'). In

Jeremiah, plain senses collide—calls for repentance mingle with claims that

repentance is too late; words of destruction are juxtaposed with those of restoration;

voices and actions sometimes uphold, but often subvert one another—and making

sense of this 'polyphony' has for the most part been a matter of apportioning the

many plain senses either to various stages in the life of the prophet, or to various

stages in the evolution of the far-from-plain text.[35] Until recently, that is, for although

in the 1980s Perdue was 'doubtful that the quest for the historical Jeremiah will be

abandoned',[36] that is largely what has happened. An increasing number of writings on

Jeremiah now turn away from attempting to reconstruct the life of the prophet, or

identifying the placement and purposes of the scribal editors who both transmitted and

developed the corpus (motivated in part by the perceived failures of historical-critical

methods, and in part by the growing interest in new-style literary criticisms), to a

consideration of the text apart from these concerns. The prophet himself is treated as a

construct of the text, and questions of authorship tend to be displaced by discussions

on the intentions of its (anonymous) τέλος—the extent to which these necessarily

simplify or ride rough-shod over the many inconcinnities of Jeremiah in the attempt to

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[34] John Barton, 'Historical-critical Approaches', in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 9-20 (p. 17).
[35] For a brief account of the numerous plain senses in Jeremiah, see Robert P. Carroll, 'The Polyphonic Jeremiah: A Reading of the Book of Jeremiah', in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence*, ed. by Martin Kessler (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004), pp. 77-85.
[36] Perdue, 'Jeremiah in Modern Research', p. 32.

wrest a reasonable plain sense or message from the text is a matter of continuing

debate.

Accompanying the problems of seeking a plain sense in a fragmented and far-

from-plain text is the additional complication that the search must strive with more

than one version of Jeremiah—that alongside the Masoretic Text (MT) is the

alternative (and in many respects, quite different) Septuagint (LXX) tradition of the

text.[37] The much-discussed relationship between these two witnesses has reached a

consensus of sorts: the greater length of the MT, which results for the most part from

an increase in epithets for the deity (compare, for example, MT 35. 13 with its

counterpart in LXX 42. 13) and descriptors for the prophet, suggests that it is an

expansion of an earlier version more closely represented by the shorter Greek

translation. But while it is reasonable to consider the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the LXX

Jeremiah as an ancestor of the expanded MT,[38] scholars also recognise that the LXX,

represented among the various textual traditions of Jeremiah found in cave 4 at

Qumran, is part of an independent tradition that has 'escaped many expansions which

were eventually incorporated in the MT'.[39] The task of text criticism, is by one

definition 'the recovery of an earlier, more authentic—and therefore superior—form

of the text':[40] a search, as J. A. Sanders writes, for 'an *ipsissima verba* of the original

contributors to the text,' which exhibits, he continues, 'Western cultural tendencies to

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[37] The differences may be described as: quantitative (the LXX is some 2700 words shorter than the MT); qualitative (there are differences in verbal and grammatical equivalence); and in terms of order (the oracles against the nations occur at the end of the MT but in the middle of the LXX). See Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* pp. 50-55.

[38] Until the early twentieth-century, it was commonly argued that the LXX Jeremiah was a derived and so inferior version of the MT, but dissenters argued that the LXX actually represented an older, less expanded, text.

[39] Louis Stulman, *The Other Text of Jeremiah: A Reconstruction of the Hebrew Text Underlying the Greek Version of the Prose Sections of Jeremiah with English Translation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1985), p. 3.

[40] P. Kyle McCarter, *Textual Criticism: Recovering the Text of the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 12.

seek individuals as sources or vehicles of truth.'[41] Thus, confronted with the two traditions of Jeremiah, the search for plain sense is aided by the recovery of a plain (or least corrupt) text sought in the past of the extant texts, again associated with the persons that congregate there, with the versions of Jeremiah constituting fragments from which a vessel of greater integrity might be formed in which to contain the prophet. But by attempting to 'pierce back to autographs',[42] this mode of scholarship encounters the difficulty of distinguishing between the literary growth of the text (its generation) and its transmission (its subsequent degeneration). The evidence from Qumran indicates that several text types of Jeremiah were in circulation simultaneously, which suggests that growth was not simply linear, and that transmission (indicative of canonical usage) had begun before the former process was complete: the location of a point at which there was a single, authentic text—not to say the very idea of a single, authentic text—becomes problematic. By an alternative account, the task of text criticism is to attempt the recovery of a given text at 'the earliest stage discernable when the text in question functioned as sacred scripture and was distributed sufficiently widely within an identity group that held the text as sacred'.[43] With this in mind, its goal is no longer to reconstruct a single original (a project which is inevitably conjectural), but to establish texts regarded as scriptural during the period in which the Old Testament canon came into being, and for which there is support from the ancient witnesses.[44] This, then, is to recognise that the MT

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[41] J. A. Sanders, 'The Task of Text Criticism', in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honour of Rolf Knierim*, ed by Henry T. C. Sun and Keith L. Eades with James M. Robinson and Garth I. Moller (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 315-327 (p. 317).
[42] Sanders, p. 320.
[43] Sanders, p. 322.
[44] This would result, notes Sanders, in the recognition of 'true variants'—variations between versions canonised by a particular community in their own right, which cannot be dismissed as 'accidents' or 'corruptions'—and so a 'pluriform Bible' which would 'honor the integrity of those ancient believing communities which had a different book of Samuel, or Joshua or Judges, or Exodus 35-40, or Proverbs or Ezekiel, or whatever text, small or large, which text criticism is finally constrained to designate as a "true variant"'. Sanders, pp. 325, 327.

and LXX witnesses of *Jeremiah* are, as A. R. Pete Diamond and Kathleen M. O'Connor describe them, 'alternative performances';[45] not evidences of something anterior, but recitations in their own right.[46]

In this study I shall work with a particular performance—the Masoretic Text of Jeremiah.[47] In either tradition, however, the performance is one in which events and characters (whether real or *nearly real*) are met within a posturing, gesticulating (dark) carnival of words: a macabre cabaret of song, readings, eccentric mimes, and self-contained scenes, bearing a greater likeness to a modernist experiment than the well-made play. For this reason, in parts (or *acts*) one and two of this thesis I juxtapose Jeremiah with the work of the German playwright and dramaturge Bertolt Brecht whose writings model a style of performance which demonstrates many of the devices of Modernism—of fragmenting unities and the attempt to startle and disturb[48]—and so recommends a self-conscious form of theatricality that offers a challenge to and critique of the practices of more traditional theatre (as it was perceived by Brecht) thus raising consciousness about the art form (and the kind of

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[45] A. R. Pete Diamond and Kathleen M. O'Connor, 'Unfaithful Passions: Coding Women Coding Men in Jeremiah 2-3 (4.2)', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Louis Stulman, pp. 123-145 (p. 141).

[46] While the concept of *performance* might imply that there is indeed a stable script underlying the distinct Greek and Hebrew productions, the difficulty often encountered when identifying the definitive script of a particular play or other indicates that play texts are far from fixed; rather, they are often altered for occasion or in response to audience reception: for example, never satisfied with the final act of *Major Barbara*, a 'terrible disappointment' to some otherwise enthusiastic friends at an early production in 1905, George Bernard Shaw continued to tinker until a *standard version* was settled upon for publication in 1930. Murray Barker cited in Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The One-Volume Definitive Edition* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 316.

[47] On these terms, a comparative study of the MT and LXX versions of Jeremiah would not set out to reconstruct a single or authentic or pristine text, for which one version is often used in the service of another, but to compare the differences in nuance between the different presentations of the Jeremiah tradition. Stulman cites Bogaert: 'the text of a version is to be considered in its own right, and that the ad hoc use of a LXX…to discuss the problems of a particular Hebrew reading must be only a minimal part of the right use of the versions.' Stulman, p. 5.

[48] The common devices and preoccupations of *Modernism*, the anomalous 'name for an epoch fast receding into the cultural past. […] A period in the beginning of the previous century', are summarised by Levenson as 'the recurrent act of fragmenting unities (unities of character or plot or pictorial space of lyric form), the use of mythic paradigms, the refusal of norms of beauty, the willingness to make radical linguistic experiment'. Michael Levenson, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Guide to Modernism*, ed. by Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1-8 (p. 1, 3).

society which produces it) and so too of the practice of being an audience.[49] But I

begin with review of the main schools of reading within recent (twentieth-century,

that is) Jeremiah scholarship, taking note of the way in which these take on the task of

finding a point of stability—in terms of author, compiler or editor(s), and more

recently *voice*, *voices*, and *Tendenz*—within this notoriously troublesome book. Then

after a theoretical discussion about the function of the figure of the author, I compare

some of the devices used in Brecht's epic plays with the structure and arrangement of

Jeremiah observing that, in a similar way, it makes the reader—rather than

spectator—conscious of the practice of reading. A Brechtian model encourages the

reader-spectator to become conscious too of the production of representation and the

historical (rather than given) nature of mainstream ideologies. Representation is

interrogated in Jeremiah, not only in the prophetic challenge to the royal and temple

ideologies, but prophetic representation itself.

The production of representation is a theme taken up by Roland Barthes, an

admirer of Brecht who brought these aspects of the German playwright's work into a

stream of French writing. Engaging with his insights, particularly those laid out in the

collection of essays entitled *Mythologies*, along with the theorizing of the Prague

School Semioticians, I begin a discussion of three prophetic dramas in Jeremiah: the

breaking of the earthenware jug (Jeremiah 19); the visit to the potter's house (18); and

the demonstration with a linen loincloth (13). Arguing that it is the theatrical frame

that invites active interpretation on the part of the spectator, I move from an

examination of the mechanics of theatrical signification to a discussion of the

relationship between performer and audience. To do this, I place the performances of

Jeremiah alongside Brecht's *Lehrstücke* (learning plays), events that challenge the

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[49] In Brecht's theatre spectators are theatricalised—not simply made aware of the part they play in the

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presumed pre-eminence of authorial or directorial intention by inscribing the comments of the audiences within them rather as the text of Jeremiah gathers continuing readings and subsequent reflections within its own pages.

In the third and final chapter, again predominantly engaging with prophetic dramas (this time Jeremiah 16, 36, and 51), I continue to make use of theatrical theory with the prophet himself now the on stage object of interpretation. Given over to textualisation—himself now the bearer of meanings—I begin to consider Jeremiah and his words as character and script that can be re-performed in limitless contexts. To help with this argument, I engage with the writings of Jacques Derrida, specifically those that introduce the concepts of the iterable (repeatable) mark and the supplement. As text, both Jeremiah and his words are liable to re-contextualisation: not limited to an original setting, every reading or interpretation is a new act that enables the survival of the text, which, unable to control its own meanings, is free to find meanings in numberless contexts. Thus reading is both a reiteration and a supplement of the original text. Recognising this openness to a future, I liken the journey of Jeremiah's scroll through the temple (Jeremiah 36) to the concept of the gift, described in Derrida's writings as an irritant which opens the same to the other, and so opens the economy of palace and temple to absolute future. Throughout and as a subplot, perhaps, I shall be addressing the phenomenon of biblical prophecy as a textual event with an audience of readers rather than as the record of a preaching even that requires the reconstruction of both it and an original historical audience.

Biblical citations in English are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV), with the tradition rendering of the tetragrammaton, *the LORD*,

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creation of a theatrical event, but aware of themselves as observers, and aware too of their complicity in the production and perpetuation of predominant ideologies.

replaced by the transliteration of its unvocalised consonants, *Yhwh*. Occasional use

will be made of more literal renderings of the Masoretic Hebrew.

Chapter 1

A DARKER VEIL: JEREMIAH AS TEXT AND TEXTILE

> Now, quite apart from the veil that centuries draw across the mighty
>
> figures of the past, there is a thicker and darker veil that separates us from
>
> the man of Anathoth, for strange as it seems, the very book which provides
>
> us with all we know about him, obscures at many points the vital issues
>
> and crucial moments of his life.[50]

It is not the colours of the veil, acknowledged by commentators to be bright and

varied,[51] which give it a darker hue, but the density of the materials used and irregular

texture of its weave. Thus while the book of Jeremiah is not out of place in the

prophetic corpus where 'all seems confusion,'[52] its 'sharp dissonances of form and

content' surpass the similar traits of its neighbours. It is 'disjointed, unsystematic and

occasionally self-contradictory,' 'it is scrappy, built up of many bits and pieces which

do not always seem to follow on easily from one another. It is badly ordered.'[53]

Consequently Jeremiah, it is thought, makes few concessions to the modern reader

since 'it lacks the sequence which assists the mind to maintain attention and

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[50] T. Crouther Gordon, *The Rebel Prophet: Studies in the Personality of Jeremiah* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1932), p. 35.

[51] 'An astonishing wealth of metaphor and imagery gleams in his pages,' John Skinner, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922). The reader of Jeremiah will 'have encountered poetry of surpassing beauty' John Bright, *Jeremiah*, The Anchor Bible, 21 (New York: Doubleday, 1965; p. CXI). Lundbom notes that while a few, such as Jerome have considered Jeremiah's language and style to be 'rustic,' the majority have been able to 'rank him as one of the great poets of antiquity'. Jack R. Lundbom *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, 21 A (New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 121.

[52] 'All seems confusion [...] No sooner has [the reader] grasped a line of thought, and prided himself that he is following it tolerably well, than it breaks off and something quite different is being discussed.' Bright, p. lvi.

[53] McKane, *Jeremiah 1 I-XXVI*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clarke, 1986) p. xlix. 'Even by the comparatively lax standards of the biblical prophetical books as a genre, Jeremiah really is in rather a mess [...] it lacks the kind of unifying vision that we find in *Isaiah*, and that there is no single dominant voice such as is evident in *Ezekiel*', Terrence Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetical Books* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 104.

comprehension.'[54] Thus the biblical book that bears more apparently biographical material than any other Writing Prophet (and so whetting critical appetites for a *Life*), teases *readerly* desires and expectations by time and again interrupting its presentation of the ancient figure and his words.[55]

Teasing, of course, is to be counted among the 'semantic motifs'[56] which gather about the folds of the veil (although perhaps not a motif that T. Crouther Gordon had in mind), expressing its paradoxical position in making conspicuous what it effaces; promoting desire for that which it keeps at a distance; rendering erotic the figure whose modesty it is supposed to maintain—motifs which articulate appropriately the tantalising semi-disclosures of Jeremiah under its commentators' gaze. And there is certainly something in Jeremiah's strange profligacy of form, in its unseemly seams, which suggests something of its promiscuous past. When Robert Carroll describes the book as 'a sprawling, untidy and exasperating collection of discrete and disparate units whose order and meaning baffle the exegete',[57] he picks up (consciously or otherwise) the (RSV) language of Jeremiah 2. 20: 'On every high hill, under every green tree, you sprawled and played the whore.' The textual abuse experienced by a book yielding to many (editorial) hands is then regarded as an act of

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[54] Robert Davidson, *Jeremiah Volume 1* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1983), p. 1; Douglas Rawlinson Jones, *Jeremiah* (London: Marshall Pickering; Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), p. 17; 'It cannot be denied that the Book of Jeremiah makes, at least on first trial, extremely difficult reading.' Bright, p. LVI.

[55] The 'readerly' text is identified by Roland Barthes as that which gives the impression that 'the author first conceives the signified (or the generality) and then finds for it, according to the chance of his imagination, "good" signifiers, probative examples'. The readerly expectation, then, seeks to return to this secure point of authorial sense. Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 174.

[56] 'Tease' does not make its way on to Derrida's list of the motifs about the veil, which otherwise includes: 'revelation, unveiling, unburying, nudity, shame, reticence, halt, what is untouchable in the safe and sound, of the immune or the intact, and so the holy and the sacred, *heilig*, *holy*, the law, the religiosity of the religious etc.' Jacques Derrida 'A Silkworm of One's Own (Points of View Stitched on the Other Veil)', in *Acts of Religion* ed. by Gil Anidjar, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 311-355 (p. 312) (first publ. *Oxford Literary Review* 18, nos. 1-2 (1996)).

[57] Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1986), p. 46.

violence against Jeremiah himself who 'like all the prophets [...] has suffered from much post-exilic editing'.[58]

Commentators who acknowledge little editorial handling, recommending the book as a product of the prophet's own endeavours—albeit continued by his amanuensis, Baruch—must then explain its reckless form as the work of Jeremiah's own hand, a self-abuse which rebounds upon the prophet with a less than complimentary force: 'There is a rough raw quality in much of the verse [...] the prophet himself seems to be no civilised philosopher, but typical of his breed, a man who speaks wild things (even to the modern ear), occasionally crude things, and behaves oddly.'[59] Even those scholars who are less sure that the prophet himself can be blamed for the book which bares his name, must admit that surely someone is responsible: 'If this book was written by a sane man with an orderly mind, he has done his best to confuse us.'[60]

Extending the metaphor of book-as-veil by considering commentary itself as a form of further over-sewing, traceable threads (strategies or trends of reading) emerge, each representing a particular perspective on the book in relation to its prophet. Ranging from those commentators who consider the text to be the lightest of textiles to those for whom the historical man seems long lost behind the heavy weave of text, three identifiable schools (of embroidery) emerge.

1.   The prophet is indeed veiled, but by the lightest of muslins

        embroidered by the deftest of hands, and through which the careful

        and skilled eye can detect an historical figure. Or it is a veil that

        bares an imprint of the prophet, rather like the shroud of Turin, the

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[58] Thomas Henshaw, *The Latter Prophets* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 158.
[59] Jones, p. 17.

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very folds of the winding sheet conveying something of Jeremiah since they have been arranged by his own hands, or at least post-mortem by those who knew him intimately.

2.   The veil, whilst allowing the reader glimpses, is so thickened by a lengthy history of over-sewing that any view of the prophet is considerably obscured. So stiffened, it is no longer malleable and presents few contours but its own.

3.   Presumed glimpses of Jeremiah are the insubstantial effects of the play of light and shadow on the appliqué and mirrored surface of the veil, which is all that now remains visible. This leads to the suspicion that, were it to be thrown back like a magician's curtain, it would reveal a space occupied by no one at all.

Michael Fishbane writes that, 'as a literary artefact, the words of the Bible require an interpreter for renewed life.'[61] In the course of this chapter, I shall first consider the interpretative measures employed to bring renewed life to the pages of Jeremiah, and more specifically, the hopes and desires invested in the veil, and informing the strategies used to bring life also to the man presumed to lie behind it. With Pete Diamond, we shall discover that 'the Jeremiah represented in these commentaries so profoundly differs that it was reasonable to ask if each were actually reading the same book!'[62] In the second and third sections, I shall (obliquely) offer the suggestion that to a certain extent, they are not. In the final section, I shall attempt a

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[60] Davidson, who then adds, 'But it is an odd biography; and we are left with a biographer with an exceedingly untidy mind. He would have had his manuscript returned with a rejection slip from any modern publisher.' p. 1
[61] Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: Literary Reading of Selected Texts* (Oxford: One World, 1979), p. xi.
[62] A. R. Pete Diamond, 'Introduction', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Stulman, pp. 15-32 (p. 15).

new strategy of reading in dialogue with the theatre and writings of Bertolt Brecht, for whom the veil or curtain that marks the stage, rather than opening to reveal a reality beyond, remains on show and so represents the theatricality of the whole event.

1. *Valorising the Veil*

> Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, not like
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> Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from
>
> gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. (II Corinthians 3.
>
> 12-13)

Interpretative approaches to Jeremiah have long been linked to theological biases: liberal theology producing biographies and theologies of the prophet, Neo-Orthodoxy producing biographies and theologies of everyone but.[63] Despite this general distinction, Leo Perdue can state that 'undergirding and stimulating most Jeremianic research since the inception of modern criticism is the concern to discover the Jeremiah of history', a project which, he points out, has parallels with the questions of 'historicity, history and historiography in the Gospels'.[64] David Jobling, who describes the resemblances between these two projects as 'striking',[65] outlines some of the portraits of the prophet which have emerged, from the cultic functionary

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[63] Interest in an 'essence' of prophecy in the biography of Jeremiah is closely comparable to the early quests for a historical Jesus led by liberal protestants such as Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) and Adolf Harnack (1853-1930) who sought an 'essence' of Christianity in the historical and biographical reconstruction of Jesus. See Bernard M. G. Reardon, 'Liberalism', in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 395-396. Neo-Orthodoxy, rejecting the idea that historical certainty was either possible, or desirable (in its claim for a theology based on human experience) privileged the scriptures as that through which God had chosen to make himself known. See C. A. Baxter, 'Neo-Orthodoxy', in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), p. 456-457.

[64] Perdue, p. 1.

[65] David Jobling, 'The Quest of the Historical Jeremiah: Hermeneutical Implications of Recent Literature', in Perdue and Kovacs, p. 285.

wrought in reaction to the 'anachronistic, romantic and individualistic' Jeremiahs constructed by liberals, to the Jeremiahs processed through a believing community some time after the historical prophet—a prophet of doom reconditioned in order to serve later generations.[66]

Jobling details some of the parallels between the quests, recognizing, for example, in the cultic Jeremiah an anti-Jeremiah not dissimilar in function to the apocalyptic anti-Jesus of Weiss and Schweitzer, whilst noting that both schools have turned their attention to the 'shaping effect on tradition of the community of faith, with its social situation and the theology of redactors'.[67] Throughout, he observes,[68] Jeremiah studies have followed the course set by Jesus research; in both cases, it is the complexity of the texts encountered that must be negotiated. Negotiated, yes, but surpassed also, or at least passed through it would seem, in order that something of an ancient world can be glimpsed and an historical figure or community be reconstructed.

Having, then, such a hope, Jeremiah scholars 'act with much boldness, and not like Moses when he used to put a veil over his face so the Israelites could not gaze at the end ($\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda o\varsigma$) of what was fading' (II Corinthians 3. 12-13). Daniel Boyarin reads Paul's words as a charge that those (Jews) who deny Christ are not capable of bearing the true meaning of the text, that 'those who do not see that there is a $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda o\varsigma$ beyond the text reach a dead end in a veil—the veil which is the letter itself'.[69] Scholarship, in the almost exclusively Christian reading traditions I shall be considering, has continued to view the textual veil, this time Jeremiah, negatively and as a problem to

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[66] Jobling, p. 286.
[67] Jobling, p. 292.
[68] And in contrast to the more usual direction of influence, from Old Testament scholarship to New Testament studies. See Jobling, p. 294.
[69] Daniel Boyarin, 'Moses' Veil: or, The Jewish Letter, the Christian Spirit', in *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 101.

be solved or overcome, with its τελος beyond. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that

the image of the prophet sought, and quite often found, is noticeably similar in form

to images of Christ. I shall consider these traditions in terms of the schools identified

earlier and examine some of their bold hopes.

1.1. *The 'Skinnerian' Approach: 'Jeremiah—Most Like To Jesus'*[70]

Carroll labels those writers who consider the figure of Jeremiah to be but thinly veiled

by the book baring his name 'Skinnerian', after John Skinner whose now classic[71]

Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah marks the 'high point'[72] of the

liberal 'psycho-biographical' approach to biblical scholarship. Rather than reading

Jeremiah as the product of various interpretative processes, Skinnerians treat the text

as a collection that combines the prophet's *ipsissima verba* with biographical and

autobiographical material. Since Jeremiah is often understood to be responsible for

the formation of his own anthology, or at least its earliest stages, the very arrangement

of the book is itself regarded as a form of self-expression. Thus history, personality,

and text all merge and the book becomes as much a part of the prophet's life and

works as a presentation of it.

A book thought to express so comprehensively an ancient life is inevitably

going to be considered significant as evidence of an ancient spirituality. A key goal of

Skinnerian exegesis therefore is to gain accurate access to the religious sensibility of

Jeremiah who then emerges as a hero of (true) faith, and so—in the Christian

tradition—an anticipation of Christ. This 'graphic approach to prophecy' is

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[70] Frederick L. Coutts, *The Timeless Prophets* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1944), p. 40.
[71] First published in 1922, its status as a classic evident by the number of reprints; I am working from the ninth, dated 1963.
[72] Jobling, p. 285.

recognised by Carroll to grant the Skinnerian approach 'a functional capacity which few other approaches will ever have and that gives it great strength and appeal'.[73]

1.1.1. *Prophecy and Religion*

John Skinner's reading of Jeremiah is neither superficial nor uncritical in that it takes into account the complex processes by which the book came into being. He acknowledges that writers other than Jeremiah have left their trace, in the oracle against Egypt of Jeremiah 46, for example, which 'is so unlike anything else from the pen of Jeremiah that I must regard it as the work of an anonymous, perhaps contemporary, poet'.[74] While he thinks it reasonable to suppose that Jeremiah might have collected many of his own oracles, he thinks it probable that the selection of cycles of oracles was the work of an editor 'who has supplied the introductory formulae and connecting links'.[75] So too he admits that 'there is no doubt that the collected prophecies of Jeremiah passed through the hands of the Deuteronomic school, and were freely edited by them'.[76] Generally generous to the redactors, he nevertheless acknowledges that they can sometimes obscure the prophet's own words and so thoughts, but finds in the book as a whole a figure so lively and recognisable that the mostly minor intrusions are easily recognised as such. The 'clumsy and unintelligible' introduction to the curse and injunction of Jeremiah 11. 1-3a, for example, cannot hide the 'trustworthy tradition' the lies behind it, and so Skinner concludes with some confidence that 'the deliberate invention of an incident which

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[73] Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Uses of Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (London: SCM Press, 1981), p. 7.
[74] Skinner, p. 239, n.3.
[75] Skinner, p. 38.
[76] Skinner, p. 102.

had no point of contact in the authentic record of his life is a procedure to which no assured parallel is found in the book.'[77]

Not only does Skinner consider a genuine biography of the prophet to be accessible in the book, and (circularly) a means by which particular oracles may be evaluated, he also finds in this biography a central clue to the formation of the books oracles. Both the language and imagery of Jeremiah are explained in terms of the prophet's life and experience, with Jeremiah's Benjamite origins providing a rationale for his 'undying affection for the Rachel-tribes and his longing for the home-bringing of their exiled children (iii. 12 f., xxxi. 4-6, 9, 15-20)',[78] and literary dependence and allusion in the book explained in terms of the prophet's personal familiarity with 'the ideas of older prophets, especially with those of Hosea'.[79] The very contours of Jeremiah's writing are thought by Skinner to be shaped by the lie of the land around his home town of Anathoth: Jeremiah's 'young poetic soul' impressed upon by its 'wild and desolate scenery' and giving rise to the 'sterner aspects' of his oracles; the 'rural life and the ordinary interests of men'[80] emerging in the rural themes of the book.

But biography, as both aim of interpretation and explanation of the formation of the book, is not for Skinner an end in itself. Rather his greater concern is 'to trace the growth of personal piety in the history of Jeremiah', and 'to elucidate the

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[77] Skinner, p. 102. Skinner responds to Jeremiah 11 in terms of its possible impact upon reconstructions of the prophet's attitude towards Josiah's reforms. Reluctant to remove the whole passage from an authentic Jeremiah corpus, he is inclined to acknowledge its 'fundamental historicity', but following Erbt, excises references to a covenant document and the exile (Jeremiah 11. 7-8) with the result that the passage cannot provide enough evidence with which 'to reach a positive conclusion as to the real bearing of ch. xi on Jeremiah's relation to Deuteronomy'. Skinner's guiding principle is based less on a detailed reading of a particular text, than the 'broad ground' that the prophet's 'insight into the nature of religion makes it inconceivable that he could ever have had any sympathy with an attempt to convert the nation by a forcible change in its forms of worship', pp. 101; 102; 105.
[78] Skinner, p. 19.
[79] Skinner, p. 21.
[80] Skinner, p. 22.

significance of pre-exilic prophecy as seen through his mind'.[81] Skinner seeks to place

Jeremiah within a narrative of the history of religion and at 'the highest level of

prophetic achievement';[82] the moment, in fact, where prophecy 'becomes conscious at

once of its true essence and of its inherent limitation'.[83] Jeremiah's 'strongly marked

emotionalism',[84] deemed by some scholars to exemplify the decay of prophecy no

longer able to cope with the moral degeneracy of Israel, is for Skinner a

demonstration rather of Jeremiah's 'religious susceptibility' which 'breaks through

the limitations of the strictly prophetic consciousness, and moves out into the larger

filial communion with God in which every child of man may share'.[85]

Central to this argument are the so-called Confessions, in which Skinner

detects 'something unworthy and ignoble in those human feelings to which [Jeremiah]

has given such free and fearless expression'.[86] Thus they represent a war between

'fidelity to his prophetic commission and the natural feelings and impulses of his

heart',[87] and in which he learns that 'victory over the world is victory over himself'.[88]

No surprise then that Jeremiah is to be considered 'a new spiritual type—the Old

Testament saint'.[89]

But as a model of spiritual progress, Jeremiah must submit to another model

for, 'it seems to me that we can understand Jeremiah better if we think of the spiritual

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[81] Skinner, p. 16. Skinner's interest in the 'life and writings of Jeremiah' results from 'a long standing interest in the study of Jeremiah's work and personality'. Skinner p. v.
[82] Skinner, p. 15.
[83] Skinner, p. 15. I shall not pursue here the apparent Hegelian tenor of this odyssey of the prophetic Mind. For Ewald, this is marked by the intrusion of emotionalism, a symptom of decay as prophecy became unable, in Skinner's words, 'to cope with the degeneracy and confusion of the time' and thus unable 'to guide and master the age as it had done in the strong hands of Isaiah.' Skinner p. 16.
[84] Skinner, p. 16.
[85] Skinner, p. 16.
[86] Skinner, p. 214.
[87] Skinner, p. 210.
[88] Skinner, p. 214.
[89] Skinner, p. 223.

agony of the "Confessions" as the Gethsemane, rather than the Calvary, of his life'.[90]

Citing another scholar, Skinner notes that 'prophecy's last effort [...] was to reveal

itself in a life'.[91] This anticipation of incarnation, coming too early in Skinner's

overtly Christian schema, necessarily falls short of perfection, and is but 'a necessary

stage towards the formation of the new humanity whose Head is in Christ'.[92] Thus

Jeremiah must settle for the glory of being recognised as the 'cradle' of a new religion

of the individual,[93] held back on the ladder of religion since he has not attained that

place, 'where the thought of self is entirely lost'.[94] Jeremiah, whose person 'so often

reminds one of Christ',[95] has one lesson yet unlearned—'the secret of victory through

defeat and death'[96]—and so bares the mark of 'an incomplete possession by the spirit

of love'.[97]

Skinner places Jeremiah at 'a transitional phase in the history of religion':

> From a nationalistic basis, on which history is the chief medium of divine
>
> revelation, to an individual and universal basis, on which God enters into
>
> immediate fellowship with the human soul. Why the perfect religion
>
> should have sprung from the bosom of national faith is a question on which
>
> it is idle to speculate. But accepting the fact as we find it, we can see that
>
> the final mission of prophecy was to liberate the eternal truths of religion
>
> from their temporary national embodiment, and disclose their true

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[90] Skinner, p. 209.
[91] Skinner, p. 222.
[92] Skinner, p. 224.
[93] Not that *individualism* is the last word, for Jeremiah's thinking 'broadened out into the conception of a new community of the people of God, based on direct personal knowledge of God such as he alone at this time possessed'. Skinner, p.224.
[94] Skinner, p. 228.
[95] Skinner, p. 229.
[96] Skinner, p. 224.
[97] Skinner, p. 229.

foundation in the immutable character of God and the essential nature of
man.[98]

His chosen diction, with its references to 'soul', 'spirit', 'saint', and 'Gethsemane',
whilst interpreting the ancient prophet for a more modern religious sensibility,
manages at the same time to lock the figure into a quite anachronistic frame of
reference.

Skinner's confidence in the translucency of the veil that allows a view of the
prophet mostly unhampered by the stitch-work of (ancient) interpretation proves,
however, to be deceptive or at least unaware of his own needlepoint. Compare, for
example, the sparse and formal call-vision of Jeremiah 1. 11—'The word of the Lord
came to me, saying, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see a branch of an
almond tree." Then the Lord said to me, "You have seen well, for I am watching over
my word to perform it"'—with Skinner's far more embroidered rendering:

> 'Thus it is midwinter, when all nature is asleep, and Jeremiah's attention is
> arrested by a solitary almond branch bursting into flower. The almond,
> which blossoms in January, was poetically named by the Hebrews the
> *wakeful* tree, as the first of all the trees to wake up at the touch and promise
> of spring. Looking at it, the prophet is impelled to pronounce its name:
> *Shāķēd*, 'awake.' What does it signify? The answer comes unbidden: 'I am
> wakeful (*Shōķēd*) over my word to fulfil it.'[99]

Elsewhere Skinner's own stitch-work over-sews the burgeoning biography with wider
biblical allusion and citation, frequently from the New Testament, suggesting almost

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[98] Skinner, pp. 14-15.
[99] Skinner, p. 31.

subliminally the perspective from which Jeremiah is being read and evaluated. Thus Jeremiah's 'preparation for the work of a prophet' is a time when 'he had to put away childish things' (1 Corinthians 13. 11),[100] his ministry a labour through which he glimpses the truth 'that the pure in heart alone can see God' (Matthew 5. 8).[101]

1.1.2. *The Voice of Jeremiah*

David Jobling states that the extreme of the liberal approach is, within scholarship at least, 'no longer an option.'[102] Nevertheless, in modified form, this liberal approach remains an important thread in the interpretation of Jeremiah, the major exponent of this position now being William L. Holladay, who affirms that, 'the reader finds in the Book of Jer a combination of words attributed to that prophet and of narratives of alleged events in his career that is unparalleled in biblical material.'[103] Already, 'attributed' and 'alleged' alert us to the fact that this is not an uncritical analysis (Holladay himself confirming 'that that naïve view is untenable');[104] Holladay accepts the findings of historical critical biblical scholarship that 'there are many disjunctions that suggest the processes of accretion in the literary material'.[105] He nevertheless remains confident enough in the possibility of accessing the prophet through the book to claim that 'it is not only in extent of words and narrative that Jrm stands out for us, but in the range of his experience'[106] and is therefore able to submit 'that the data of the book can be used to build up a credible portrayal of the prophet, a portrayal against which there are no opposing data'.[107] Holladay remains, however, more measured than Skinner; recognising that the data, though credible, are too few and

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[100] Skinner, p. 23.
[101] Skinner, p. 215.
[102] Jobling, p. 286.
[103] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 1.
[104] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 2.
[105] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 10.
[106] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 1. Holladay uses 'Jer' to denote the book Jeremiah and 'Jrm', the prophet himself.

have too many variables, so that 'all one can hope to do is to produce a reconstruction that is plausible'.[108] Thus by asserting that the narrative portions and final construction of the book must have been written by someone close to the prophet, he is able to conclude that 'the poetry preserved in the book exhibits a distinctive vocabulary, style, and theology that one may attribute to Jrm, that the narrative portions of the book are trustworthy in the events they record, and that the book is largely the work of the scribe Baruch'.[109]

The point of contact between prophet and book is expressed by Holladay in terms of Jeremiah's 'authentic voice'. In the distinctive vocabulary and terminology, which he finds to be no respecter of sources, he detects a particular diction marked by 'freshness, imagination, and irony'[110] out of which he is able to revivify the speech and so the man.[111] The emergent poet is a figure whose writing seems surprisingly modern—'Words are often exploited for multiple meanings; conventional views are often reversed'[112]—and whose style contrasts with the solemnity of Deuteronomy and the pious, repetitive nature of the deuteronomistic redaction of Kings. Holladay thus distances himself from the prevailing scholarly argument that Jeremiah has undergone a radical deuteronomistic re-write, accounting for the presence of material deemed deuteronomistic in terms rooted in the historical, biographical events of Jeremiah's ministry. Assuming that there would indeed have been a septennial reading of Deuteronomy following the discovery of the book in 622 BCE (during the reign of

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[107] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 25.
[108] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 25.
[109] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 24.
[110] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 15.
[111] He argues for a 'vocabulary distinctive to Jrm found across the "sources,"' Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 15. Citing, for example, the particular use of שׁוּב (return) and שׁקר (falsehood), which, though common enough in the OT, proliferate in Jeremiah. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 15. Holladay acknowledges 'limitations on our ability to assess Jrm's use of language' but is optimistic that 'we may at any rate set down some impressions'. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 75. He thus goes on to notice specifics of the Jeremiah text—the paralleling of perfect and imperfect verbs (also noticed in Ugaritic texts), the particular use of the infinitive absolute, and so on.

Josiah)[113]—as the book of Deuteronomy demands there should indeed be (Deuteronomy 31. 9-13)—Holladay suggests that the seven year recitation would provide a setting for a number of Jeremiah's major proclamations in which he would parody its formal language, hence the deuteronomistic tone of the several sermons in the book.[114]

Once identified, Jeremiah's 'authentic voice' gives Holladay access to the mind of the man. Motivated by a historically literal reading of the production of a scroll of Jeremiah's oracles (Jeremiah 36), Holladay seeks to reconstruct the content of this 'earliest literary deposit'[115] (a collection representing sayings given between 'the days of Josiah' and the 'fourth year of Jehoiakim', Jeremiah 36. 1-2) in order that 'it may sharpen our awareness of both the settings of the early oracles and of the ordering of these oracles in Jrm's mind before he dictated them.'[116] Jeremiah the poet is also Jeremiah the anthologist, whose craft is more than wordsmith, but archivist of his own output. Integrally involved with the production of his book in its most primitive form, the very arrangement of this collection is a testimony to his taste and the very pattern and form of his thinking—the folds and seams of this first, still detectable, veil are traces of the prophet's presence.

So convinced is Holladay by the voice he perceives, that he remains unperturbed by the scholarly suggestions that the conventional form and language of the so-called Confessions actually points away from their being the unique

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[112] Holladay, p. 15.
[113] 'Now I assume that the injunction of Deut 31. 9-13 was taken seriously, that the form which Deuteronomy took in those days was recited every seven years at the feast of booths (tabernacles), thus at the end of September or the beginning of October.' William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), p. 1.
[114] 'It is my proposal that these occasions offer a chronological structure for the career of Jrm, and most specifically that several of the parade examples of Deuteronomistic prose in the book are Jrm's various counter proclamations at those times when Deuteronomy was recited.' Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 2.
[115] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 16.
[116] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 16.

outpourings of a prophetic soul.[117] Rather, he claims the presence of this literary form

indicates that the prophet availed himself of a genre of the individual lament, cutting

it loose from the cult, thus confirming rather than denying his status as innovator.

Furthermore, while agreeing with the suggestion made by this scholarship that 'the

confessions were preserved not because of any biographical concern for Jrm's

psychology but because Jrm spoke for his people in their corporate agony

(particularly in the exile) and because Jrm's words became useful in the people's

worship of God',[118] he is still able to conclude that while these words might give

voice to the agonies of later generations, they nevertheless began as an expression of

the prophet's own troubles. Holladay therefore maintains that 'Jer is unique among

the prophetic books in preserving such a series of prayers, which appear to give

extraordinary insight into the inner life of the prophet'[119]—thus those aspects of the

confessions that might break up the subjectivity of Jeremiah, are recruited to make

stronger claims on its behalf.

Holladay's Jeremiah is a master craftsman and an innovative artist. Working

with the materials to hand—fabric from the law, yarn from the cult[120]—he labours

with forms that are familiar to produce new 'garments of torah'[121] for a new age

whilst providing a pattern for generations to come. Adding the raw flax of his own

sufferings, he brings into being a mode of materializing the word which though

textual, is wrought incarnationally in his own person which 'represents the people in

their agony to come' whilst providing 'a paradigm to the people of Yahweh's

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[117] For example, Walter Baumgartner, *Jeremiah's Poems of Lament* trans. by David E. Orton
(Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1988), and Henning Graf von Reventlow, *Liturgie und prophetisches
Ich bei Jeremia* (Gutersloh: Gutersloher, 1963)
[118] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 359.
[119] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 358.
[120] Holladay lists also, and in some detail, Jeremiah's 'dependence' upon the prophet who preceded
him. See Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, pp. 35-53.
[121] Borrowed from the title of Michael Fishbane's *The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical
Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989)

action'.[122] The finished veil is both a record of the man and a direct witness to his handiwork that is by no means obliterated by later additions and editions—it too is incarnationally wrought, but like its prophetic creator, can only anticipate the fuller materialisation of God: 'The word of God had not in those years become flesh, but it had been deposited in written form, and that written deposit, at that moment, was despised and rejected by men and was destroyed. But the written deposit was not the word, it bore witness to the word.'[123]

1.1.3. *Jeremiah and Rhetoric*

The most recent offering which bears the distinctive stitch-work of this school of embroidery is the commentary by Jack R. Lundbom in which he continues with the approach he began in an earlier monograph. In the book of Jeremiah, Lundbom finds 'the most complete profile of a Hebrew prophet, also one of the best profiles of any figure in the ancient world'.[124] Bringing together a 'variety of disciplines, each employing its own methodology [...] to explicate the biblical text', Lundbom privileges the use of rhetorical criticism, introduced into biblical studies by James Muilenburg at the 1968 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in order that the critic might seek 'the texture and fabric of the writer's thought'.[125] Stepping beyond Muilenburg's strategy of examining the warp of literary units and structures to access the weft of the prophet's mind, Lundbom examines the 'speaker's ability to persuade',[126] and so arrives at 'a new estimation of Jeremiah the man'—that he is 'primarily a prophet of engagement'.[127]

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[122] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 361.
[123] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 262.
[124] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 57.
[125] James Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 88, pp. 1-18 (p. 7). Lundbom's commentary continues with a method he employed in his earlier monograph, Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975).
[126] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 71.
[127] Lundbom, *Jeremiah: A Study in Ancient Hebrew Rhetoric*, pp. 115 and 116.

Like Holladay, Lundbom recognises that Jeremiah is 'a document which has undergone change',[128] and by ascribing the greater portion of the editorial process to the scribal family of Neriah to which the prophet's companions Baruch (Jeremiah 36. 4) and Seraiah (Jeremiah 51. 56) both belong,[129] is similarly satisfied that the prophet is accessible through its pages. Indeed, Lundbom believes that Jeremiah's connection with scribes is considerable and that he had learnt from Jerusalem's scribal school of the time 'the craft that enabled him to become carrier *par excellence* of the divine word'.[130] This then enables Lundbom to describe Jeremiah not only as a 'skilful poet', ' but also 'someone well trained in the rhetoric of his day' and 'an engaging orator'.[131]

A poet well versed in the literary speech patterns of his peers, Lundbom's Jeremiah, like Holladay's, is able to commandeer the stylistic conventions to express his own experiences. Thus the Confessions, a term Lundbom acknowledges is not fully appropriate,[132] are not simply imported laments, but 'rare glimpses into a prophet's interior life'.[133] But while 'Jeremiah is a man of profound religious faith', he 'cannot be charged with excessively privatising religion, even though much of a personal nature comes from his lips. He prays for himself, but he prays even more for others'.[134] Lundbom's Jeremiah is another *saint* who not only proclaims the divine word, but demonstrates it with symbolic actions of which the 'most profound action of all is Jeremiah's final suffering, where his entire life becomes the symbol'.[135] In this he anticipates the suffering servant of Isaiah 53, Job, and the message of 'the NT

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[128] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 85.
[129] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 92. 'Alterations, where they exist, are largely the work of scribes in charge of the compilation process'. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 85.
[130] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 92.
[131] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 121.
[132] Lundbom notes that poems designated *confessions*, implying a personal monologue, often include a divine response, and exclude poems of a similar form in which Jeremiah speaks on behalf of the nation. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 634.
[133] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 117.
[134] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 117.
[135] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 667.

gospels, where the divine message is understood as being acted out in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ'.[136]

Lundbom's assertion that the business of rhetorical criticism starts with the biblical text is accompanied by an acknowledgement that there is a lack of any extra-biblical texts of that period with a helpful bearing on his subject: 'There really is no other place to begin.'[137] One senses in his comment that 'seldom, if ever, does rhetorical criticism of a modern text labor under such constriction'[138] a regret that Jeremiah the man and his oratorical interactions with any audience depends so much upon inference from a single source. That the text is a point from which to 'begin' indicates that Lundbom's goal lies beyond the text, beyond the veil that is, and in the reconstruction of a live discourse. He has faith however, that his chosen method of outlining forms in the fabric of the text will bring into relief something of the man and his oratory.

1.2 *Proximity to the Prophet*
T. Crouther Gordon's search for Jeremiah behind the veils of book and history calls to mind an excavation with the 'man of Anathoth' now a biblical Lindow man[139] long buried under the layers *Tell el-Sepher-Yirmayahu*. The task of sifting and labelling these accretions is associated with the traditio-historical approach[140] which argues that 'the historical Jeremiah for the most part remains *concealed* behind [...] various traditions which have undergone a long process of reshaping and reformulation'.[141]

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[136] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 140.
[137] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 73.
[138] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 72.
[139] Or Lindow II. The body of an Iron Age man found in Lindow Moss, Cheshire, England in 1984 and 'affectionately known as Pete Marsh'. 'It was boxed and and transported to the British Museum, where it was carefully excavated and thoroughly examined by a team of scientists.'
< www.britishmuseum.ac.uk/compass/ixbin > (accessed, June, 2004).
[140] Itself associated with 'Neo-Othodoxy'. Perdue, p. 1.
[141] Perdue, p. 2. My emphasis.

Anathoth Man becomes the site of archaeological endeavour, his corpse now lost in the layers of a corpus to be examined inside and out.

The story of this dig begins with the 'now classic'[142] study by Bernhard Duhm (1901) that identified fragments of the prophet's preaching in the poetic material alone, considering all else for the most part apocryphal.[143] Duhm's revised account, in which he accepts that the prose material might represent a redaction of original sayings, was developed by Sigmund Mowinckel (1914 and 1946)[144] who identified and labelled the constituent sources of Jeremiah: *A*, the genuinely Jeremiah oracles, mostly the poetry of Jeremiah 1-25; *B*, the biographical prose (written by Baruch); and *C*, the prose sermons. The redactors responsible for each source then become $R^A R^B R^C$ and the redactor responsible for combining these, R^{ABC}.[145] The greater part of Jeremiah scholarship since has maintained this schema whilst modifying and developing it; in 1989 Soggin was still able to claim that 'this threefold classification is generally accepted today'.[146]

The no nonsense algebraic formulae—analogous, perhaps, to a knitting pattern—of this school have replaced the literary language of John Skinner's biographical over-sewing, signifying a quasi-scientific approach to the text. Jeremiah is read less as the collected utterances of an individual soul than the product of a process of transmission the mechanics of which can be identified and categorised. Rather than leading to a demotion in a perception of the prophet's importance in

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[142] J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 3rd edn trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1989), p. 342.

[143] Duhm ascribed only 280 verses of Jeremiah to the prophet Jeremiah, 220 to Baruch, and the remaining 800 or more to editors and glossators. See T. R. Hobbs, 'Some Remarks on the Composition and Structure of the Book of Jeremiah', in Perdue and Kovacs, pp. 175-191.(first publ. in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 34 (1972), pp. 257-275).

[144] In his later publication, Mowinckel turns away from 'sources' and discusses instead 'cycles of tradition'. See Soggin, p. 342.

[145] For a more detailed account of the application of source criticism in Jeremiah scholarship, see Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, pp. 39-41.

[146] Soggin, p. 342.

relation to the book, however, it has often resulted in scholars of this school regarding the genuinely Jeremiah material, once discovered, as the essence of the book—all other material then being dismissed as secondary and irrelevant in the project of approximating as nearly as possible an original message.[147] Not all, though; other scholars, whilst working with the same assumptions about primary and secondary material, are prepared to regard the latter in a more positive light as the creative development of a Jeremiah tradition.

1.2.1. *Preaching to the Exiles*

E. W. Nicholson accepts the 'essential historicity' of the record in Jeremiah 36, that Jeremiah dictated to the scribe Baruch a scroll of oracles, and on the basis of this accepts the consensus that 'the poetic oracles, contained mainly in the first half of the book [of Jeremiah], represent substantially the original sayings of Jeremiah'.[148] Also in keeping with his particular school of scholarship he continues, 'although much of the material in the book can be attributed directly to Jeremiah himself, that is, preserves his *ipsissima verba*, we must also reckon with the probability that much of it owes its origin and composition directly to a circle of traditionists.'[149] He also notes, however, a lack of consensus about the origins of 'the many prose sermons and discourses which are found throughout the book'[150]—whether they are also composed by the eyewitness Baruch, or are of Deuteronomistic origin and so quite possibly apocryphal.

Tracing an agreed (scholarly) narrative that the scroll of Jeremiah 36 was first lengthened by Baruch then passed on to editors who handed it down and made further alterations to the text, Nicholson observes a presumption held by many that the

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[147] A view taken by Duhm, Mowinckel, Holscher, and Horst. See E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), p. 24.
[148] Nicholson, p. 3.
[149] Nicholson, p. 4.

movement is motivated by a desire to preserve the prophet's words for posterity.[151]

He suggests a different motivation for the additional words: 'the desire to actualise for

the generation to which they belonged the prophetic word spoken in times past.'[152]

Prose passages that seem to misunderstand the message of Jeremiah, such as the

sermon on Sabbath observance in Jeremiah 17. 19-27, which John Bright argues

places too one-sided an emphasis on Sabbath observance to be attributed to Jeremiah

himself, is better understood as a 'conscious attempt for those responsible for the

prose to represent Jeremiah as having given expression to a belief concerning

observance of the Sabbath which was an important issue in their own time'.[153] Thus

he argues that Mowinckel's *C* material (the prose tradition other than biography)

represents a deliberate development of the prophet's teaching rather than an attempt to

provide a *gist* of what the prophet had said.[154]

Whilst marking discontinuity therefore with the thrust of Jeremiah's own

preaching, Nicholson discerns in the prose sermons a more profound continuity with

the prophet's particular practices. Just as 'Jeremiah took up oracles which he had

uttered in the early years of his ministry and applied them to or interpreted them in

terms of the situation of a later time', so 'the possibility immediately arises that those

who transmitted his sayings subjected them to a similar process'.[155] Jeremiah's

recycling of his own material is therefore seen to provide a model for the creative

stitch-work of a Jeremiah tradition, a development that Nicholson does not think is

exclusive to the prose sermons. The biographical narratives, whilst retaining a kernel

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[150] Nicholson, p. 3.
[151] Nicholson, p. 8.
[152] Nicholson, p. 10.
[153] Nicholson, p. 13.
[154] Nicholson, p. 13.
[155] Nicholson, p. 9.

of historical veracity,[156] are not simply transmitted in a bid to preserve details of the prophet's life, but for the purpose of preaching to later generations, more specifically, given the 'attitude of censure towards those who remained in Judah', those in exile in Babylon.[157] The 'episode of the scroll' in Jeremiah 36 is not simply a description of how Jeremiah's oracles came to be collected, but in placing 'the burden of responsibility for Israel's rejection of the Word of Yahweh and the judgement which this brings [...] firmly on the shoulders of the king'[158] demonstrates a kinship with the theology of the Deuteronomistic History[159] and emphasizes the centrality of prophecy 'as the channel of divine revelation'.[160]

Whilst retaining the basic distinction between the poetry (the *ipsissima verba* of Jeremiah) and prose in Jeremiah, Nicholson concerns himself with the latter. He rejects Mowinckel's division between the genres of biography and homily recognising instead their shared concern which is 'theological in nature' and deuteronomistic in outlook.[161] Alongside the words of Jeremiah then are the words of later preachers who make use of the Jeremiah tradition as a starting point for their own theological concerns; the prophet becomes father to a religious tradition. In so doing, Nicholson manages to redeem texts—appreciate the reworking of an original design—dismissed as secondary by Duhm and Mowinckel who privilege oracles and narratives that give clear access to the prophet. At the same time, he is himself at odds with the scheme he ascribes to the traditionists—their commitment to the text is forward looking and creative, in company with his school-fellows, Nicholson's remains historical. As Pete Diamond and Kathleen M. O'Connor comment, 'the managers of the prophetic

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[156] Whilst denying that Baruch was the author of the narratives, Nicholson does not entirely reject his part in their generation. Nicholson, pp. 111-113.
[157] Nicholson, p. 127.
[158] Nicholson, p. 42.
[159] Nicholson notes the formal parallels between the narrative in Jeremiah 36 and II Kings 22. p. 43.
[160] Nicholson, p. 48.

tradition did not share the historical-critical project—that is, the reconstruction of the "original" meaning of the text.'[162]

1.2.2. *Rolling Corpuses*

That the style and language of the prose in Jeremiah is akin to that of Deuteronomy and the so-called Deuteronomistic History of Joshua-Kings has long been recognised. In 1942 Philip Hyatt listed some of the scholarly accounts which had been given for this kinship, citing the nineteenth-century commentators who held Jeremiah responsible for the production of the Pentateuch,[163] alongside the alternative suggestions that 'Deuteronomy borrows from Jeremiah',[164] or that Jeremiah was himself a supporter of the religious reforms in the reign of Josiah based upon an early edition of the law book. None of these explanations Hyatt believes to be adequate. While noting that both Deuteronomy and Jeremiah were written in the seventh-century BCE and would therefore have vocabulary and syntax in common, he proposes that the more particular parallels found in an 'important and extensive group of passages [...] are due to the activity of Deuteronomistic editors'.[165]

Hyatt admits that it is tricky to establish the direction of a literary influence, but by arguing both the Josianic date of a first edition of Deuteronomy[166] and Jeremiah's disapproval of the reforms associated with this publication,[167] concludes that the presence of specifically Deuteronomistic language and theology must be a later insertion into the book of Jeremiah; an attempt, in fact, 'to prove that Jeremiah

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[161] Nicholson, p. 36.

[162] Diamond and O'Connor, 'Unfaithful Passions', p. 124.

[163] Or was even himself responsible for writing the Deuteronomistic history books of Joshua-Kings.

[164] J. Philip Hyatt, 'Jeremiah and Deuteronomy', in Perdue and Kovacs, pp. 113-127 (p. 113) (first publ. in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 1 (1942), pp. 156-173).

[165] Hyatt, p. 121.

[166] Hyatt, pp. 115-117.

[167] Hyatt identifies several passages, including declarations of the destruction of the temple in Jeremiah 7 and 26, which make it 'very difficult to believe that Jeremiah could ever have approved of Josiah's reforms'. Hyatt, p. 117.

was an active supporter of the Deuteronomistic reforms.'[168] In the course of his argument, Hyatt observes linguistic similarities, but not without noting semantic differences; thus whilst demonstrating similarities of expression with Deuteronomy 24. 1-4, which argues a case of cultic defilement, Jeremiah 3. 1-5 argues a moral case of adultery. Thus even though Jeremiah cannot be said to have approved of the Deuteronomistic reforms, he nevertheless employed its language, adding, 'there can be little doubt that Jer 3.1-5 is genuine, since it is a fine poetic passage and is strongly prophetic in tone'.[169]

Fine poetry and prophetic tone alone are not firm arguments for the identification of genuinely Jeremiah material and Hyatt admits 'that subjectivity is likely to enter in'.[170] He finds, however, some confidence by 'being as careful and objective as possible in considering what is characteristic of the style and thought of the prophet Jeremiah, on the one hand, and of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomists, on the other'.[171] Underlying his linguistic and semantic comparisons, therefore, is an interpretative strategy based on the recognition of identifiable and consistent styles of writing, which enables him to distinguish an individual prophet on the one hand and a theological school on the other, the latter having intentionally reworked the former while not obscuring him completely. Carroll notes that this theological over-sewing has in Hyatt's opinion, 'led to some distortion in the presentation of Jeremiah and made the task of discovering the historical Jeremiah that much more difficult'.[172] As 'distortion' suggests, the image of Jeremiah is not lost, it is simply skewed; the presumption is that it is possible to unpick the distortion and regain access to the

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[168] Hyatt, p. 123.
[169] Hyatt, p. 119.
[170] Hyatt, p. 119.
[171] Hyatt, p. 119.
[172] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 41.

reality that preceded it: 'in order to understand the true Jeremiah, we must discount the Deuteronomistic passages.'[173]

1973 was a watershed year in the study of a deuteronomistic edition of Jeremiah with the publication of monographs by both Winfried Thiel and Helga Weippert. Thiel's study, described as 'the most complete examination of every aspect of Deuteronomistic influence on the construction of the book of Jeremiah',[174] concludes that there was a sixth-century redaction of Jeremiah which reflects central themes in Deuteronomistic theology, including the interpretation of exile as a punishment for the sins of Judah, and a presentation of the prophet as preacher of the law of Deuteronomy, which is understood as the authoritative guide for the conduct of the nation. While Theil's argument begins by noting affinities in the prose vocabulary of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history books, it continues by attributing words found only in Jeremiah to the Deuteronomistic activity also. Weippert, who also examines linguistic features in Jeremiah, reaches the opposing conclusion that the language of the prose speeches is peculiar to the prophet himself. Carroll finds Weippert's study a 'finely-honed lexical analysis' but considers her conclusions 'wrong-headed. What her analysis does suggest is that we must allow for a more sophisticated and complex account of the redaction of Jeremiah and be less inclined to attribute so much of it to Deuteronomistic sources';[175] a criticism which impacts upon the arguments of not only Weippert but Theil too.[176]

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[173] Hyatt, p. 127.
[174] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 41.
[175] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 42.
[176] Carroll later considers the presence of Deuteronomistic language and theology in the book of Jeremiah, rather than being evidence of a wholesale and systematic editorial endeavour, an example of intertextuality—'a mosaic of quotations'—in which there is 'a very strong relationship between the language and discourses of Jeremiah and those of other biblical books'. Robert P. Carroll 'The Book of J', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Stulman, pp. 220-243 (p. 226).

In a more detailed analysis, William McKane observes that a simple

cataloguing of words shared by both Jeremiah and Deuteronomy with the

Deuteronomistic literature, if too general will, he argues, demonstrate nothing more

than that both literatures are written in Hebrew. Even when words are found to be

peculiar to these two corpora alone, he continues, it might only signify 'sympathies of

a broad kind which are shared but are not necessarily limited to one organised

religious party or movement'.[177] Word-strings, with which the study of Theil is

primarily occupied, he continues, do provide a 'higher degree of particularity, on the

basis of which questions about literary relationship can more reasonably be raised'.[178]

But in these same word-strings Weippert recognises a difference in semantic nuance

and function that effectively separates the terminology in Jeremiah from the identical

terminology in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history books—they represent

strands of Jeremiah himself. McKane argues that Weippert 'tries too hard on

occasions to drive a wedge between the prose of the book of Jeremiah and the

Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic prose with these considerations' and cannot

ultimately support the conclusion she sets out to reach, but sees a more positive

influence of her study by 'wooing us away from a too great pre-occupation with the

Deuteronomic and Deuteronomistic affiliations of the prose of the book of

Jeremiah'.[179]

McKane remains unsurprised that Weippert finds differences in nuance in the

use of shared terminology, since the terminology serves the interests of the different

corpora to which it belongs. McKane cannot agree with the conclusion that the

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[177] William McKane, 'Relations Between the Poetry and Prose in the Book of Jeremiah with Special reference to Jeremiah iii 6-11 and xii 14-17', in Perdue and Kovacs, pp. 269-284 (p. 271) (first publ. in *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 32, *Congress Volume*, ed. by J. A. Emmerton (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981), pp. 220-237).
[178] McKane, 'Relations between the Poetry and Prose', p. 271.
[179] McKane, 'Relations between the Poetry and Prose', p. 273.

distinctive use of particular language can demonstrate that Jeremiah wrote the prose, but only that there is a distinctive Jeremiah nucleus, out of which the prose has been generated. This introduces McKane's own theory of the book's formation in which he seeks to take into account 'the untidy and desultory character of the aggregation of material which comprises the book of Jeremiah' and not to invest it with 'architectonic properties which it does not possess'.[180] In the process of literary growth that is 'in a measure irrecoverable' he detects no 'grand theological scheme' but a more localised development around the verse or verses that set it in motion, adding up to 'something much less than the systematic Deuteronomistic redaction which Theil discerns'.[181]

McKane believes that it is not unreasonable to suppose that the poetry provides a 'reservoir for the prose'[182] but that the discovery of significant resemblances of that prose with prose from outside the book of Jeremiah, and/or an apologetic concern for the distinctiveness of Jeremiah prose and the concomitant interest in labelling material accordingly, distract from the business of examining the internal relations of the constituent parts of the book. Bright had suggested the prose contained a gist of Jeremiah's original preaching; Nicholson, less a (sometimes mistaken) gist than a theological re-appropriation of words and actions of the prophet; Holladay detected a 'metrical core' of Jeremiah 'enlarged and overlaid by subsequent prose elaboration'.[183] Rather than 'a hypothetical core which has been encapsulated in

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[180] McKane, 'Relations between the Poetry and Prose', p. 274.
[181] McKane, 'Relations between the Poetry and Prose', p. 275.
[182] McKane, 'Relations between the Poetry and Prose', p. 269. This is the argument of Theil, that the Deuteronomistic redaction of Jeremiah made use of vocabulary from the prophetic poetry to produce a distinctive *Jeremiah* prose. While the idea of the poetry acting as a linguistic 'reservoir' is not deemed unreasonable, and in fact adds to his own idea of a 'rolling corpus', he notices that Theil uses it to explain verses which do not 'live together' in the extant text, and so have been brought together to prove a hypothesis. See William McKane, *Jeremiah I*, p. lvi-lxii.
[183] McKane, 'Relations between the Poetry and Prose', p. 276.

prose'[184]—a submerging of the prophet, still present but barely discernable—McKane writes of an 'adjacency or contiguity' in which the prose has been generated out of the poetry as commentary or exegesis. In his later commentary this is explained in terms of a 'rolling corpus'[185] expanding by piecemeal accumulation. Though this implies that there was something to which the accretions gathered, McKane is suspicious of claims that could be made for such a kernel. The idea of a kernel is associated with the distinction between genuine and ungenuine often made in a bid to recover an original text (and so the *ipsissima verba* of a prophet) rather than to explain the shape of the extant text. McKane claims that his own aim is not 'to recover an "original" Hebrew text, but to explore the possibilities of uncovering the history of the Hebrew text'.[186]

From and exhaustive (and exhausting) comparison between the LXX and MT of Jeremiah,[187] McKane observes that the majority of expansions are scribal rather than editorial, not looking beyond 'the small pieces of text to which they are attached'.[188] This process of expansion does not affect poetry alone, but prose also, thus in Jeremiah 7. 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, McKane detects a kernel relating to the temple which has been expanded by the insinuation of a different theme—the possibility of the loss of land. Whether the temple material is original to Jeremiah, he argues, is impossible to know.

McKane's agnosticism leads him to criticise the assumption that exegesis is inadequate unless a poetic passage is explained in terms of its connection to a

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[184] McKane, 'Relations between the Poetry and Prose', p. 277.
[185] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. l.
[186] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. l.
[187] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, pp. i-xxxi.
[188] There are editorial expansions—he cites Jeremiah 25. 1-7, 8-14—but which demonstrate no 'overarching editorial plan or systematic theological tendency'. McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. li.

particular historical circumstance. While he considers this still 'an ideal',[189] much of

the poetry in Jeremiah 1-25 cannot be so correlated and all that can be offered is

guesswork:

> This stepping out from the inner world of the *corpus* of the book of
>
> Jeremiah into the particulars of external history has appeared to me as the
>
> most problematic aspect of my entire investigation. I am profoundly
>
> sceptical of some of the historical correlations which have been found for
>
> pieces of poetry and to which their exegesis has been bound. These
>
> impressionistic attachments of pieces of text to external historical events
>
> have an uncommon resemblance to the process of selecting from a range of
>
> possibilities by sticking a pin in one of them.[190]

Chronological notices, he argues, do not help; since they are part of a Jeremiah

corpus, 'the chronological notice, where it occurs, will always locate a passage in a

pre-exilic setting, since it can do no other.'[191]

Agnosticism does not, however, prevent McKane from disagreeing with H. G.

Reventlow's contention that there is nothing but communal laments among

Jeremiah's Confessions, 'that we have no access to the privacy of Jeremiah's inner

struggles.'[192] Rather, Mc|Kane cites the prophet's identification with the community

to which he belonged, and claims that 'this is a testimony to exceptional nature of

[Jeremiah's] individuality and the fineness of his spiritual texture: only an individual

who had made the community's brokenness his own could have spoken like this'.[193]

For all his scepticism, then, McKane does not dismiss the possibility that passages in

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[189] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. lxxxviii.
[190] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. lxxxix.
[191] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. lxxxix.
[192] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. xciii.

Jeremiah do indeed give access to an historical prophet—and his inner life, even—and again, this Jeremiah becomes a hermeneutical principal by which the originality of certain verses can be discerned: rejecting W. Baumgartner's understanding of the imagery in Jeremiah 14. 8b-9a as 'evidence of prophetic originality',[194] for example, he argues, 'it is difficult to believe that Jeremiah would have identified himself with a theology whose climax was a שלום oracle, or would have offered a prayer which he knew to rest on a foundation of שקר'.[195]

1.3. *Loss of the Prophet*

Thus far, the recurring assumption has been that to some degree the poetry of Jeremiah 1-25 contains the *ipsissima verba* of Jeremiah; the majority of discussion of historicity and historical access in Jeremiah focussing on the sermonic and narrative prose material. In 1981, Robert Carroll maintained the assumption that the only possible *a priori* is that the poetry is Jeremiah's own,[196] but that the prose introduces 'a number of problems relating to the consistency of the prophet's thoughts':[197] the poetic oracles describing a corrupt society incapable of amending its ways; the prose sermons, often displaying thought patterns similar to the dogmas of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history, appealing for the community to repent. Content aside, the stylistic differences, not simply explainable in terms of Jeremiah himself switching genres—'a major poet, and there is little doubt that Jeremiah was indeed such a poet, does not use banal prose for the majority of his most important statements'[198]—makes for a disjointed presentation of the prophet. These disparities, accompanied by the 'striking feature' of double accounts (for example, the repetition

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[193] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. xciii.
[194] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. xciv.
[195] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. xciv.
[196] 'Probably the only *a priori* judgement used in this book.' Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 9.
[197] Carroll, *From* Chaos, p. 8.

of the temple sermon in Jeremiah 7 and 26)[199] which treat the same subject matter differently, and 'the presence of certain verses, phrases and motifs throughout the book of Jeremiah indicates a redactional feature of the book rather than a tendency on the prophet's part to repeat himself in different contexts'.[200] The narratives, he argues, allow no confidence in their having an historical core: Jeremiah 36, for example, so often read as an account of the actual formation of the earliest strata of Jeremiah, dramatizes an encounter between king and the prophetic word brought to the king by scribes, is 'a literary creation designed to incorporate the scribal influence into the Jeremiah tradition'.[201] On the basis of these observations, Carroll proposes that 'the Jeremiah tradition was constructed out of the poetry of Jeremiah, worked on by many redactional circles, including a major deuteronomistic redaction, and produced over a lengthy period of time'.[202]

Perhaps more radical than many in his deprecation of the Jeremianic provenance of the prose, Carroll is not at this stage far removed in his approach from the scholars of the second school of embroidery, arguing that the prose has fitted round the prophet's poetry rather like a (not altogether well-fitting) garment. But in his 1986 commentary on Jeremiah he founds a third, more radical, academy:

> The poetry of the book of Jeremiah (source or level A) raises fewer
> controversial discussions because many scholars are agreed on attributing
> it to the prophet Jeremiah. [...] Jeremiah is seen as a poet in the first
> instance; hence the majority of poems in Part I are accepted as his work.
> [...] However, the attribution of all the poetry in the book to the prophet
> Jeremiah conceals an unwarranted assumption which should be questioned.

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[198] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 9.
[199] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 8.
[200] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 8.
[201] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 15.

> [...] It is a dogma of Jeremiah studies that the prophet is the poet of the
> tradition. That dogma cannot be established by argument; it can only be
> believed. Yet much of the poetry of the book of Jeremiah is similar to
> poetry to be found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible and has a stereotypical
> quality which frustrates identifying it with a specific author. [...] Only the
> redaction justifies the identification of the lament speaker with
> Jeremiah.[203]

No more Mr. Nice-Guy-*a-priori*, Carroll is now reading the book '*a posteriori*';[204] take away the editorial schema, he argues, and the figure of Jeremiah simply disappears. Previously divested of his prose, the prophet is now stripped even of his poems and the reader is left with a veil, intricately embroidered, but behind which lies nothing (or at least, nothing knowable).[205]

The gradual demotion—effectively an erosion—of the prophet's part in the production of the book promotes the role of the editors; the promotion is considerable. Jeremiah reiterates the claim that the words of Jeremiah are those of Yhwh who has touched his mouth (Jeremiah 1. 9) and whose Word he has ingested (Jeremiah 15. 16) and which burns within him (Jeremiah 20. 9), but in Carroll's reading, 'we have no *reason* to believe the poems of 1-25 to be other than anonymous utterances from a variety of sources. The editors of the book have put them in the mouth of Jeremiah and we read them as his utterances'.[206] The act of a personal creator is now understood to be the creative act of anonymous redactors[207] who are not only held responsible for the development of a Jeremiah tradition, but the actual creators of the

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[202] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 11.
[203] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 47.
[204] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 34.
[205] 'If the redactional framework is removed, the figure of Jeremiah disappears from the poetry and the prose'. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 48.
[206] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 47. Original emphasis.

figure of Jeremiah himself: 'We should treat the character of Jeremiah as a work of fiction and recognise the impossibility of moving from the book to the real "historical" Jeremiah, given our complete lack of knowledge independent of the book itself.'[208] This is not, he argues, the result of 'radical scepticism [...] but is a recognition of the function of the redactional framework in creating a link between the persona of the narrative [...] and the unidentified speaker of the poems and the prose sermons'.[209]

The large-scale and detailed English language commentaries of Holladay, McKane, and Carroll—each representing a different school of embroidery—were all published (at least in part) in 1986. Beyond the differences in format and presentation dictated by the various publishing houses[210] are of course the more important differences of their respective 'presuppositions, approaches and execution of comment'.[211] That Holladay and Carroll stand at opposite ends of a scholarly spectrum need not be reiterated, but as Carroll himself points out, 'their disagreements are perspectival rather than in terms of textual exegesis'[212]—different in outcome rather than kind. Their respective judgements on individual texts, he observes, can be 'startlingly similar'[213] even when their broader interpretations differ significantly due primarily to their presuppositions about the production of the books.[214] Thus a

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[207] 'What do we know about the book's editors? Nothing!' Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 12.

[208] Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 12.

[209] Carroll *Jeremiah: A Commentary* p.47-8.

[210] Carroll himself favouring Holladay's as 'easiest to work with because it opens flat out'. Robert P. Carroll 'Radical Clashes of Will and Style: Recent Commentary Writing on the Book of Jeremiah', in *Journal for the Study of Old Testament* 45, pp. 99-114. (p. 110).

[211] Carroll, 'Radical Clashes', p. 101.

[212] Carroll, 'Radical Clashes', p. 102.

[213] Carroll, 'Radical Clashes', p. 106.

[214] Carroll who claims a position of ignorance on the matter of production—'we actually *know* remarkably little (if not nothing) about how such books were produced in the ancient world'—finds 'the most irritating feature' of Holladay's approach to be its tendency to link verses and incidents which the editors have not chosen so to associate. This he believes is necessary if Holladay is going to sustain the conviction that Jeremiah is both author and editor, but while it is 'very imaginative [...] it is hardly sound exegesis'. 'Radical Clashes', pp. 107-108.

comparison of their exegeses of Jeremiah 1 shows that they both recognise it to be built up of additions, but while Holladay assigns these to Jeremiah himself, Carroll makes no such association, commenting that 'without these hypothetical readings of certain texts Holladay's understanding of the additions to ch. 1 would hardly differ from those of Carroll and McKane'.[215]

Holladay reads Jeremiah as the product of a single, identifiable mind, Carroll as the product of an anonymous many. It seems fair, however, to point out that the anonymity of these editors is not absolute since Carroll is often able to identify 'their interests' in matters relating, for example, to the temple (see his commentary on Jeremiah 1).[216] In terms of the presuppositions of the production of the book, the arguments of Holladay and Carroll might be as different as they can hope to be, but in terms of their underlying understanding of text (although in the years following the publication of his commentary, Carroll moves away from this position), do occupy some common ground in that they approach Jeremiah in terms of the identifiable intentions of author/s and/or editors/s. Holladay arrives at the reasonably describable and personal figure of Jeremiah, Carroll at the more shadowy but nevertheless describable set of attitudes and ideologies of editors who in effect are partly hypostasised points of historical reference.

Negotiating a(n often self-referential) comparative review of the 1986 commentaries with some humour, recommending his own as a 'best buy', Carroll acknowledges that in relation to his peers in publication he is still a 'young scholar' who has time left to improve his work (adding the now poignant comment, 'the angel of death being exempted from such considerations').[217] He sees a potential for

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[215] Carroll, 'Radical Clashes', p. 103.
[216] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, pp. 90-101.
[217] Carroll, 'Radical Clashes', p. 110.

longevity in McKane's 'rolling corpus' theory,[218] but believes Holladay's approach to be unsustainable. Brueggemann critiques all three 1986 commentaries for being 'long on critical questions' while 'the interpretative outcome is characteristically thin'.[219] By 'interpretation' Brueggemann seeks a move beyond historical placement, to 'interpretative issues of the contemporary faith community'.[220] In response, Carroll thinks it 'foolish to expect from Carroll, Holladay and McKane such satisfaction because they address the academy solely and leave to others the ecclesiastical glossings of the text' and argues that it is 'absurd' to criticise them 'for failing to achieve what they did not set out to do in the first place'.[221] Carroll suspects the charge of 'thin' means 'interpretation not in line with Brueggemann's own theological holdings',[222] which would necessitate a selective approach to Jeremiah which, in their recognition of the complexity of the book, he and his fellow commentators do not allow. Directing readers to Jeremiah 8. 8, which he reads as a dismissal of all prophets and even the inscribed torah as false, Carroll concludes that 'the text itself speaks out against all such attempts to domesticate the divine word'.[223]

1.4. *School Report: Checking the Stitching*
The veil of the book of Jeremiah has been variously handled and variously appreciated, with scholars of the first school (John Skinner, William Holladay, and Jack R. Lundbom) taking care not to disturb too many of its folds, which they perceive to be either the prophet's own arrangement or those of his intimates, while scholars of the second school (Nicholson and McKane) are more prepared to pick at the stitching and peer underneath, lifting panels and reorganising parts. The sole

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[218] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 1.
[219] Walter Brueggemann, 'Intense Criticism/Thin Interpretation', in *Interpretation XLII 3* (July 1988), pp. 268-280 (p. 273).
[220] Brueggemann, 'Intense Criticism', p. 273.
[221] Carroll, 'Radical Clashes', p. 111.
[222] Carroll, 'Radical Clashes', p. 111.

scholar of a third school (Robert P. Carroll), believes it to be a patchwork of materials the pattern and weave of its multitude of panels examinable and describable, but mostly untraceable in terms of their origin—apparent glimpses of Jeremiah proving to be the stitch work of many hands.

Skinner, for whom the text of Jeremiah is like the stocking-stitch of Madam Defarge whose knitting both describes and prescribes the unfolding Terror,[224] or the Bayeaux tapestry, both explaining and explained by the events it depicts, finds the prophet's soul to be palpable in the poetry, particularly the so-called Confessions. Both Holladay and Lundbom find access to the mind of Jeremiah in the style and structure of his writing, as if the very patterns of his poetry are a representation or iconography of his thinking—a prophetic mind-map and a means by which the man is knowable and known. Where that poetry is believed to have been converted into prose,[225] a metrical gist is thought palpable, and so the prophet is not entirely obliterated.

Similarly, Nicholson believes that underlying much of the deuteronomistic prose 'are sayings and oracles which the prophet himself uttered'[226] though not simply preserving the words, but reapplying them. Scholars of this school, rather than regarding the book to be a vehicle for access to the prophet, are more likely to discuss the extent to which it represents a departure from the prophet's own words, equating prophecy with a phenomenon of proclamation and that 'the preservation of his messages in written form represents a secondary stage in their history.'[227] The

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[223] Carroll, 'Radical Clashes', p. 111.
[224] Initially a seemingly passive character, quietly knitting, it emerges that Madam Defarge is knitting a register of everyone who is to die in the cause of the French Revolution. Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Penguin, 1970)
[225] A possibility Carroll considers to be 'too similar a process to turning wine into water to be appealing or persuasive as an argument'. *From Chaos* p. 13.
[226] Nicholson, p. 30.
[227] Clements, p. 7.

compilers are no longer thought to be Jeremiah's close friends and companions, but anonymous and impersonal figures of a Jeremiah-tradition. The book is thus understood to be part of a development away from the prophet, which while denying easy access to him also gives him some protection since he cannot be blamed for its disorderly state.

Paradoxically for a group of scholars who thrive on the complexity of the book's final form, there is perhaps a greater demonstration of what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls a 'rage for unity'.[228] Scholars of the first school, for whom a certain unity and coherence is conveyed by the clear sense of the prophet in the pages of the book, seem more willing to accept the book's desultory state, whereas scholars of this second school seek out coherent sources and consistent editorial layers—at the same time assuming that the sources and writers display a coherence and consistency that no editors seemed concerned to impose upon the final form of the book. And while some suppose that these same editors have interpreted the words of Jeremiah for a new time and place, thereby redeeming rather than dismissing the value of secondary material, their own efforts to assign these endeavours to an historical time and place effectively make a move which is quite contrary to that which purportedly concerned the traditionists.

McKane, of course, sees no such sources and supposes the gathering of accretions to be the result of a less systematic rolling effect. However the accretions are explained, they are recognised by all to distort to a greater or lesser degree an original or earlier version. Most consider this earlier form to be closer to a Jeremiah (or Baruch) *autograph*[229] (a term which conveys the sense of authority that is sealed

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[228] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Translator's Preface' in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* corrected edn (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. xvi.
[229] A term which, in the technical use of Text Criticism, denotes an author's original script. See McCarter, p. 11.

by a signature), to some extent still recognisable and reconstructable by lifting off the overlay. *Distortion* recalls the Marxist understandings of the effect of ideology, which in its least sophisticated forms assumes one can undo the effects of distortion and discover a reality behind it, but in so doing confuses historical facts with eternal and immutable ones. In this case, the historical point of reference is the earlier Jeremiah document, as opposed to an actual Jeremiah, and it is by no means assured that at any level a recognisable Jeremiah corpus is in fact identifiable with confidence. The results of just such an enquiry are by no means secure; the scroll of Jeremiah which features in Jeremiah 36 being generally understood to represent the tradition at its most primitive stage, yet attempts at determining the precise contents of that *Urrolle* have varied considerably.[230]

The history of critical study of Jeremiah has, as Perdue noted in 1984, been 'stimulated' by the concern to uncover the Jeremiah of history;[231] that figure, once determined, then provides a hermeneutical principle by which the extant text might be articulated. But the equation of a Jeremiah in history with a Jeremiah discerned in the text through the identification of his own words and via the various narratives concerning him is of course determined by that text itself—to point out the circularity of this process is banal since biblical scholars are already keenly aware of the limited resources in terms of sources for such a project (the book of Jeremiah alone). Inseparable from the warp and weft of the text, Jeremiah does not stand apart from it or precede it, rather he must be encountered in dispersed form across its pages; a form which shifts with each new reading upon which he depends for his survival.

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[230] The attempts to reconstruct the content of Jeremiah's first scroll are numerous, and while some have identified it as *C* or prose material, the majority think it more reasonable to look among the *A* or poetic material of Jeremiah 1-25, but using a variety of interpretative principles to do so. See Bright, p. LXI; and Jones, p. 28.
[231] Perdue, p. 1.

2. *Tearing the Veil*

The distortion of a text is not unlike a murder.[232]

Sigmund Freud's fascination with the propensity of things superficial to 'disclose', albeit cryptically, that which has been forgotten or forbidden,[233] leads him to discern in the 'striking omissions, disturbing repetitions, palpable contradictions' of a text, 'signs of things the communication of which was never intended.'[234] Thus he awards writing a complexity comparable to the human psyche, its manifest behaviour indicating hidden manifestos, and perceives behind textual distortion in the book of Exodus, an actual murder: the oedipally driven dispatch of an 'Egyptian Moses'.[235] Textual homicide, then, constitutes a secondary slaying: an editorial crime in which the splicing of traditions leaves traces like bloody fingerprints on the page that the exegete-as-detective must treat as evidence.[236] Shifting his metaphor a little, Freud now represents 'the poetically elaborate accounts attributed to the Jahvist and to his later competitor, the Elohist,' as 'gravestones'—outward markers of a corpse beneath the corpus.[237]

The many sources detected in the corpus of Jeremiah make up a veritable mausoleum of writers and redactors now lost; the project of scholarly exhumation, whilst uncovering any number of corpses, continues to struggle with the business of identifying the now decomposed parts. But the restoration of a body of Jeremiah requires a radical disarticulation of the book, and a struggle emerges which, far from

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[232] Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1939), p. 52.
[233] 'It is uniformly found that precisely those ideas which provoke [unimportant and irrelevant ideas] are of particular value in discovering the forgotten material.' Freud cited in Christopher Bollas, *Free Association* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2002), pp. 7-8.
[234] Freud, p. 52.
[235] As opposed to the Midianite Moses. In textually combining the two, one must be sacrificed. Freud, p. 52.
[236] See Henshaw on Jeremiah suffering at the hands of the editors. Henshaw, p. 158.

remaining mostly hidden in a past preceding the text, has been fought endlessly in a coliseum of scholarship between biographers and redaction critics, each claiming to rescue and protect the prophet or text respectively.[238] In the following section, I shall begin to consider more closely the role played by, or assumed for, both author and text in the expectations (and exegesis) of the reader. To do so, I shall engage with the writings of a number of literary critics from outside biblical studies, including Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Umberto Eco.

2.1. *Strange coincidences*

Robert Carroll advocates that for the book of Jeremiah to live in all its complexity, the readers must be prepared to do away with the prophet as an historical and unifying point of reference—the prophet must lose (or be lost) so that the book might live. Supporters of the prophet, whilst voicing respect for the disorderly book, nevertheless take it to task. John Bright, in his 1965 commentary, represents an extreme of this latter tactic.

Maintaining that 'our entire knowledge of Jeremiah being derived from his book, the reconstruction that one offers of the prophet's life and message will inevitably depend upon one's understanding of the book and the critical problems attaching to it', [239] Bright's critical approach is in keeping with the (then) consensus that it breaks down into sub-collections or 'books' and that these themselves 'give the impression of being loose collections without any plan of arrangement consistently carried through', and though arrangement is topical rather than chronological, 'it is not consistently carried out', so that 'one finds no trace of inner coherence'.[240] Not even the in voice of Jeremiah does Bright find stability, since the prophet sometimes

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[237] Freud, p. 77.
[238] Carroll, 'Radical Clashes', p. 104.
[239] Bright, p. LV.
[240] Bright, p. LIX.

speaks in the first person, sometimes in the third; not unlike the doomed man in Amos, Bright runs and runs in search of a point of security only to find time and again that there is neither shelter nor safe haven.

Nevertheless, and somewhat surprisingly in view of these comments, Bright remains optimistic that a reconstruction of the prophet's life and message is possible and tackles the text by choosing to re-instate chronology. Claiming that his own translation follows the order of the Hebrew and subsequent English translations, he makes 'one major exception' by rearranging the book according to the 'editorial superscriptions'.[241] Needle and thread in hand, Bright unpicks misplaced panels and so reworks the veil to reconstruct the prophet.

Bright's cut and paste quest for Jeremiah enacts the (violent) power of the critic committed to a (paradoxically self-serving) effacement before the author privileged in interpretation, and so dramatises Roland Barthes's declaration that 'when the Author has been found, the text is "explained"—victory to the critic'.[242] The demise of the author recommended in Barthes's 1968 essay spells a liberation (rather than conquest) for the reader that spills into ecstasy, since 'to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases—reason, science, law.'[243] The essay, all too easily 'misread', suggests Moriarty[244] (a comment clashing with the common conceptions of Barthes's argument), is often characterised, caricatured even, by its concluding antithesis—'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author'[245]—so that the newborn reader considers it simply an assertion of 'a great liberation from textual authority' and a 'license to make of text whatever one

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[241] Bright, p. CXXXVIII.
[242] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 147.
[243] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 147.
[244] Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 2.
[245] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 148.

will'.[246] Soon after, Barthes published a book with the title, *Sade / Fourier / Loyola* (1971),[247] which suggests that the author was not so finally dispatched and that readings of Barthes, which presume that an absolute shift from one side of the antithesis to the other, are somehow overly reductive.

'The Death of the Author' begins with a far less antithetical proposal placing *writing* in the position of ascendancy: 'the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death, writing begins.'[248] 'The author', Barthes argues, 'is a product of our society insofar as, emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual.'[249] The result is an image of literature 'tyrannically centred on the author'—the author becomes a voice 'confiding' in us from the text.[250]

'To give a text an author', writes Barthes, 'is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.'[251] While this would seem primarily to serve the interests of that author, it also serves the interests of the critic who has the important task of explaining the text by discovering the authorial voice: the reign of the author has therefore also been the reign of the critic.[252] In its extreme form, in Bright's commentary for example, it is the text that suffers in the midst of this shared tyranny. The death of the author loosens the combined (and violent) grip of the complicit parties that not only places text and reader in a new relationship, but

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[246] A. K. Adam, 'Author', in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), pp. 8-13.

[247] Roland Barthes, *Sade / Fourier / Loyola* trans. by Richard Miller (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[248] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 142. Writing is thematic for Barthes, something of a constant in his widely differing books and essays—though as a concept it is given to change. Barthes was not the first to question the authority of the author, it is an idea present in the longer history of New Criticism: in 'The Intentional Fallacy', W.K.Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley argue 'that the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art.' In W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies of the Meaning of Poetry* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1954), pp. 3-18 (p. 3).

[249] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', pp. 142-143.

[250] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 142

inevitably effects a change in the reader also. Without an author-target, 'the claim to

decipher a text becomes quite futile';[253] the text becomes 'the multiplicity of writing'

with its 'relations of dialogue, parody, contestation', the reader 'the space on which

all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed'.[254] A corollary of the loss of a

unifying presence of an author is the loss of a unified reader: 'he [*sic*] is simply that

someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is

constituted.'[255] The shift in epochs—from an age of the author to an age of writing

and reader—is a shift from the genius of an originator, to the veil-like web of texts

and words, with the genius now recognised as a product of the weave of words rather

than something anterior to it. Thus the author, no longer an originator, is appreciated

as one who orders and manipulates and (per)forms pre-existent matter—like a potter

with clay; like Elohim-God with םהת (Genesis 1. 2)—and in which process,

paradoxically constitutes him-herself; hence, 'the modern scriptor is born

simultaneously with the text—neither preceding nor exceeding the text.'[256]

When Barthes writes that text is not 'a line of words releasing a single

"theological" meaning (the message of the Author-God)',[257] he seems to contradict,

almost knowingly, the principle by which biblical commentators so often read the

prophetic text, as if it were their priestly task to uncover the unified and literally

theological meaning conveyed by a messenger of God within. But whilst denying the

validity of this unified and unidirectional model he provides another that has some

resonance with the Bible. Barthes turns to 'ethnographic societies' where the

responsibility of writing is that of a 'mediator, shaman, or relator' whose

[251] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 147.
[252] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 147.
[253] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 147.
[254] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 148.
[255] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 148. Original emphasis.
[256] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 145.

'performance' may be admired, 'but never his genius'.[258] The origin of the oracle is not the individual mind—the locus of the prophet's unique religious sensibility or spiritual insight and so the voice of God mediated by the human—but 'it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality [...] to reach the point where only language acts, 'performs'; and not "me"'.[259]

Barthes's short essay reads like a commentary on the project of twentieth-century biblical exegesis in which the prophet-author has dominated as an interpretative principle, even when recognised as a figure conjoined by, or dispersed among, identifiable and audible editors. His recommendation of writing as 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'[260] robs the Author of the role of 'the past of his own book'[261] and replaces him with the writer 'who no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather a dictionary from which he draws a writing that can know no halt'.[262] Text and prophet merge and become one—the text constituted by the writing of the prophet, the prophet constituted by the writing of text. Barthes, then points to Mallarmé who saw 'the necessity to substitute language itself for the person who until then had supposed to be its owner'[263] and Proust 'himself' who 'instead of putting his life into his novel, as is so often maintained [...] made of his very life a work for which his own book was the model'.[264] But how then does one write meaningfully of a writer who has pronounced the death of the author? A possibility is suggested by Jonathan Culler who, in line with Barthes' own practice, reads him as the multi-dimensional text whose own

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[257] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146.
[258] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 142.
[259] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 143.
[260] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146.
[261] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 147.
[262] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 147.
[263] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 143.
[264] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 144.

works, to use Barthes's terms, 'blend and clash':[265] the advocate of systematic

structuralism who 'stands not for science but for pleasure', the champion of the avant-

garde whose best-known studies are on 'classic French writers, such as Racine and

Balzac', and the enemy of authors who 'is himself pre-eminently an author, a writer

whose varied products reveal a personal style and vision'.[266]

2.2. *Textual Limits*

The circumvention of references to an author through the category of 'writing',

observes Michel Foucault—in which the restrictions of interiority and the dimension

of expression are removed, and writing 'is identified with its own unfolding

exteriority'[267]—links it with sacrifice. Contrasting with the more familiar associations

of writing with the perpetuation of the hero's immortality (as in Greek epic), or the

staying of an executioner's hand (as in *The Thousand and One Nights*), writing thus

becomes a 'voluntary effacement': 'the work which once had the duty of providing

immortality, now possesses the right to kill, to be its author's murderer.'[268] Thus

while we remain at the scene of a crime, that which had for Freud constituted the

primary evidence—writing itself—is now identified by Foucault to have been accused

as both the weapon and its wielder.

Having argued that the author functions as 'a regulator of the fictive, a role

quite characteristic of our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and

private property',[269] Foucault acknowledges that changes in society will effect a

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[265] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146.
[266] Jonathan Culler, *Barthes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 2-3.
[267] Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author', in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* trans. and ed. by Josue Harari (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p. 142.
[268] Foucault, p. 142.
[269] Foucault, p. 159.

change in the functioning of text, not to the extent represented by Barthes's ecstatically liberated reader, 'but still with a system of constraint'.[270]

Foucault's declared interest is the function of an author (together with identifying the space left by the same) whose name, 'Aristotle' say, is more than a simple gesture, rather it is 'the equivalent of a description'—'"the author of the *Analytics*", "the founder of ontology", and so forth.'[271] Rather than suggesting that writing effaces absolutely the author, that as Barthes writes, 'the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins',[272] Foucault proposes that 'the proper name and the author's name are situated between the two poles of description and designation: they must have a certain link with what they name, but one that is neither entirely in the mode of designation nor in that of description'.[273] The link between the proper name and the individual named and between the author's name and what is named are 'not isomorphic and do not function in the same way'.[274] If, for example, if it was discovered that Shakespeare had never lived in the house visited by tourists today, this would not modify the functioning of the author's name, 'but if we proved that Shakespeare did not write those sonnets which pass for his, that would constitute a significant change.'[275]

In this difference, Foucault recognizes that an author's name is not simply one element in a discourse, rather it has an important 'classifactory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate

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[270] Foucault, p. 160. Without mentioning Barthes, Foucault's essay nevertheless comments upon 'The Death of the Author' and argues that Barthes 'notion of writing seems to transpose the empirical characteristics of the author into a transcendental anonymity,' (Foucault, p. 143) which he considers to be 'a simple repetition, in transcendental terms, of both the religious principle of inalterable and yet never fulfilled tradition, and the aesthetic principle of the work's survival, its perpetuation beyond the author's death, and its enigmatic *excess* in relation to him'. Foucault, p. 145.

[271] Foucault, p. 146.

[272] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 142.

[273] Foucault, p. 146.

[274] Foucault, p. 146.

[275] Foucault, p. 146.

them from and contrast them to others.'[276] Barthes's author who dies by the pen, is the 'scriptor [...] born simultaneously with the text'—a figure inseparable from the unlimiting of writing;[277] Foucault's author 'marks off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterising, its mode of being'.[278] But it is only a certain number of discourses that Foucault recognises to be endowed with this 'author-function':[279] 'A private letter may well have a signer—it does not have an author.'[280] Tracing the emergence of this quite specific 'author-function',[281] Foucault does not then re-reify the author as an individual behind or beneath a text, but recognises him[282] to be the result of 'a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call "author"'.[283] The realistic status awarded to such an author, he regards as a 'projection in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusions that we practice';[284] operations that vary according to the periods and types of discourse, a philosophical author being constructed rather differently from a poet; and I may add, a prophet according to our reckoning of prophecy.[285]

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[276] Foucault, p. 147.

[277] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 145.

[278] Foucault, p. 146.

[279] Foucault's interest is in 'the role the author figure is made to play in the analysis of a literary text'. Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 119.

[280] Foucault, p. 148.

[281] Associating this with the extent to which 'authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive. [...] Discourse was not originally a product, a thing, a kind of goods; it was essentially an act—an act placed in the bipolar field of the sacred and the profane, the licit and the illicit, the religious and the blasphemous.' Foucault, p. 148.

[282] I use the male pronoun not to privilege male authors, but to remain consistent with Barthes's own language.

[283] Foucault, p. 150.

[284] Foucault, p. 150.

[285] Foucault notices that literary criticism once defined the author in terms 'directly derived' from the manner in which Christian tradition authenticated texts, citing Jerome's four criteria: 1. A book deemed inferior to others in a named corpus is withdrawn, thus defining the author 'as a constant level of value': 2. Similarly with books propounding doctrines in conflict with other works, thus considering the author to be 'a field of conceptual or theoretical coherence': 3. Works of a different style are to be excluded, presenting the author as 'a stylistic unity': 4. Quotations of events after the author's death must be interpolations, positing the author 'as a historical figure at the crossroads of a certain number

The fringes of Foucault's author-limited texts are not, however, fixed. When collating an author's corpus of work, what is to be included or excluded? In publishing Nietzsche's works, should his deleted footnotes and rough drafts have a place? What of a laundry list found amidst a collection of his aphorisms? Determined in terms of 'a certain unity of writing'[286] the author functions as a 'source of expression' manifested 'equally well, and with similar validity in works, sketches, letters, fragments, and so on'.[287] Thus while author-function excludes letters but not novels, and has the philosopher being constructed differently from the poet, it also has the contradictory function of including various literatures within an author-described corpus on the all levelling basis of *writing*, which is again a reiteration that the author is a product of the text or corpus, while at the same time being the determinative factor in describing and limiting that corpus.

For Foucault, the author undergoes no death, but a reversal. While we are 'accustomed [...] to saying that the author is the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations'—a role not effectively removed by Barthes's effacement of the author in writing—in fact, Foucault argues, the author is a 'principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning'.[288] The author 'does not precede the works, he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses'.[289] Foucault's riposte to Barthes does not contest that the author is generated in writing, nor that he functions to limit the text, but that it is 'pure romanticism' to imagine a

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of events'. Thus, coinciding with Barthes' limiting author, Foucault notices that the author becomes the basis on which the presence of particular events in a work are explained, and 'also their transformations, distortions, and modifications'. He adds that while modern literary criticism is not concerned with matters of authentication, it 'still defines that author the same way'. Foucault, p. 151.

[286] In terms of Jerome's criteria.
[287] Foucault, p. 151.
[288] Foucault, p. 159.
[289] Foucault, p. 159.

culture in which writing would 'operate in an absolutely free state'.[290] The author-function may disappear, but it will also be replaced by another 'system of constraint—one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced.'[291] Similarly, for Jacques Derrida, who argues that by definition a text must be able to function in the absence of any specific reader or author (who is indeed, therefore, removed by the act of writing), it cannot be separated from context in general.[292]

2.3. *The Pragmatics of Reading*
Roland Barthes's dead author, both revivified in the text and, if waiting in the wings,[293] returning to take a position on the title page of a later book, barely stays buried. And if called upon simply to designate a particular text or corpus, which itself becomes the means by which the author is described, his limiting function cannot be said to have been entirely lost. The reader does not now run amok and spin interpretations in disregard of these factors, despite the misgivings produced in association with popular imaginings of postmodernism. The revolution awaited by Barthes, and mimicked by Eagleton,[294] has not occurred—the struggle continues.

In the *Role of the Reader*, Umberto Eco argues that an *open* text, one in which does not 'pull[…] the reader along a predetermined path'—for example James Joyce's *Ulysses*—forces a greater constraint upon the reader than a *closed* text such as Fleming's James Bond books. The latter, Eco argues, anticipates a readership of average education, becomes more pliable in the hands of a theoretically informed reader such as Eco himself (who attempts an ideological interpretation), while the

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[290] Foucault, p. 159.
[291] Foucault, p. 160.
[292] See pp. 225-229 below.
[293] 'The Author diminishing like a figurine at the far end of the literary stage'. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 145.
[294] Terry Eagleton, 'The Revolt of the Reader', in *New Literary History*, 13 (1982), pp. 439-52.

former, with its 'maze like structure' forces co-operation from a reader who must be of above average competency to cope with it: 'You cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it. An open text, however "open" it be, cannot afford whatever interpretation.'[295] Eco thereby displaces the role of the author with that of the text's own intentions. Elsewhere he claims that 'the rights of the interpreters have been overstressed',[296] and in 'Between Author and Text' he continues, 'every act of reading is a difficult transaction between the competence of the reader (the reader's world knowledge) and the kind of competence that a given text postulates in order to be read in an economical way'.[297] His distinction between simply *using* a text, for example citing Wordsworth's 'a poet could not but be gay' for the purpose of parody or to demonstrate the effects of reading in different contexts, and *interpreting* it by taking into account Wordsworth's 'cultural and linguistic background' is not simply to re-introduce biographically based interpretation, but to take into consideration the intentions of the text.[298] In so doing he separates the empirical author of history—whose personal intentions need not be known—from a Model Author of textual strategy. While he acknowledges a third, Liminal Author or Author on the Threshold—'the threshold between the intention of a given human being and the linguistic intention displayed by a textual strategy'[299]—a shadowy figure, present in the 'series of association' set up consciously or otherwise in the words of a text, he is to be constrained in the cause of interpretation by the economy of the text, and while the reader may enjoy any number of echo effects the text

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[295] Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indianna University Press,), p. 9.
[296] Umberto Eco, 'Interpretation and History', in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 23-43 (p. 23).
[297] Umberto Eco, 'Between Author and Text', in Stefan Collini, pp. 67-88 (p. 68).
[298] Eco, 'Between Author and Text', pp. 68-69.
[299] Eco, 'Between Author and Text', p. 69.

provides, 'at this point the act of reading becomes a *terrain vague* where interpretation and use inextricably merge together.'[300]

The draw of economy, pulling the reader back from brink of *use* to the solid ground of an *interpretation* based on a textual strategy, presents for Richard Rorty an unsustainable distinction. In so far as Eco separates the *intentions of a text* from those of an empirical author, and gives the reader the right to find in the former economic values unseen by the latter, can that economy-generating text then limit its own propensity to generate? 'Can it help [the reader] choose between competing suggestions—help separate the best interpretation from its competitors?'[301] Rorty promotes an 'unmethodological criticism' which 'uses the author or text not as a specimen reiterating a type but as an occasion for changing a previously accepted taxonomy, for putting a new twist on a previously told story'—in which the reader is 'enraptured or destabilized'.[302] If this sounds like the self-declared 'anti-essentialist' is taking the side of 'traditional humanistic criticism', Rorty himself pulls the reader back from the brink and adds 'this is not my intention'.[303]

Similarly, Stanley Fish criticises his own earlier writings, in which he had asserted that the 'reader comes to know that his experience of the poem is part of its subject',[304] for creating a similarly implausible trap: 'When someone would charge that an emphasis on the reader leads directly to solipsism and anarchy, I would reply by insisting on the constraints imposed on readers by the text.'[305] In a move similar to that of Eco, Fish had differentiated between *description* of the objective text and its *interpretation*, by which he denoted a process unconstrained by any principle and so

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[300] Eco, 'Between Author and Text', p. 71.
[301] Richard Rorty, 'The Pragmatist's Progress', in Stefan Collini, pp. 89-108 (p. 97).
[302] Rorty, p. 107.
[303] Rorty, p. 108.
[304] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in this Class: The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 6.

purely arbitrary (and so comparable to Eco's use of *use*), but then realised that

between description of an objective text and interpretation is assumed a linguistic and

textual fact. He later recognises that it is the interpreting subject who has to identify

these facts, thus blurring the distinction, and that 'the text as an entity independent of

interpretation [...] drops out and is replaced by the texts that emerge as the

consequence of our interpretative activities'.[306]

The very existence of text presumes intentional agency, as Stanley Fish points

out, 'one cannot read *or* reread independently of intention, that is, of the assumption

that one is dealing with marks or sounds produced by an intentional being, a being

situated in some enterprise to which he has a purpose of a point of view.'[307] Of

course, the discoverable intentions of an author do seem to supply a criterion by

which interpretations of a text may be evaluated, but as A. K. Adams points out, this

does not mean that there is a 'methodological or ethical obligation to defer to the

intention of the original author or "the historical author" of any particular stand-in',[308]

even if that were possible. As Barthes writes, 'it is not that the Author may not "come

back" in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a "guest".'[309] But *possibility* is a

further issue: in the absence of the constant supervision of a living author, the reader

is left with the text alone; as Terry Eagleton puts it, 'even if I do have access to

Shakespeare's mind when reading Hamlet, what is the point of putting it this way,

since all of his mind I have access to is the text of Hamlet? Why not just say instead

that I am reading Hamlet [...]?'[310] The reader is then left with the task of identifying

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[305] Fish, *Is There a Text*, p. 7.
[306] Fish, *Is There a Text* p. 13.
[307] Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), pp. 99-100.
[308] A. K. Adam, 'Author', in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* ed. by A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), pp. 8-13 (p. 12).
[309] Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', in Barthes, *Music Image Text*, pp. 155-164 (p. 157).
[310] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 41.

those elements within the text that direct reading or determine interpretation, which returns us rather to irreducible generations of the textual economy identified by Rorty and Fish.

The generative text of Jeremiah generates various Jeremiahs (or the lack of them) all deemed possible by the text's own economy (whilst indicating awkwardly the creative-imaginative role of the reader in that process). McKane's hypothesis of a rolling corpus, which states that texts generate texts, functions as something of an allegory of this principle. While assuming there is a kernel or seed of sorts from which generation takes its queue, this process is not carried out in a systematic way or in relation to the constraints of a perceived author, but is piecemeal and opportunistic. The rolling corpus would seem also then to function as a demonstration of Barthes's writerly text—'not a thing, we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore [...] is *ourselves writing*'[311]—quite literally even, since past readers have become its writers too. The result is 'a tissue of quotations',[312] and though this is Barthes's estimation of pretty much any text, the description seems particularly apt for Jeremiah, which even in Holladay's study is demonstrated to combine concepts and language from Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk—albeit passed through an individual prophet first.

2.4. *Conclusion*

The preceding discussion detects scenes of struggle where formerly one might have thought there were only 'clever, dandruffy people'[313] pouring over the complexities of a text to catch glimpses of a prophet. But as Susan Sontag has observed, 'piety

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[311] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 5. Original emphasis.
[312] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146.
[313] Hebrew scholars imagined by Lynn Truss in *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* (London: Profile Books, 2003), p. 75.

towards the troublesome text [...] may conceal an aggression';[314] 'post-mythic consciousness' finds the ancient texts 'in their pristine form, no longer acceptable. Interpretation is then to reconcile the ancient texts to "modern" demands'.[315] The interpreter cannot admit to doing this, and 'claims to be only making it intelligible, by disclosing its true meaning'.[316] Similarly, for Harold Bloom reading is 'an art of defensive warfare',[317] in which the critic exerts power over a text to subdue it. The subduing of Jeremiah has traditionally involved the discovery of a prophet-author, or indeed other historical agencies by which it may be explained in both form and content; the emergent figure(s) constituting a critical victory. The fast and loose play often presumed to be practiced by postmoderns *on* text, proves nothing compared with Skinner's imaginative over-sewing, the division into sources of Duhm and Mowinckel, and the outright tearing of the text by Bright. But the sheer 'multiplicity of divergent, even oppositional readings' in present day Jeremiah studies has brought about a state described by Carroll as '"a guerrilla war" [...] where there are no clear winners'.[318] It is the loss of consensus and ensuing impasse, he suggests, which make contemporary readings now pertinent.[319]

While texts, it seems, are inevitably sites of dramatic struggle—my recitation of the story of the text of Jeremiah, involving veiled figures, distorted images, and subsequent discussions of imprisoned readers, breakouts, poisoned pens, the overthrow of tyrants, rescues from the brink, the refusal of God, and murder, reads like a Gothic horror—we may not now readily accept that the corpse of a murdered Moses does lie 'beneath the pages of *Exodus*', Freud's discussion of the text of

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[314] Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', in *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 2001) pp. 3-14 (p. 6) (first publ. in *Evergreen Review* (1964)).
[315] Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 6.
[316] Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', p. 7.
[317] Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. 126
[318] Carroll, 'The Book of J', p. 222.

Exodus as 'two distinct forces diametrically opposed to each other' which have left

their traces on it, indicates that struggle, if not literal and historical, is not only part of

reading, but invited by the nature of the text itself.

3. *'Followers of the Veil*'[320]

The heritage of critical continuity stimulated by the search for the historical Jeremiah

is traced by Leo Perdue in his 1984 collection back to Duhm, and so the beginning of

the twentieth-century.[321] In the 1999 collection *Troubling Jeremiah* the quest is said

to have 'rushed towards the end of the century into impasse after impasse on almost

every major point of the agreed agenda set for reading and resolving the problems of

the Jeremiah tradition'.[322] For Robert Carroll, the loss of consensus on the reading of

Jeremiah constitutes a cause for the emergence of newer ways of reading the Bible—

'I doubt if I would be recommending an intertextual approach to reading Jeremiah if

more traditional ways of reading the biblical text had proved satisfactory.'[323] In his

introduction to *Troubling Jeremiah* Pete Diamond maps out this 'decided shift in

reading strategy'[324] with epigraphs lifted from a quite different Carroll—Lewis

Carroll. Jeremiah studies would seem to have entered a looking-glass world in which

the text is no longer perceived as a problem to be solved, but a riddle with no single

solution.

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[319] Carroll, 'The Book of J', p. 225.
[320] Eco, 'Overinterpreting Texts', in Stefan Collini, pp. 45-66 (p. 54).
[321] A continuity demonstrated by the inclusion of essays deemed still pertinent whilst dating back to the 1940s.
[322] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 15.
[323] Carroll, 'The Book of J' p. 225.
[324] Diamond, 'Introduction', pp. 15-32 (p. 15).

Diamond addresses the relation of new writers, or at least new writings, to the critical backdrop exemplified by the commentaries of the 1980s with two questions: 'what has current commentary on Jeremiah enabled us to see about the task of reading the prophetic book that represents indispensable gain? Yet what, at the same time, indicates we cannot simply continue within the framework of these reading strategies [...]?'[325] In answer to the first, he identifies the canonising process, which in either its maximal or minimal form, is understood to be a 'dehistoricising impulse' which invites a theoretical consideration of the codes which make such literary acts possible, rather than an historical account of them for which, and providing an answer to his second question, there is a 'fatal vacuum of direct, non-biblical, non-traditional, concrete, extrinsic information about any of the postulated historical agents'.[326]

The implicit positivism of these answers, coupled with their concern for the processes (though theoretical rather than historical) by which a Jeremiah scroll came into being, indicates some continuity with the concerns of traditional strategies of criticism. The discontinuity he describes as a reorientation from 'compositional history' to 'the poetics of the extant work'[327]—a 'decisive turn from reading for extrinsic agency behind the text to an intrinsic reading for an immanent and meaningful form'[328]—and in so doing, comments upon the 'texture' and 'literary seams'[329] of Jeremiah: an interest in the veil itself.

3.1. *The Return of the Veil*
The first contributor in *Troubling Jeremiah* is Louis Stulman whose monograph on the architecture of Jeremiah, *Order Amid Chaos*, bears the subtitle 'Jeremiah as

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[325] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 16.
[326] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 18.
[327] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 19.
[328] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 20.
[329] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 25.

symbolic tapestry'.[330] In his essay 'The Prose Sermons as Hermeneutical Guide to

Jeremiah 1-25',[331] he notes the common recognition that the Deuteronomistic History

is punctuated by prose speeches which interpret the course of events and proposes that

the prose sermons of Jeremiah—Mowinckel's C material—fulfil a similar function.

Criticising Bright's description of Jeremiah as a 'hopeless hodgepodge' and

McKane's hypothesis of a 'rolling corpus', Stulman argues that they fail to recognise

not only the commonly acknowledged macrostructures of the book—the Oracles

against the Nations (Jeremiah 46-51); the Book of Consolation (Jeremiah 30-33); and

the 'identifiable literary grouping' of Jeremiah 37-44—but also smaller structural

divisions.

In his analysis of Jeremiah 1-25, he detects five macro-units,[332] framed by an

introduction and conclusion, that together 'map out the dismantling of Judah's

symbolic universe, that is, its basic perception of life and reality'.[333] The first macro-

structure, Jeremiah 2-6 breaks down in further units 'with reasoned apology for

Yahweh's innocence and Judah's culpability' (Jeremiah 2), a 'jumbled and "messy"

literary and symbolic world' in which Yhwh responds to betrayal (Jeremiah 3), the

'total dismantling of life and all infrastructural supports' (Jeremiah 5-6),[334] with the

first prose sermon and beginning of the next macro-unit acting both as commentary

on the preceding chapters and 'seam of hinge'[335] introducing the next. Whilst its

depiction of Judah 'clinging tenaciously to the Jerusalem temple' marks 'a radical

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[330] Louis Stulman, *Order Amid Chaos: Jeremiah as Symbolic Tapestry* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998)

[331] Louis Stulman, 'The Prose Sermons as Hermeneutical Guide to Jeremiah 1-25: The Deconstruction of Judah's Symbolic World', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Stulman, pp. 34-63.

[332] Distinguished by basic indicators of structural divisions such as Jeremiah 7. 1; 11. 1; 18. 1; and 21. 1; and the shared rubric and prose style of Jeremiah 7. 1-3, 8; 11. 1-17; 18. 1-12; and 21. 1-10. Stulman 'Prose Sermons' p. 43.

[333] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 43.

[334] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 48.

[335] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 51.

departure' from the preceding picture of total abandon,[336] Stulman argues that the poetic chapters form a subtext: Judah is using the temple as a shelter from the indictments and as protection from 'Yahweh who has become a dangerous adversary'.[337] The attempt to avoid Yhwh's sovereign word is futile and results in the loss of land and shrine, which are 'imagined as approaching shifts in the symbolic arrangements of the universe'.[338]

The prose sermon of Jeremiah 7 not only punctuates but also 'reperforms' the poetry by sublimating the 'polyphonic and dissonant poetry' in the 'univocal and congruent prose' making 'crystal clear' that Judah's cultic behaviour is reprehensible.[339] In so doing it prepares for the following chapters (Jeremiah 8-10), which confirm that it is the faithless community of Judah and not Yhwh who is guilty of breaking the covenant. The following macro-units then similarly dismantle the covenant, which 'cannot save the community from radical redefinition of status required by exile';[340] the Jerusalem hierarchy; and finally, the royal ideology. Along the way, the narrative of the potter (Jeremiah 18) indicates that like the potter, 'Yahweh enjoys the utter freedom to reverse the good fortune of a nation', and the depiction of Jeremiah as Yhwh's covenant mediator who must suffer rejection, his cries of innocence in the Confessions accentuating Judah's guilt.

Stulman's book, of which his essay is really the first chapter, builds on this negotiation of the complex make up of Jeremiah. Maintaining throughout the metaphor of Jeremiah as 'a symbolic tapestry of meanings with narrative seams', Stulman argues that the book as a whole 'reflects an intentional literary organisation

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[336] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 49.
[337] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 50.
[338] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 50.
[339] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 50.
[340] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 53.

and final theological message'.[341] To arrive at this message he asks with James L.
Mays 'what is there in the text that transcends to make it more than a mere
collection?' [342] and suggests that following the dismantling of the community's social
and symbolic world, this is found in the confession of God's sovereignty; a growing
adherence to a book central to community formation; and the divergent views of
suffering: one that is coherent and retributive, and another which is 'counter-coherent
and replete with ambiguity'.[343] The first view of suffering, which assumes that this is
a predictable and morally unambiguous world, the good are considered 'insiders' who
are insulated from 'the perils posed by enemies' defined as those who live 'outside'
the sanctioned social structures.[344] A simple equation of the good with Israel, the bad
as foreign enemies, however is not presumed. Many of the nineteen references to an
'enemy' (אֹיֵב) in Jeremiah occur with Yhwh as active, delivering Judah to its
enemies (15. 9; 19. 7; 34. 20, for example); 'the real agent of impending disaster is
Yahweh himself'.[345] Similarly, many of the references to Babylon (בָּבֶל) refer to it as
Yhwh's instrument of assault—thus rebellion against Babylon is rebellion against
Yhwh. Those within Judah who rebel against Babylon are, therefore, 'indigenous
outsiders'.[346]

The fact that 'malevolent forces are *within* the community' brings about the
second category of suffering embodied by the 'raging persona of the prophet'.[347]
Jeremiah as the suffering servant of God represents 'the insider *par excellence*'.[348]
Taken together, argues Stulman, both forms of suffering witness to the dismantling of

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[341] Stulman, *Order*, p. 17.
[342] Cited in Stulman, *Order* p. 19.
[343] Stulman, *Order*, p. 20.
[344] Stulman, *Order*, p. 131.
[345] Stulman, *Order*, p 123.
[346] Stulman, *Order*, p. 128.
[347] Stulman, *Order*, p. 135. Original emphasis.
[348] Stulman, *Order*, p. 134.

the world once known but in so doing, 'pave the way for new and profound understandings of reality' as insiders have become outsiders and outsiders 'enjoy an ambivalent yet sanctioned place in this newly emergent world.'[349]

'Informed by the insights of historical criticism'[350] Stulman's reading strategy treats the text as text. To do so, his metaphor of 'tapestry' enables him to make the claim that 'in spite of the book's untidiness this literature is readable', though not 'by standards of linear logic and coherence'.[351] Throughout, he argues, the book of Jeremiah bears witness 'to an intentional shift from chaos and dissonance to order and coherence',[352] which he recognises in the textual strategies of the final form by means of its prose sermons, literary personas, and macro-structural units. Having dismissed Bright's charge that the book is a 'hodgepodge', in the conclusion Stulman admits that Yhwh is a 'jumbled character' and that the structuring prose can 'never wholly domesticate the turbulent and dangerous world of the poetry'.[353]

Stulman's depiction of the role of the sermons, to 'control'[354] the poetry while commenting upon it suggests his final form reading maintains diachronic assumptions;[355] and although Stulman's avoidance of personal pronouns—a circumvention which gives the effect that the text is its own writer—is studied, his stress on the 'intentional' and claim that Jeremiah 'is a rather carefully constructed composition with a purposeful design' suggests that the monograph is an example of imaginative redaction criticism. Confronted with Jeremiah it is a moot point whether one can say there is indeed order emerging from chaos or that the order is in fact

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[349] Stulman, *Order*, p. 136.
[350] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 17.
[351] Stulman, 'Prose Sermons', p. 17.
[352] Stulman, *Order*, p. 185.
[353] Stulman, *Order*, p. 187.
[354] A term repeatedly used of the function of the prose, for example, 'Prose Sermons', p. 50; and *Order* p. 19.
[355] Indeed, Stulman is up front about this, writing of 'the developing tradition'. *Order* p. 187.

rather overwhelmed, a point on which Stulman himself seems anxious. His own

preference is allied to the trajectory of his theology as Yhwh in the conclusion

becomes a God who suffers and 'who sculpts new beginnings and fresh shapes out of

the rubble of fallen worlds'.[356]

Stulman's assertion that Jeremiah is 'carefully constructed' with a 'discernible

theological *Tendenz*'[357]—despite the fact that many other scholars find it a

hodgepodge—suggests that he believes it finally describable: that the text bears its

own strategy which lays claim to an appropriate reading.[358] Given that the text itself is

the only datum and that, as Robert Carroll has pointed out, we have no knowledge of

how the text should be read, it could be argued that the controlling function Stulman

perceives in the prose sermons is little more than his own means of controlling the

surge of words in Jeremiah; by fixing on the speeches, Stulman has been able to form

meaningful patterns, but always with an awareness that these cannot 'nullify the

chaotic and liminal state of the text'.[359] His claim that they 'provide the most

important interpretative guides for reading Jeremiah'[360] does not need to be construed

as a more objective claim than that this is how he uses them, and with effect.

Stulman's attempts to tame Jeremiah are inevitably as futile as he believes the book's

attempts to tame Yhwh 'who refuses to be imprisoned by any closed system'.[361]

The turn from author to text, whilst marking 'a de-centring of extrinsic, and

historicist preoccupation to the intrinsic, imaginative world of the text',[362] may carry

with it an unaltered set of assumptions. Diamond's proposal that 'only as we discover

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[356] Stulman, *Order*, p. 188.
[357] Stulman, *Order*, p. 27.
[358] Which is described by Fish as a 'formalist assumption' affirming the integrity and objectivity of the text. Fish, p. 8.
[359] Stulman, *Order*, p. 187.
[360] Stulman, *Order*, p. 18.
[361] Stulman, *Order*, p. 187.
[362] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 20.

the semiotic grammar creating the symbolic, surface structure of the book of Jeremiah can we successfully demonstrate that there is a coherent system of meaning structured by the book'[363] replaces the role of the author with that of 'coherent system'. If the isolated and limited datum of the text of Jeremiah proves inadequate for the confident reconstruction of an author, it is unlikely to prove more capable of conveying impersonal, but no less objective reading criteria.

3.2. *Return of the (Hidden) Author*

Diamond's own depersonalising use of the term 'Jeremiah tradition' does not disguise the fact that Jeremiah, like Barthes's Author, waits in the wings, for Diamond's next statement is, 'the figure of Jeremiah remains troubled and troubling for the professional interpretative community'.[364] Diamond notes that the 'Jeremiahs' conceived in recent commentaries 'so profoundly differ that it was reasonable to ask if each were actually reading the same book!'[365] The textual economy of Jeremiah proving its potential to generate a variety of Jeremiahs such that the variants arising out of historical-criticism mean that advocates of the approach must account for the differences. Like Carroll, Helga Weippert does not situate the cause in the 'type of exegesis'[366]—that is, the principles of historical criticism—but in the conceptualisation of the literary process by which the Jeremiah literature was produced. Holladay and Duhm are labelled maximalist and minimalist respectively in regards to this; Holladay arguing for the maximum, Duhm the minimum of a 'retrievable authentic kernel in the tradition'.[367] But even among those who make no claims for a Jeremiah kernel, the figure of Jeremiah is perceived quite differently; both Carroll and Brueggemann recognising the prophet to be a production of the text,

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[363] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 21.
[364] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 15.
[365] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 15.
[366] Cited in Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 18.

not an entity preceding it, but while Brueggemann constructs an authoritative voice in opposition to opposing ideological voices,[368] Carroll recognises rather a plurality of conflicting characterizations.

Bearing down on the perceived intentions of the text are the intentions of the commentators whose 'cultural desires and ideological interests perennially circulate through the nexus of author-text-reader'.[369] Having described the text of Jeremiah itself as 'a gallimaufry of writings'[370] Carroll now applies that term to the secondary texts it generates, counting his essay a 'further contribution to such a gallimaufry of readings'.[371] This recognition of a continuity between the nature of the Jeremiah corpus and the nature of the collected texts generated by it is picked up in his general assertion that 'writers of texts are first readers of other texts' and leads him to the more particular statement that 'writers of Jeremiah were readers of other scrolls'.[372]

McKane's rolling corpus, which acknowledges overtly that text generates text, itself depends upon the fact that those who added to the growing book were its readers. And when the rolling stopped and the text, so weighed down with a whole history of writing, ground to a halt, the reading and so the writing did not end. As 'many similar words' were added *to* Jeremiah's scroll (Jeremiah 36), words continued to be added by both ancient and modern commentary. Antipathy towards the scroll meant that the prophet and scribe, Jeremiah and Baruch, required protection—'and Yhwh hid them' (Jeremiah 36. 26). Josephus then adds more words to this:

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[367] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 17.
[368] See Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 11-20.
[369] Diamond, 'Introduction', p. 25.
[370] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 38.
[371] Carroll, 'The Book of J', p. 222.
[372] Carroll, 'The Book of J', p. 229.

> Then he ordered that a search be made for both Jeremiah and his scribe
>
> Baruch and that they be bought to him for punishment. So then they
>
> escaped his wrath.[373]

Barton notes that an odd feature of the development of the figures of Jeremiah and Baruch in later writings is that 'Baruch came to usurp pride of place from his master Jeremiah'.[374] Though various accounts have been given for this phenomenon, Barton himself suggests it is because, like Ezra who similarly eclipses Nehemiah, Baruch was a writer—'it made sense to attribute books to them rather than to people like Jeremiah who spoke rather than writing.'[375] Nevertheless the figure of Jeremiah had a reasonable after-life and his character developed beyond the characterisations of the book, as he became a seer predicting the distant future, a wonder worker, and a figure of the end times.

The boundary of the text is broken, and the author becomes part of a corpus growing beyond the book. Barthes makes a distinction between the *work*, as 'a fragment of substance, occupying part of the space of books (in a library for example)[...] the work can be held in the hand', and the *text*, 'a methodological field [...] held in language'.[376] Text holds within it the intertextual which is 'not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try and find the "sources", the "influences" of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas'.[377] That the writers of Jeremiah were readers of other scrolls is enough for Carroll to undermine the principal of 'looking for original speakers whose

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[373] Josphus cited in John Barton, 'Jeremiah in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Stulman, pp. 306-317 (p. 306).
[374] Barton, 'Jeremiah in the Apocrypha', p. 306.
[375] Barton, 'Jeremiah in the Apocrypha', p. 308.
[376] Roland Barthes, 'From Work to Text', p. 156-157.

utterances we would like to think were written down and then transmitted faithfully over millennia'.[378] Rather he envisages the writers of scrolls being first readers of scrolls and in their scrolls carried on dialogues with other scrolls.

3.4. *Conclusion*

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.[379]

By any description—as the labour of love of a prophet and his close colleagues; the work of many hands (often perceived as too many cooks); or 'a mosaic of quotations'[380]—the veil of Jeremiah is the result of a painstaking process of writing and dissemination and so takes its place in the Old Testament/ Hebrew Bible, described by Elaine Scarry as both 'monumental artefact' and 'a monumental description of the nature of artefact'.[381] In this much, the endless generation of words of the Jeremiah tradition is analogous to the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus, which Scarry describes as 'laden with thick sequences of precise requirements that stun the mind with their confident sweep of beautiful detail'.[382] The God of the Bible being bodiless,[383] must be incarnated in textiles and in texts, so it is through the tireless descriptions of the construction in linen, hair, and goatskin of the curtains of the tabernacle 'there gradually comes before us in these

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[377] Barthes, 'From Work to Text', p. 160.
[378] Carroll, 'The Book of J', p. 229.
[379] Oscar Wilde cited by Susan Sontag in 'Against Interpretation', p. 3.
[380] Soggin, p. 340; Collins, p. 104; Carroll, 'Book of J', p. 223.
[381] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 181.
[382] Scarry, p. 211.
[383] When God allows himself to materialise, as when Moses is permitted not to see his face, but his back, Scarry notes, 'the aspect of God most prominently represented is his unrepresentability, his hiddenness, his absence,' p. 211.

endless tiers of tissue something that seems the magnificent and monumental tissue of the body of God'.[384]

It is a paradox perceived by Scarry in the scriptures, that 'God's existence seems so absolute and human belief in that existence so assumed and widely shared that doubt within the story of any one individual's life or any one epoch seems like only a small tear in the page', while at the same time, 'on every page described in these writings is the incredible difficulty, the feat of the imagination and agony of labour required in generating an idea of God.'[385] The production of the materials of this central and centring shrine requires an increase of words, and consequently the generation of a fullness that belies a central formlessness so that 'what at the same time comes before us is the veil, the materialisation of the refusal to be materialised, the incarnation of absence'.[386] Scarry's explanation of the biblical description of the textiles of the tabernacle is like Barthes's description of text as an onion, 'a construction of layers (or levels, or systems), whose body contains, finally, no heart, no kernel, no secret, no irreducible principle, nothing except the infinity of its own envelopes—which envelope nothing other than the unity of its own surfaces',[387] and which in turn returns us to Jeremiah, whose voice, so detectable to Holladay, is dispersed among the many readers and writers rolled up in his corpus, and now part of the 'weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric)'.[388]

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[384] Scarry, p. 211.
[385] Scarry, p. 198.
[386] Scarry, p. 211.
[387] Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Hill and Wang, 1986), p. 99.
[388] Barthes, 'From Work to Text', p. 159.

4. *A Veil of Tears: Jeremiah as Epic and Fabric*

...and make

My Curtain half high, don't seal off the stage!

Leaning back in his chair, let the spectator

Be aware of busy preparations, made for him.[389]

The Bible, which has starred in numerous theatrical productions from the medieval

Mystery Plays to relatively recent shows such as Peter Shaffer's *Yonadab* (1985),[390] is

not shy about treading the boards. By placing Jeremiah on stage at the Theater am

Schiffbauerdamm however, where the Berliner Ensemble has continued to perform

the plays of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) since 1954, I propose neither to dramatise the

book (already achieved in 2000 in a made-for-television film starring Patrick

Dempsey and Oliver Reed), nor to examine its cultural appropriations (though Brecht

once cited the Bible as 'der stärkste Eindruck'—'the strongest influence'—on his

writings),[391] but to rehearse it in a setting for which it seems strangely suited.

Stimulated by the uncanny congruence between the episodic form of Brecht's plays

and the dissonant and discontinuous structure of the prophetic text, I shall offer an

articulation of the latter in terms of the former, exchanging (or at least infiltrating) the

familiar vocabulary of *sources* and *redactions*, *deuteronomists* and *rolling corpuses*,

with the alien (and alienating) terms *episch*, *Gestus*, and *Verfremdunseffekt* in a bid to

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[389] Bertolt Brecht cited in Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils*, 4th edn (London: Methuen Drama, 1984), p. 126.

[390] Peter Shaffer, *Yonadab: A Play* (London: HarperCollins, 1992).

[391] Often thought to refer to little more than the influence of the language of the Lutheran Bible, it has been shown to extend to themes, even narrative ideas. See G. Ronald Murphy, *Brecht and the Bible: A Study of Religious Nihilism and Human Weakness in Brecht's Drama of Mortality and the City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 3.

show (or perform) the text in a context removed from its usual arena in biblical studies.

Brecht's 'epic [*episch*] theatre', as Elizabeth Wright points out, is 'designed to provoke the realization in the spectator that intervention is a real possibility. [...] Both actors and spectators are invited, even incited, to play their part in the construction of a narrative other than the one that the received version of history proposes'.[392] It offers, to borrow from Brueggemann, 'an imaginative world that is an alternative to the one that seems to be at hand—alternative to the one in which the reader or listener thinks herself or himself enmeshed.'[393] In so doing, it instigates a cycle of identification and critique—a contestation of representations of historical reality—that becomes a 'collective labour, involving material produced by author, actor, and spectator':[394] a 'joint participation' in which 'the author is no longer just a hidden persuader, but openly solicits collaboration'.[395] In this new and experimental space, the text(ile) of Jeremiah is transformed from veil into curtain, which like the Brechtian screen, remains in view bearing images and slogans that comment on the proceedings and hides few, if any, of the rigs and ropes of production. And where it (un-typically) offers a more or less seamless image of the world of the prophet, as if through a *slit window* in the otherwise dense weave of words,[396] it is now seen to open onto something akin to the well-made play: a finished product which demands little

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[392] Elizabeth Wright, *Postmodern Brecht: A Representation* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 2.
[393] Brueggemann, p. 15.
[394] Wright, p. 1.
[395] Wright, p. 26
[396] An image borrowed from Cyril Rodd: 'Often when we visit a mediaeval castle we climb a spiral staircase to the top of the keep. For most of the time we are surrounded by blank walls, but as we clamber up we pass slit windows through which we obtain glimpses of the countryside that surrounds the castle. The view is narrowly restricted and we often find it difficult to imagine what the whole panorama looks like.' Cyril Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), p. 3.

from its reader.[397] On these occasions it fulfils Barthes's description of the 'readerly'

(*lisible*) text as that in which the user, divorced from the process of production, is

plunged into 'a kind of idleness'.[398] Conversely (and far more typically), where the

text is piecemeal and seemingly unfinished, it remains a perpetual present requiring

collaboration from its reader in the continuing business of construction in which

reading becomes the '*ourselves writing*' characteristic of the 'writerly' (*scriptable*)

text.[399] Of course, no section of Jeremiah can really be considered readerly—even at

its most organised it does not encourage idleness—and while Barthes seems to

suggest that readerly or writerly qualities are inherent in particular literary styles, he

continues his argument with a writerly commentary on a readerly classic—Balzac's

Sarrasine—and so undermines his own distinction while demonstrating that this

distinction resides as much (if not more) in the expectations of the reader as it does in

the text.

The Brechtian stage is the writerly stage in that there is no event apart from its

audience whose comments and commentary are as integral to the text in play as any

published script.[400] Thus in the following three sections, I shall observe the production

of Jeremiah from a position well back in the (well-lit) auditorium from where I can

see its commentators and critics engaging with the spectacle. From my position in the

'gods' I shall respond to the proceedings, not by producing a new and definitive

interpretation, nor to analyse textual minutiae (I am too far away, and it is the wrong

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[397] The nine chapters of narrative in Jeremiah 37-45, for example, take up fewer pages of commentary than the nine chapters of poetry and prose in Jeremiah 11-19: 52 pages fewer in Jones; 47 pages fewer in Carroll; 39 pages fewer in McKane. Brueggemann, wittingly or otherwise, makes use of Eco's terminology to suggest that the poetry in Jeremiah is 'more open', the prose 'more prone to closure', p. xiii. The analogy, of course, is weak: though perhaps more immediately accessible, Jeremiah 37-45 is nevertheless 'temporally and spatially disorientating' (Callaway, p. 172) in a manner that the well-made play, traditionally understood, is not.

[398] Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 4. Original emphasis.

[399] Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 5. Original emphasis.

[400] Brecht's scripts were continually re-written, often in response to the comments and suggestions of both the actors and audience.

kind of theatre for opera glasses), but to note how Jeremiah might perform in this context, while suggesting that it already does. Brecht's dramaturgy is informed by his Marxism, but the result is less a presentation of dogma, than what Frederic Jameson calls 'a sly "method"' which 'successfully eludes all the objections modern philosophy has persuasively made against the reification of the methodological as such'.[401] It is a self-critical practice that is both engaging and entertaining: a means rather than an end, or a convergence of the two. It is, as Jameson continues, 'the teaching of a practice also being a practice in its own right, and thereby "participating" in the very satisfactions it holds out to its student practitioners.'[402] Similarly, I suggest, Jeremiah—and perhaps the prophets in general—present less dogma or message than a 'sly "method"': less a content that can be named prophecy, than a mode of reading (which proves also to be writing) that is itself *prophetic*.

4.1. *Complete Seeing in Jeremiah*

> Greetings, Prophet;
>
> The Great Work begins:
>
> The Messenger has arrived.[403]

The ascendance of final form readings of Jeremiah—opposed, that is, to the historical-critical separation of authentic and inauthentic (or secondary) words—has been accompanied by (or inspired by, or made possible by) claims for its unity as *book*.

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[401] Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 2.
[402] Jameson, p. 4.
[403] Tony Kushner, *Angels In America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes. Part One: Millennium Approaches* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1992), p. 119.

Martin Kessler writes of a '(kerygmatic) stamp' left by final editors or authors;[404] Stulman, of 'underlying theological strategies' that bring to the 'turbulent and dangerous world of the poetry' order, coherence and a 'theological *Tendenz*'.[405] Dissonance is not ignored, but recognised for its role in attesting to the 'wild and undomesticated God who refuses to be imprisoned by any closed system'[406] without undoing the book entirely—'in spite of paradoxes created by multiple voices, the work demonstrates a unity of purpose and coherence that should be taken seriously'.[407] Contradiction in the text, it is argued, is also managed by the text. Thus while the voices bring complexity and resist the (reductive) determination of a definitive meaning, they are not thought to undermine a unifying teleology discussed in terms of 'message'.[408] Above all, it is the status of the book as scripture that frames it and sets this search for coherence in motion: 'there still seem to be many readers', writes Kessler, 'who are interested in hearing its message.'[409] Returning to the nomenclature of Barthes, the text—by any reckoning *writerly*—is approached with expectations that are *readerly*, its *Tendenz*, when defined, taking the place of an historical author and 'conducting meaning' like a god in relation to which the critic 'is the priest whose task is to decipher the Writing of the god'.[410] I shall consider one such exegetical position in further detail before reconsidering it within a Brechtian scheme.

Brueggemann too hears 'the sounding of many voices',[411] either reflecting or resisting the will of Yhwh which, he argues, give Jeremiah a dynamism that defies

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[404] Martin Kessler, 'Editor's Introduction', in *Reading the Book of Jeremiah: A Search for Coherence* ed. by Martin Kessler, (Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, 2004), pp. xi-xiv (p. xiii).
[405] Stulman, *Order*, p. 185.
[406] Stulman, *Order*, p. 186.
[407] Kessler's comment is made in reference to the overall argument of the writers in this edited collection. Kessler, 'Editor's Introduction', p. xii.
[408] Kessler, 'Editor's Introduction', p. xi.
[409] Kessler, 'Editor's Introduction', p. xii.
[410] Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 174.

interpretations closed by 'positivist, historicist, objectivist claims'.[412] Resistant to

'final readings',[413] he finds the text 'endlessly subtle and, when we are attentive,

resist[ant to] every reading that gives closure'.[414] Suspicious of both ideological and

canonical readings—understood to be the flipside of each other—for their tendency to

flatten the text by remaining on the 'outside' and measuring it in line with the limiting

calibrations of '*Enlightenment norms*' or '*the Christian tradition*',[415] Brueggemann

recommends that readers '"go inside" and follow where the text itself seems to point,

without premature judgements grounded in past interpretative commitments'.[416] The

text itself is not, he believes, 'endlessly indeterminate' claiming that it 'does indeed

make its own convoluted advocacy',[417] its many 'voices' yielding to an overall

design. Not only is it possible to follow its convolutions, it is imperative to do so: the

reader's own voice, at best only one more noise in the hubbub, must like the others

yield to this design and be shaped by the text. It is not we who are submitting

Jeremiah to '"interpretation" or "application"', it is rather 'that we submit our

experience to it'[418]—it is 'our situation', he argues, 'not the text, that requires new

interpretation'.[419]

While Brueggemann recognises that Jeremiah is itself 'an *ideological offer*',[420]

he proposes that it simultaneously 'dismisses ideology, exposes propaganda, overrides

anxiety, and offers forgiveness in the place of brutality'[421] not only to its ancient

audience, but also to its present day readers. It is, he argues, a 'textual tradition' that

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[411] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 13.
[412] Brueggemann, *A Commentary,* p. x.
[413] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 15.
[414] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. xii.
[415] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. xii. Original emphasis.
[416] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. xii.
[417] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. ix.
[418] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 18.
[419] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 18.
[420] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. x. Original emphasis.
[421] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 19.

witnesses to an 'inescapable hovering of God that is oddly sovereign in ways that outdistance our desperate modernity' and through which 'ancient hearing and speaking keeps pushing into our present'.[422] Thus while acknowledging the textuality and historical specificities of the Jeremiah tradition,[423] he nevertheless asserts that what it '"meant" has the incredible power to "mean" now';[424] 'it is as if', comments Carroll, '2500 years had never happened'.[425] Carroll, in fact, accuses Brueggemann, Holladay, Jones and others of assuming that there is 'a direct link between the words of the text and whatever they imagine to be the transcendental' a position he describes as bordering on 'fundamentalism'.[426] Brueggemann's exegetical policy, which despite reference to sociological and literary analysis, is one of *submit and follow*, seems to make reading an act of devotion to a perceived textual τέλος-on-high, a 'hovering of God' which escapes mere textuality and historical contingency. Brueggemann as devotee hands himself over to the (spiritual) direction of the text, surrendering to its (inherent) discipline.[427]

As Rorty and Fish argue,[428] the identification of an implicit textual strategy (here 'the action and voice of the text') is dependent upon the reader's own strategy, presumably, unavoidably linked to 'prior commitments'[429] be they ideological, theological, or otherwise. Brueggemann himself admits that '"inside" work is never fully innocent', and even considers 'prior commitments' to feminism with approval; Carroll, for one, suggests that 'the text has been domesticated quintessentially by

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[422] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, pp. 19-20.

[423] 'A commentary as this one must focus on what the text of Jeremiah meant in its ancient speaking and hearing'. Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 19.

[424] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 19.

[425] Robert P. Carroll, 'Something Rich and Strange: Imagining a Future for Jeremiah Studies', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Stulman, pp. 423-443 (p. 437).

[426] Carroll, 'Something Rich', p. 473.

[427] Rid of 'prior commitments' Brueggemann's reader is also childlike in his or her approach to the text-as-kindergarten, there to 'remain and play and listen and notice'. Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. xii.

[428] See above, pp. 66-70.

[Brueggemann's] own ecclesiastical theology'.[430] Thus while it seems reasonable to argue that scholars should not read in procrustean beds, it is also reasonable to question whether they can attain even the partial innocence Brueggemann seems to be seeking. To avoid a readerly flattening of the text, Brueggemann appears to recommend a flattening of critical faculties, or a loosening from critical commitments, certainly insofar as they criticise or critique what he determines to be the theological thrust of the book.

Brueggemann's summary that 'Jeremiah articulates a dispute (reflective of a conversation in Jerusalem) about who rightly understands historical events and who rightly discerns the relationship between faith, morality, and political power' suggests that the reader might engage with the book in the same critical and speculative manner that an audience is encouraged to engage with the plays of Brecht. His following arguments however, indicate that for Brueggemann, *inside* is also *on*side: 'Jeremiah is nearly unambiguous in its conviction that the Jerusalem ideology is a mistaken, fraudulent notion of public life that can only lead to death';[431] that the tradition 'insists that covenant fidelity is the clue to public well-being'; and that what it 'meant' it still 'means'.

> Indeed, everything depends upon our reading and hearing of this text. If we
> fail to hear this text, we may succumb to a fraudulent discernment of our
> situation. Like ancient Jerusalem, we shall imagine that our situation is
> decided by the policies of the empire and not by the pathos of the holy,
> faithful God.[432]

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[429] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. xii.
[430] Carroll, 'Something Rich and Strange', p. 437.
[431] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 14

But Brecht, for whom the spectator is no more outside a performance than outside the particular society that produces or performs it, seeks instead to place the spectator 'above' rather than 'in the stream'[433]—'this passion for propelling the spectator along a single track where he can look neither right nor left, up nor down', Brecht writes, 'is something the new school of play-writing must reject'.[434] Unlike Brueggemann, who advises that the exegete should pass through an ideological coat-check before entering Jeremiah,[435] Brecht criticises the assumption that spectators should 'hand in their hat at the cloakroom, and with it [...] their normal behaviour: the attitudes of "everyday life"',[436] calling the tendency for an audience to become 'a passive (suffering) part of the total work of art' a form of 'witchcraft' to be 'fought against'.[437] Taking up arms by recommending that 'footnotes, and the habit of turning back to check a point, need to be introduced into play-writing too',[438] he calls for the 'literarization of the theatre'—achieved through the use of 'screens on which the titles of each scene are projected'[439]—enabling the audience to cross-reference and so cross-examine the unfolding narrative. 'Instead of being enabled to have an experience', he says, the spectator should be 'forced to cast a vote'.[440]

Brecht describes the 'literarization of the theatre' as an 'exercise in complete seeing'.[441] Scene titles, likened by Jameson to 'the chapter headings of eighteenth-

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[432] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 18.
[433] Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1957), p. 44
[434] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 44.
[435] By which means, 'the interpreter focuses on the action and voice of the text itself and is not led away from the actual work of the text by any external reference or hypothesis.' Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 15.
[436] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 39.
[437] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 38.
[438] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 44.
[439] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 44.
[440] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 39.
[441] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 44

century novels which announce their contents to the curious',[442] are projected or dropped down to place the spectator in the privileged position of having both forward and footnote to the unfolding events. In *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1940), for example, scene one is introduced with the heading, 'Spring 1664. The Swedish Commander-in-Chief Count Oxenstierna is raising troops in Dalecarlia for the Polish campaign. The Canteen woman Anna Fierling, known under the name of Mother Courage, loses one son'.[443] The punch-line disclosed, suspense is denied and the dramatic drive is interrupted; the spectator, no longer drawn into the stream by the desire to know what will happen, finds him or herself above the stream: detached and so speculative and critical. As subsequent headings continue to chronicle the events of the Thirty Years War 'through which the smaller destinies of Mother Courage and her family are doomed to pass', the episodes function 'as stages of a great lesson, which Mother Courage fails to learn'.[444] Like a spectator at the orthodox theatre, Courage is caught in the current of an unfolding drama; she is, as Barthes suggests, 'so much inside the war that she does not see it'.[445] Yet it is her blindness, recognised by the audience alone, which becomes a means of seeing: 'she sees nothing, but we see through her.'[446] Given this privileged perspective, the spectator, who (to use another metaphor of the senses from Barthes) 'hears the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him',[447] is turned from passive consumer to active critic, casting his or her vote as the characters speak and act.

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[442] Jameson, p. 44

[443] Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 3.

[444] Jameson, p. 44.

[445] Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. by Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 34.

[446] Barthes, *Critical Essays*, p. 34.

[447] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 148.

Both foreward and footnote, Jeremiah 1.1-3 similarly situates and anticipates the chapters that follow. Comparable to, but longer than, the colophons in other prophetic texts (Isaiah 1. 1; Hosea 1. 1; but most closely, Amos 1. 1), it places the career of the prophet (דברי ירמיהו 'The things of Jeremiah' 1. 1)[448] in a specific historical setting—the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, and (flicking to the last page) 'until the captivity (גלות) of Jerusalem' (1. 3; cf. 52. 27-34): 'it is', Brueggemann observes, 'as if in this terse preface we are given the entire plot to the book of Jeremiah.'[449] Confirming the brute historical fact of captivity whilst prefacing a book set in the period that precedes it, the editorial introduction places the reader above the stream, from where they might speculate about the coming catastrophe. A significant segment of the history of Judah thus becomes the narrative setting for a cross-examination of events and ideas, and the characters (prophets, priests, people, and kings) involved in and representing them. National history and prophetic career— a forty-year period (reckoned by royal dating), and so an archetypal biblical age[450]— are further framed, indeed defined, by the repeated comings of the word of Yhwh ([...] ויהי בימי [...] היה דבר יהוה בימי 'The word of Yhwh came in the days of [...] and it came in the days of [...]', 1. 2-3) marking this, more specifically, as an age or epoch of prophecy. In this way, prophecy is as much an undoing of processes in history, as it is an articulation of them: like Walter Benjamin's 'angel of history', prophecy provides a perspective of 'complete seeing' poised between past catastrophe and an inconceivable future in a 'time filled by the presence of the now' (*Jetztzeit*) which marks a break or cessation in all process 'blast[ing] a specific era out of the

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[448] Traditionally rendered 'words of', דבר combines the concepts of 'history', 'events', 'things'.
[449] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 22.
[450] Moses led Israel in the wilderness for forty years (Deuteronomy 34. 7); David reigned forty years over Israel (I Kings 2. 11). Carroll suggests that this is intentionally schematic (Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 90), Lundbom, that it is not. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 225.

homogeneous course of history'[451]—a messianic time in which all history is given meaning retrospectively. It is an *epoch*, then, in a sense that looks back to the Greek etymology of that word as a 'holding up' or 'suspension'. Clement writes of prophecy—as it is now presented in written form—as if it were a (particularly vertiginous) mode of complete seeing, 'a kind of divine overview of the events'.[452] But for Brueggemann, and Stulman for that matter, it is 'evocative and constructive of another life world':[453] a theatricalization of events which 'invites the listener to participate [...] so that one can imagine a terminated royal world while that world still exists, and one can receive in imaginative prospect a new community of covenant faith where none has yet emerged'.[454] It is not a final interpretation of objective events, but the construction of an alternative history: the verbal fabrication of an age, which mediates through 'poetic anguish, lyrical expectation, metaphorical openness, and imaginative ambiguity' an underlying τέλος of 'sovereign hurt and fidelity'.[455] Brueggemann writes of the text as 'concrete',[456] but as an imaginative positing of the world, it is also constructed, its τέλος—if discoverable and persuasive—is at most a point of orientation unable to escape the provisional (not final) nature of textuality; speculative and critical, it is not itself beyond speculation and critique.

Jeremiah 21. 1-10 also acts as title or preface, on this occasion to the cycle of stories concerning the last king of Judah (Jeremiah 37-40), with which it has numerous linguistic and thematic connections,[457] announcing, as summarised by Carroll, 'that the royal house is doomed and that in the days of Zedekiah the

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[451] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 245-255 (p. 263).
[452] Clement, p. 13.
[453] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 15.
[454] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 17.
[455] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 20.
[456] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 16.
[457] Jeremiah 21. 2 is repeated with variations in 37. 3-5; 21. 3-7 parallel to 37. 6-9; 21. 8-10, reissued with alteration in 38. 2-3.

Babylonians captured the city, fired it and executed the king's sons and his nobles. Now read on!'[458] With this information, 'read[ing] on' is no simple matter of being carried along by the current of a plot; as the story of the fall of Jerusalem is played out, the reader follows the moves of the inhabitants of the city as they pass, like Mother Courage, through stages in a lesson—that intercession is useless (37. 3); that the (temporary) withdrawal of the 'Chaldeans' (37. 5) can bring only false hope (37. 8); that military resistance is futile, even the wounded of the enemy would rise up and fight again (37. 10); and that 'salvation' comes by surrendering and going out to the enemy alone (38. 2)—which all (bar one) fail to learn.

Represented as the word of Yhwh through his prophet (הדבר אשר־היה אל ירמיהו מאת יהוה 'The word which came to Jeremiah from Yhwh', 21. 1) the preface is far from impartial, and while hindering dramatic drive, it sets in motion an alternative, if not more forceful interpretative current—that the events which follow express the will of Yhwh who is now fighting against Jerusalem (21. 5). Thus during the struggle of voices in Jeremiah 37-39, there appears to be little doubt, not simply of the outcome of the choices made by the various characters, but how those outcomes are to be understood: political resistance to the impending Babylonian destruction (the action of the leaders of Jerusalem) is not only futile (37. 10), it is itself a policy which deserves divine judgement (21. 8-10; 38. 2-3)—to resist the Babylonians is to resist Yhwh.

In *Mother Courage*, as in Greek Tragedy, the spectator is engaged by the 'incongruity between what it knows in advance and the imperfect knowledge of the dramatis personae'.[459] In Jeremiah 37-39, however, the dramatis personae are denied

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[458] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 140.
[459] Bernhard Zimmermann, *Greek Tragedy: An Introduction*, trans. by Thomas Marier (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 91.

the mitigating circumstances of imperfect knowledge: themselves blind, they

nevertheless have a seer in their midst who is adept at complete seeing. Sharing

something of the perspective of the reader (knowledge of the divine policy of

destruction), the prophet recites for them straight from the word of Yhwh: from 21. 3-

7 ('And the Chaldeans will surely return and fight against this city; they shall take it

and burn it with fire'; 37. 8); and then from 21. 8-10 ('Those who stay in the city shall

die by the sword. [...] But those who go out to the Chaldeans shall live' 38. 2). With

the advantage of having someone reading the stage placards—had Mother Courage

the same advantages, she may have made different choices—the continuing blindness

and deafness of the inhabitants of Jerusalem seems wilful; in fact, readers are left in

no doubt about this: in another preface, they are informed that 'neither [Zedekiah] nor

his servants nor the people of the land listened (שמע) to the words of Yhwh that he

spoke through his prophet Jeremiah' (37. 2). The prophet who read from the word,

and who often seems also to read from the words of Deuteronomy, is confronted by

people who refuse to comply with a central theme of the book of law: to 'listen' (37.

2; 37. 14; Deuteronomy 18. 19).

As scripture, however, Jeremiah is itself framed by other words—the writings

of other seers reading from the placards and texts of their own dramas—'other

institutions', as Brecht might call them, which can be brought to bear on the narrative

in play.[460] Some commentators 'turning back to check a point' note that the leaders in

Jerusalem might simply be reading from (or listening to) another word from Yhwh,

for example, that given by Isaiah whose literacy as a prophet is already proven.

Zedekiah's request for intercession ('Please pray for us [התפלל־נא] to Yhwh our

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[460] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 43. As part of the 'literarization of the theatre', Brecht had also citations and comments from outside the play, slogans and images—of people starving, or of gluttons—projected to

God' 37. 3) seems to be a repetition, or at least an event comparable to Zedekiah's request that inspires the word in 21. 1-10: 'Please inquire (דרש־נא) of Yhwh on our behalf […] perhaps (אולי) Yhwh will perform his wonderful deeds for us, as he has often done' (21. 2). The often done 'wonderful deeds', which may refer to a number of traditions from the exodus onwards, in this context plausibly alludes to the miraculous rescue of besieged Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah (II Kings 18. 17-19. 37; Isaiah 36-37), an event that seems to have confirmed an ideology of the inviolability of the city, a belief to which Isaiah made no small contribution.[461]

There is little, perhaps, that is complete about complete seeing. Eagleton writes of Brecht 'encouraging in the audience "complex seeing"',[462] which might well be a slip, but if so, a helpful one. Seeing cannot help but be historically (and in this case, textually) situated and so limited, and hindsight, whilst enabling a broad view, is far from omniscient. Brecht never proposes an absolute or dogmatic answer to the events enacted, but offers rather 'several conflicting possibilities at any particular point', each of which is to be considered and critiqued.[463] Similarly, though often in a more biased format, Jeremiah addresses 'conflicting possibilities' or articulations of the past, none of which can reasonably be taken as the final word, even Brueggemann, for whom 'the words of this book stand in some special connection with the word of

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contextualize further the actions of the characters. See Walter Benjamin 'What is Epic Theatre? [First Version]' in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. by Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 1-14 (p. 7).
[461] Bright writes, 'Doubtless they [Zedekiah and his messengers] think particularly of Jerusalem's marvellous deliverance from Sennacherib, king of Assyria, a century earlier,' p. 215; McKane, 'The king's representatives are asking Jeremiah for a reassuring oracle of the kind which Isaiah is said to have uttered (Isa 37.33-35; 2 Kgs 19.35-36) and are looking for a miracle of the kind which saved Jerusalem on that earlier occasion', *Jeremiah 1*, p. 496. 'One generation's prophecy', writes Carroll, 'is the next generation's superstition!' *From Chaos*, p. 303.
[462] Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1976), p. 65.
[463] Eagleton, *Marxism*, p. 65. Watching *Mother Courage*, spectators see something (to put it reductively) of the 'futility of war', and with the help of projections and placards rise 'above the stream' to speculate about how things might be otherwise, albeit without reaching a definitive solution: indeed, learning to speculate, to question, to 'see', is the pedagogy of the play ('the bitterest lesson', writes Brecht, is simply to see a character not learning). Brecht, *Mother Courage*, p. 146.

Yahweh', does not equate them absolutely.[464] Other commentators loosen that

connection further and suggest that given the circumstances (that a new but yet

unproven divine policy regarding protection was in play) Zedekiah's hopeful 'perhaps

(אולי) Yhwh will perform his wonderful deeds', not unreasonable. The single brute

datum of Jerusalem's destruction demolishes that hope and so demands further

speculation take place; the speculation in Jeremiah, primarily that Yhwh was active

and punishing his people, is one such, but covers anxieties voiced (mostly negatively)

in the continuing speculations of other commentators: Clements, for example, writes,

'a cynical response to the events of Judah's downfall might have concluded that such

gods as there were cruel and despotic, paying no heed to human misery and grief.

Another perspective would have been to think of one God alone as the ruler of the

universe, but as a being so remote and detached from human affairs as to play no

effective part in them.'[465] The prophets, as Carroll has pointed out, permit 'YHWH to

be blamed for what happened, though 4.10 may hint at such an explanation without

any degree of developed articulation.'[466]

As they criticise and speculate, scholars begin to cast their votes. Else Holt

believes that these chapters provide 'the ultimate justification for the terrible events

that lead up to the destruction of the temple, the city and the people of God. [...] Not

even during the punishment did the leaders of Jerusalem understand and submit to the

will and the wrath of God'.[467] Brueggemann, that the listener is summoned 'to reject

the ideological discernment of the world by the royal-temple establishment, which is

[464] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 22.
[465] Clements, p. 14.
[466] Robert Carroll, 'Halfway Through a Dark Wood: Reflections on Jeremiah 25', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Stulman, pp. 73-86 (p. 76).
[467] Else Holt, 'The Potent Word of God: Remarks on the Composition of Jeremiah 37-44', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Stulman, pp. 161-170 (p. 163).

shown to be false and which will only lead to death'.[468] But commentary, like

prophecy, need not be complicity: Carroll is wary of the message of Jeremiah: 'Of

course, if there is one book in the Bible which is completely unsuitable in the time of

[…] war it is the book of Jeremiah! The nastiness of the enemy was not his concern,

and treason in the face of the enemy did not bother him.'[469] And Thomas W. Overholt

perceives 'a struggle between two covenant theologies, each of which was firmly

rooted in the people's past', adding, 'I've always thought of them as legitimate, if

competing, attempts to understand the course of current events. If Jeremiah's

opponents seem to us ideologues, it is perhaps because (aided by hindsight) we have

cast our lot with the texts.'[470]

4.2. *Jeremiah in the Subjunctive*
Elaine Scarry describes moments of doubt in the Bible as 'small tears', 'the dropping

of a single stitch' in the generation of the idea of God.[471] Turning the metaphor

around, the tears and dropped stitches in Jeremiah (its disjunctions and inconcinnities)

inscribe doubt and condition in the production of prophecy and so signal a mood that

is subjunctive. The discontinuities and interruptions witness less to the mechanics of

construction—in terms of sources and editions—than the construction of the realities

it labours to achieve, marking them as *provisional* and so contestable: open to the

possibility of alternatives. The subjunctive is the mood of the epic (*Episch*) theatre of

Brecht, characterised 'first, [by] the provisional positing of a different way of

organising social life—what if the world were not like this? Second, [by] the

conditional—if the spectators and the actors and the play form a Brechtian triangle of

speculation and critique, aesthetic pleasure, and political engagement, then the "epic"

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[468] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 16.
[469] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 276.
[470] Thomas W. Overholt, 'What Shall We Do About Pluralism? A Response to Leo Perdue's *The Collapse of History*', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Stulman, pp. 359-366 (p. 365).

happens'.[472] In Brecht's judgement, traditional or dramatic theatre attempts to reproduce reality and in so doing offers an image of something apparently natural and given to which the audience then surrenders as its passive and unquestioning consumer; as Terry Eagleton writes, 'because the dramatic illusion is a seamless whole which conceals the fact that it is constructed, it prevents the audience from reflecting critically on both the mode of representation and the actions represented.'[473] Brecht associates these conventions with the Aristotelian categories of 'mimesis' (imitation) and 'catharsis' (purging)[474]—the latter understood by Brecht to function by means of empathetic suspense and consolation—and so attempts a non-Aristotelian theatre in which illusion is disrupted (and so exposed) and the possibility of empathy (which he believes might hinder critical speculation), if not expunged, is at least utilized.[475] The fabric of storytelling is brought to the fore, its seams exposed; rejecting the formal conventions of the well-made play, Brecht was able to exploit the pliability and give of the narrative (as opposed to the dramatic) form[476]—with the epic, he writes, 'one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces.'[477] The pieces are then tied 'in such a way that the knots [are] easily noticed': poetry interrupts prose, and each is interrupted with song (so long as the singer does

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[471] Scarry, p. 198.

[472] Janelle Reinelt, 'Notes on *Angels in America* as Epic Theatre', *in Approaching the Millennium: Essays on Angels in America*, ed. by Deborah R. Geis and Steven F. Kruger (Ann Arbour: University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 234-244 (p. 237).

[473] Eagleton, *Marxism*, p. 64.

[474] Aristotle writes that 'tragedy is an imitation of an action [...] effecting through pity and fear the purification [καθαρσις] of such emotions'. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 10. Brecht understands this effect to be 'psychological'. *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 57. Carlson, however, notes that Aristotle's phrase can be interpreted medically, morally, and artistically even. Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical Survey, from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 18.

[475] 'The figures portrayed [...] are not a matter for empathy, they are to be understood.' *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 15. 'The empathy that the Brechtian actor solicits will thus not be an end in itself, but a means to an end. The actor will use it as a preliminary, as a lure to the spectator.' Wright p. 27.

[476] Wright, p. 31. The distinction between 'epic' and 'dramatic' is made by Aristotle. In 1797, Goethe and Schiller jointly re-presented the distinction: 'Their essential difference lies in the fact that the epic poet presents the events as totally past, while the dramatic poet presents it as totally present.' Cited in Esslin, p. 113.

not 'follow the music blindly', but sings against it).[478] In place of 'plot', Brecht

proposes 'narrative', rather than 'feeling', he seeks 'reason'; 'sensations' and

'involvement' are to be replaced by 'decisions' and 'argument'; and 'linear

progression' is to be broken up by a movement of 'montage [...] curves and

jumps'.[479] Willett comments, 'the whole mixture suits Brecht's idea of conflict and

incompatibility; it gives to the later works especially, a great richness of texture.'[480]

With its 'sharp dissonances of form and content'[481]—its loosely knotted

narratives and episodes (Jeremiah 37-45); its prose interrupted by poetry (21-30); and

its poems interrupted by prose (11-20)—the text(ure) of Jeremiah lacks the 'linear

progress' of the (formally) dramatic.[482] And although it is almost too chaotic to be

epic,[483] a brief and partial synopsis of its 'sprawling, untidy'[484] content—

> 11.1-14: the preacher of the covenant; 11:15-12.23: various poems and
>
> laments; 12.14-17: prose fragment about the nations; 13.1-11: the
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> waistcloth incident with interpretation; 13.12-14: sayings about a jar of
>
> wine; 13.15-27: sundry poems.[485]

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[477] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 70.

[478] *Brecht on Theatre*, p.131.

[479] These terms are taken from Brecht's table showing 'shifts in accent' between the 'dramatic' and 'epic' forms. *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 37.

[480] John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht: A Study from Eight Aspects* (London: Methuen Drama, 1959), p.103.

[481] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. xlix.

[482] Occasionally, the term 'drama' is (loosely rather than formally) applied to the book of Jeremiah: Stulman, *Order*, p. 18, for example.

[483] Interestingly 'chaos' appears in the titles of books not only about Jeremiah—Carroll's *From Chaos to Covenant*; Stulman's *Order amid Chaos*—but also about Brecht—John Fuegi's, *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos According to Plan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[484] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 46.

[485] Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 18.

—seems only slightly more random than Brecht's own synopses from the

'stragglingly episodic'[486] *Mother Courage and Her Children*:

> In the years 1625 and 1626 Mother Courage crosses Poland in the train of
>
> the Swedish armies. Before the fortress of Wallhof she meets her son
>
> again. [Song of the Girl and the Soldier.] Successful sale of a capon and
>
> heyday of her dashing son.[487]

> January 1636. The emperor's troops are threatening the Protestant town of
>
> Halle. The stone begins to speak. Mother Courage looses her daughter and
>
> trudges on alone. The war is long from over.[488]

With the exception of the surprisingly well-disciplined narrative of Jeremiah 37-45—

which is not itself free from tears and dropped stitches[489]—chapters occur in reverse

order (chronologically, 35 precedes 34), and passages with thematic connections are

dispersed and disconnected by placement (for example, the material relating to the

kings).[490] This lack of linear progression coupled with the continual interruptions of

themes and arguments once started disrupts—as past commentators have been

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[486] John Willett and Ralph Manheim, 'Introduction', in Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage*, trans. by John Willett (London: Methuen Drama, 1980), pp. vii-xxii (p. xxi).

[487] Brecht, *Mother Courage*, p. 75.

[488] Brecht, *Mother Courage*, p. 13; p. 80.

[489] The 'storyline and plot development are much disputed'. Stulman, *Order*, p. 26. 'These chapters are made up of episodes which do not at all follow smoothly upon each other, but are temporally and spatially disorienting.' Mary Callaway, 'Black Fire on White Fire: Historical Context and Literary Subtext in Jeremiah 37-38', in Diamond, O'Connor, and Stulman, pp. 171-178 (p. 172).

[490] Particular distinct collections are generally identified as: oracles against Judah and Jerusalem (2-25); prose cycles about the prophets (27-29); the book of consolation (30-33); the fall of Jerusalem narratives (37-44 [45]); and oracles to the nations (46-51). Carroll notes that 'a structure is discernable in the book of Jeremiah', but adds, 'in attempting to divide a book as large as Jeremiah into large blocks and smaller subsections the analyst soon begins to grasp the difficulty of the task and to understand how complex is the material gathered together. [...] Every reader will offer a different assessment of the content of a section and in some cases there will be disagreement about the precise point where a block may begin or end.' Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 17. Stulman writes of 'large compositional units' and 'macro-structures', notes challenges to this argument from McKane and others, but re-asserts that the identifiable units are intentional, demonstrating 'hermeneutical strategies', and convey 'some final theological *Tendenz*.' Stulman, *Order*, p. 17; p. 28.

inclined to point out—a clear view of object, content, or message of the text as

something above, beyond, or within it. Similarly disrupted, and as a result of the

textual disruptions themselves, is the possibility of sustained empathy (of the kind

courted in dramatic theatre) for or with the characters caught in the current of the

catastrophe. The mostly un-named voices of lament break off to make way for action

narrative or judgement; glimpses of tragedy—for example, woman Jerusalem, her

children gone, gathering up her belongings for exile (Jeremiah 10. 17-20)—passed

over swiftly and replaced by angry accusations. The prophet himself, requiring

considerable labour to be reconstituted as a biographical figure, is only ever suggested

in the text, and always as secondary to, or a cipher for, the divine word.[491]

Jameson likens Brecht's epic theatre to 'a realism achieved by means of

Cubism'.[492] Fragmenting its object to show different planes simultaneously, Cubist art

makes no attempt to insinuate itself upon the spectator as a representation, or view of

a reality beyond the surface of the canvas, but foregrounds its own presence as

artefact. Both Stulman's *Order Amid Chaos* and the collection *Troubling Jeremiah*

are fronted with images of Cubist works by Paul Klee, a comment, perhaps, on the

discontinuous style of the prophetic text,[493] and an acknowledgement of

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[491] And yet, as we have seen, Jeremiah has time and again been worked up into the subject of biography: transformed into a hero of the word who can then become an object for empathetic response.

[492] Jameson, p. 46.

[493] The framing of multiple points of view that forego the conventions of perspective, Cubist art comments suitably on the shifting perspectives presented by various prose and narrative passages in Jeremiah which feature single or similar incidents. Running like threads through the text, strings of speeches and stories demonstrate shifts of perception that continually alter (or undercut) the reader's engagement. The temple sermon of Jeremiah 7, for example, which is almost wholly speech, returns in Jeremiah 26 in reduced form featuring only as a single component in a narrative about the reception of the prophetic word (26. 4-6). The sermon (7. 1-15) makes of the ruined shrine of Shiloh an example of what will inevitably happen to the Jerusalem temple (7. 13-15) as a result of their complacency and apostasy; in the narrative (26), Shiloh functions as an object lesson and call for repentance: 'if you will not listen to me [...] then I will make this house [the Jerusalem temple] like Shiloh' (26. 5-6)—which causes a split between the cultic prophets and priests, and the princes, the former rejecting the message and threatening Jeremiah himself. In turn Jeremiah 26 anticipates 36 in which a scroll of the prophet's words is read in the temple and received with similar consternation. The opening of Jeremiah 36 makes reference to and use of the language of Jeremiah 25, but while the reader is 'turning back to check a

Brueggemann's observation that 'Jeremiah is not a "record" of what happened, but rather *a constructive proposal of reality*'.[494] Perhaps *proposals* (plural) would be better since no single reality is left unchecked or final, no contradiction covered over. For example, while little reference is made within Jeremiah 2-20 to the part played by Judah's royal house in the final destruction of the state (where blame is shared predominantly by prophets, priests, and the people),[495] the later narratives posit the actions of the kings as a key element in this catastrophic outcome (36. 20-32; 37. 1-2). And while, as Carroll notes, the monarchy is mostly viewed negatively or (outside the narratives) 'as an irrelevance of the past, unimportant in comparison to the prophetically mediated divine word',[496] there are passages, however peripheral, which posit kingship as integral to future hope (22. 1-4; 23. 5-6 and 33. 14-16; 33. 17-26). Thus no representation, no positing, however dominant, is left without challenge or alternative, no challenge or alternative, however minor, is without (at least) some weight; representation itself is therefore recognised as something actively produced or producing and so contestable.

Segmented 'as if it were cut up into individual pieces',[497] the epic, writes Jameson, is a 'ludic un-building' of the reified (naturalised, solidified) surface of history. While discussing Brecht's own 'adoption of reification as a dramatic and representational "method"',[498] Jameson resists Lukács's criticism—that 'montage' replicates rather than subverts the reifications of modernity—since he considers it 'already a dereification of action to posit its analytic malleability [...] to release it

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point' within Jeremiah, the text also makes connections with a text elsewhere in the Bible—II Kings 22. In this way, the material of Jeremiah fulfils overtly Barthes assessment of all text as a 'tissue of quotations', of itself and other biblical texts; a gesture which troubles the desire to get 'inside' the book, since the various insides of Jeremiah make reference to a variety of 'outsides'.

[494] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. ix. Original emphasis.

[495] Or reference is made to the failings of leadership in general (2. 8; 5. 31; 6. 13-15; 8. 8-12); kings are mentioned only in passing (3. 6; 4. 9; 8. 1; 13. 18; 15. 4; 17. 20; 19. 4, 13).

[496] Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 101.

[497] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 70.

from the unity of its form'.[499] The realism advocated by Lukács—described by Elizabeth Wright as a kind of 'mimesis-plus, which "reflected" on an "objective reality", yet at the same time revealed the causes of its shortcomings'[500]—lead him to evaluate writers in terms of their perceptiveness and ability to translate this into text and so champion Balzac and Tolstoy. But Brecht, notes Robert Leach, 'is not content to accept, as Tolstoy was, for example, the author's unquestionable omniscience with regard to the reality presented', rather he 'is interested in the author's own relationship to that reality'.[501] Like Barthes, for whom realism is not an act of seeing, but a mode of signification representing nothing so much as the conventions of realism itself (excluding certain representations whilst making others seem natural),[502] Brecht's theatre, 'by doubting all codes and representations, [...] reveals the contradictions of history.'[503] Beyond iconoclasm, Jameson senses a more productive purpose, namely, 'the whole message and content of the V-effect [*Verfremdungseffekt*] itself.'[504]

Brecht's concept of *Verfremdung*—'distanciation', or 'estrangement' (since Wright advises that 'other translations make it all too easy to fall into the temptation

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[498] Jameson, p. 46.

[499] Jameson, p. 47.

[500] Wright, p. 70. The Hungarian Marxist critic Georg Lukács, regarded Brecht's episodic theatre as decadent formalism which reinforced social reifications. Brecht's response was to return the accusation of formalism: 'the formalistic nature of the *theory of realism* is demonstrated by the fact that not only is it exclusively based on the form of a few bourgeois novels of the previous century [...], but also exclusively on the particular genre of the *novel*.' Brecht accuses Lukács of making a fetish of a past form—the nineteenth-century 'realist' novel—but believing the term 'realism' not defunct, Brecht 'cleanses' it of old associations, 'refunctionalising' it to indicate more than style or genre, but 'a concept [that is] wide and political, sovereign over all conventions.' Bertolt Brecht, 'Against Georg Lukács' *New Left Review* March/April 1974, 84. pp. 39-50 (p. 42). For an account of the contest between Brecht and Lukács, see Wright, pp. 68-75; and Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1976), pp. 70-72.

[501] Robert Leach, 'Mother Courage and her Children', in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. by Peter Thompson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 128-138 (p. 130).

[502] Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1972), p. 149.

[503] Wright, p. 73.

[504] Jameson, p. 47.

of treating the "effect" as a mere artistic device')[505]—is given a complex ancestry in relation to which it is also defined as distinct.[506] More than a 'stylistic peculiarity' (an aesthetic of 'defamiliarization'), it is a reappraisal of 'reality' that 'reminds us that representations are not given but produced';[507] in so doing, it invites new productions. Central to Brecht's dramaturgy—'the exposition of the story and its communication by suitable means of alienation [*Verfremdung*] constitute the *main business* of the theatre'[508]—it is the sum and function of all the techniques of epic theatre[509] conceived of as a form of intervention. Brecht believed theatre to be inescapably political, that 'for art to be "unpolitical" means only to ally itself with the "ruling group"', and that 'unpolitical' art was the only kind permitted by the apparatuses of existing (bourgeois) society.[510] Neither deterministic nor mechanical, the V-effect operates dialectically, 'to historicize and negate':[511] such interventionist techniques, according to Brooker, 'trigger change in the material world by changing "interpretations" [...] in the analogous world of theatre';[512] Wright provides a more radical reading (and I believe it is correct to do so): Brecht does not imply that 'the stage is life: rather, the fictionality of life, the re-writability of the text of history,

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[505] The term 'alienation', preferred by John Willett, is best avoided 'because of its socio-economic implications'. Wright, p. 19. Peter Brooker points out that Brecht had used the term *Entfremdung* (more strictly translated as 'alienation') prior to his first use of *Verfremdung* in 1935. Peter Brooker, 'Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice', in Thompson and Sacks, pp. 185-200 (p. 192).

[506] Marvin Carlson summarises the history of estrangement from Aristotle to Viktor Shklovsky. Carlson, p. 386. John Willett regards Shklovsky's 'making strange' (*ostranenie*), which refers to the defamiliarizing quality of poetic metaphor, as directly influential upon Brecht. John Willett in *Brecht on Theatre* p. 99. Peter Brooker is less certain, not convinced by this heritage. Brooker, 'Key Words', p. 192.

[507] Wright, p. 19.

[508] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 202. My emphasis.

[509] 'The value of this conception for Brecht was that it offered a new way of judging and explaining those means of achieving critical detachment which he had hitherto called 'epic'. Willett, *The Theatre*, p. 177.

[510] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 196. The dramaturgy of epic theatre represents Brecht's engagement with dialectical materialism under the direction of Karl Korsch. See Roswitha Mueller, 'Learning for a New Society: the *Lehrstück*', in Thompson and Sacks, pp. 79-95 (pp. 93-94).

[511] Brooker, 'Key Words', p. 186. Brecht wrote of his plays 'running dialectically' prior to adopting the term 'epic', then later, when 'epic' proved a too easily misunderstood genre, returned to writing about 'dialectics in theatre'. *Brecht on Theatre* p. 24; p. 281.

[512] Brooker, 'Key Words', p. 193.

offers a model for theatre',[513] concluding, 'where Lukács wants to show the world as potentially whole, [...] Brecht shows it as fragmented and infinitely transformable so as to force the audience into a continuous process of re-writing.'[514]

Offering neither realism nor reasoned explanation, Jeremiah presents a (somewhat less than) ludic un-building (Stulman's 'dismantling of Judah's symbolic universe')[515] of institutions revealed to be in opposition to a divine word apparently un-tethered to the political and so historical mechanisms of state. It gives, if not a value-free evaluation of the actions of the government of Judah, a divine perspective—a point of complete seeing—from which national establishments are estranged in a V-effect which exposes their contradictory ideologies. Thus the temple, which represents the people's protection under Yhwh and so grants confidence, also brings complacency and so contempt: 'Hear (שִׁמְעוּ) the word of Yhwh. [...] Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, "We are safe!"—only to go on doing all these abominations?' (7. 2, 9-10). As the word 'impinges upon the royal reality',[516] it exposes the nation's history as contingent (and presently separated from the ground of its theological/ ideological identity—Yhwh), by means of a scatter-gun approach to blame in a pile-up of implied subjunctives: *if* the prophets had spoken differently, *if* the kings had acted differently, *if* the word of Yhwh had been heard. The 'if' inscribed throughout invites continuing speculation upon possible alternative courses of action which becomes a pedagogy of some urgency in the present and for the future: the positing of a blameworthy past makes way for a positing of a possible future

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[513] Wright, p. 31.
[514] Wright, p. 75.
[515] Stulman, *Order*, p. 31.

understood in terms of right action and correct discernment of the word of Yhwh (depicted in Jeremiah as already making its way into writing: Jeremiah 29; 36). Far from being an exercise in historiography, the book of Jeremiah rehearses the re-writability and so transformability of the realm of history. The future, so far as it can be imagined, is something that Stulman, for example, notes should not be constructed from material confined to the 'configurations of hope and promise set forth in the "book of Consolation" or to the few discrete salvation oracles scattered throughout Jeremiah', but from the very shattering of 'Judah's "little" categories of control and its illusion of certainty':[517] the hierarchies of a royal ideology—'adversarial at best and perhaps even intrinsically evil'—give way to, or are to be reconfigured by, an 'egalitarian social order' which refers to 'pre-monarchial arrangements'; earlier understandings of idolatry are now to include 'any liturgical act that attempts to straightjacket a free unshackled God'; covenant allegiance to Yhwh is to become 'an expression of unceasing loyalty and love for God'; and 'the word of God as "scroll" or "Scripture" begins to assume a decisive place in the social setting(s) of Jeremiah' as the well-established social institutions 'indissolubly linked to Jerusalem' break down.[518]

It is the emergent 'scroll-piety', argues Stulman, which is the primary agent in bringing to birth a new Israel, articulating the end of old configurations of reality whilst providing a promissory second chance in terms of a 'fresh symbol system from the ruins of exile'.[519] In this much, new Israel is textual and speculative: an imaginative positing of possible realities based on and restructured out of the limitations of an old Israel, itself constructed out of equally speculative readings and

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[516] Brueggemann, *A Commentary,* p. 22.
[517] Stulman, *Order,* pp. 177 and p. 54.
[518] Stulman, *Order,* p. 182.
[519] Stulman, *Order,* p. 183.

writings. Throughout this weaving together of possibles, the divine word, known only through documented voice and event—the word (דבר singular) of Yhwh through the words or things (דברים plural) of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1. 1-3)—is subject to the historicising and negating force of a textual V-effect; estranged and shown to be inseparable from the textual-historical reality into which it impinges. Thus, far from representing a point of orientation, a site of *complete seeing* situated somehow above or outside the text, the divine word is itself subject to complete, or better complex, seeing—*seeing* is itself seen and proves to be no less produced than the other textually represented realities. Dramatised within Jeremiah as a conflict between prophets (a contest between those who claim to have seen or heard the word: between Jeremiah and Hananiah in Jeremiah 28, for example), validating the eponymous seer whose proclamation is proved right in hindsight, the problems that accompany production of the word are not then exhausted. Carroll, when commenting on commentary relating to the 'discourse of blame'[520] that accuses the inhabitants of Judah of an inability correctly to perceive the word of Yhwh, exposes further conflicts relating to the ideology of governing word:

> I simply do not understand how readers can follow the arguments of Jer.
> 23:9-40 that "the prophets of Jerusalem" are to blame for the destruction of
> the people and then when they arrive at Jer. 25:1-7 not see the blatant
> contradiction that is entailed in the claim that the people's destruction is
> due to their not listening to the prophets![521]

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[520] Carroll, 'Halfway', p. 75.
[521] Carroll, 'Halfway', p. 75.

In his own discourse of blame, Carroll lays the problems (impossibility even) of interpretation with the book itself: 'I am still of the opinion that the book of Jeremiah is a very difficult, confused and confusing text. *I refuse not to be confused by it.*'[522] Like epic plays of Brecht in which conflict and incompatibility in form and content 'divide rather than unify the audience',[523] conflicts within Jeremiah arouse conflict without; the interpreters of Jeremiah respond passionately: through the 1990s, writes Carroll, 'individual after individual at meeting after meeting has found it necessary to rise to their feet and denounce me in the strongest terms possible for my reading of Jeremiah.'[524] Rather like the lone-voiced prophet of Jeremiah 37-38, Carroll's readings remain unheeded. By another estimation (Jeremiah 23. 21-22), however, the failure of his own insights condemn them:

> But if they had stood in my council,
>
> then they would have proclaimed (וישמעו) my words to my people,
>
> and they would have turned them (וישבום) from their evil ways,
>
> and from the evil of their doings.

Following this logic, the prophet who speaks the divinely decreed word successfully turns the people from their apostasy. Given that Jeremiah later complains, 'I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened' (25. 3), Carroll is in good company.

By any account, Jeremiah challenges fixed certainties. Brueggemann (and to a certain extent Stulman) equate these with the practices represented in Jeremiah as pre-exilic—the royal temple ideology—proposing a covenant theology as an alternative

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[522] Carroll, 'Halfway', p. 75.
[523] Brooker, 'Key Words', p. 189.

firm ground. That which is critiqued is not, however, dismissed outright: as we have seen (by gathering separate threads from the whole corpus), though criticized, or even deemed redundant (see, for example, Jeremiah 22. 1-9), the royal line of David is also proposed as worthy of future reconstitution (23. 5-6). What is privileged, perhaps, is not an alternative way of living as such, but an element of doubt regarding all alternatives—a tear in every seemingly seamless ideology.[525] Even the Torah, produced by the pen of the scribe (2. 8), is no safeguard; as Joep Dubbink writes, 'no "truth in solidified form," whether it be the stones of the temple, the gold of the royal crown, or even Holy Scripture, is adequate to express the truth of the word of YHWH.'[526] But no truth, even in flexible form, seems all that secure—the negatively recommended question, repeated in Jeremiah 2. 6 and 8, 'Where is Yhwh?' has no satisfying answer, since he is prone to play the trickster: in the words of Jeremiah (the purported direct-line to the deity), 'Ah, Yhwh God, how utterly you have deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, "It shall be well with you," even while the sword is at the throat!' (4. 10).[527] Even the word of Yhwh, it seems, cannot be trusted—nor can it be expected to verify the words of its mediator: again Dubbink, 'no signs occur anywhere, nowhere does one notice that YHWH supports his prophet by letting his words come true; we only see a prophet immersed in hopeless misery.'[528]

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[524] Carroll 'Halfway' p. 77.

[525] To describe the Marxist conception of the unitary nature of ideology, Michael Freedon uses the word 'seamless'. As 'part of a single, even total, account of the world' it smoothes over contradictions and is therefore a 'false consciousness' which allows uneven class relations to continue. Michael Freeden, *Ideology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 8. Terry Eagleton suggests that ideology 'is a text, woven of a whole tissue of different conceptual strands', and so not so smooth on closer inspection. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 1. Commentators frequently remark, however, that Jeremiah is noticeably 'not a seamless robe running from 1.1 to 52.34 requiring a synchronic reading without punctuation'. Carroll, 'Halfway', p. 74.

[526] Joep Dubbink, 'Getting Closer to Jeremiah: The Word of YHWH and the Literary-Theological Person of a Prophet', in Kessler, *Reading Jeremiah*, pp. 25-39 (p. 27).

[527] Brueggeman would rather read this verse as an expression of irony, 'there has indeed been deception, but it cannot be blamed on Yahweh'. *A Commentary*, p. 55.

[528] Dubbink, p. 32. The single exception to this is the death of Hananiah, in fulfilment of Jeremiah 28. 17.

4.3. Gestus *and the Construction of Jeremiah*

As antidote to the fog of the Wagnerian *Gesamkunstwerk* ('the integrated work of art'),[529] blamed for its seamless presentation of a reality seemingly natural and beyond critique, Brecht recommended 'a radical *separation of the elements*'.[530] Teased out, 'words, music, and setting' are free to 'adopt attitudes', to strike a pose as it were, which is a characteristic of the *Gestus*. '"*Gestus*," of which "*gestische*" is the adjective', explains Willett, 'means both gist and gesture; an attitude or a single aspect of an attitude, expressible in both words and actions';[531] a definition which it has since been noted, omits the distinctively Brechtian aspect of the gest (the established English translation)[532]—that it must also have a social content.

> Not all gests are social gests. The attitude of chasing away a fly is not yet a
> social gest. [...] The gest of working is definitely a social gest, because all
> human activity directed towards the mastery of nature is a social
> undertaking, an undertaking between men. On the other hand a gest of
> pain, as long as it is kept so abstract and generalised that it does not rise
> above a purely human category, is not yet a social one. [...] The social gest
> is the gest relevant to society, the gest that allows conclusions to be drawn
> about the social circumstances.[533]

The gest is the 'pregnant moment', writes Barthes, 'a hieroglyph in which can be read at a single glance [...] the present, the past and the future': 'when Mother Courage

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[529] A 'term first used by Richard Wagner in *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (1849) to describe his concept of a work for the stage, based on the ideal of ancient Greek tragedy, to which all the individual arts would contribute under the direction of a single creative mind in order to express one overriding idea.' Grove Dictionary of Art <<http://www.artnet.com/library/03/0317/T031789.ASP.>> (accessed, May, 2004).

[530] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 37. Original emphasis.

[531] John Willett in *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 42.

[532] Willett makes use of the obsolete English word 'gest' which means 'bearing, carriage, mien'. John Willett, *The Theatre*, p. 173.

[533] *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 104-105.

bites on the coin offered by the recruiting sergeant and, as a result of this brief interval of distrust, loses her son, she demonstrates at once her past as a tradeswoman and the future that awaits her—all her children dead in consequence of her money making blindness.'[534] But while it is full of meaning, the gest has no 'depth': it is the socially situated gesture and conveys little of a character's 'inner life'.[535] Thus sitting next to his wife, Galy Gay is a picture of 'petit-bourgeois contentment', in return for cigars and brandy he puts on a uniform and is transformed into a 'human fighting-machine';[536] receiving a new personality as the product of social relations, Galy Gay is historicized (as opposed to 'naturalised'), socially identified and 're-written'—he is, Brecht writes, 'reassembled just like a motor car'.[537]

The assembling of characters by gesture, saying, and narrative in the episodic text of Jeremiah may be describe as gestic insofar as it is formal and conventional, rather than psychological and consistent. Kings and prophets are presented in mutually defining conflict much as they are elsewhere in the Bible (think Nathan confronting David; Elijah against Ahab) with little concern for their lives beyond these encounters—Jehoiakim, for example, appears only as a villain who refuses to heed the prophetically mediated words of Uriah (Jeremiah 26. 20-23) and, with a pantomimic flourish, Jeremiah (36. 20-26). The more ambiguously drawn Zedekiah, generally deemed weak and ineffectual rather than villainous,[538] is nevertheless only depicted in terms of his relation to Jeremiah; functioning as a foil to the true word bearer, he submits to pressure from his countrymen and advisors (and so compounds

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[534] Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in Barthes, *Image Music Text*, pp. 69-78 (p. 73).
[535] The gest 'excludes the psychological, the subconscious, the metaphysical'. Willett *The Theatre*, p. 173.
[536] Wright, p. 33. 'Galy Gay' is the central character in *Man Equals Man*, trans. by Gerhard Nellhaus in *Brecht: Collected Plays: Two*, ed. by John Willett and Ralph Manheim (London: Methuen, 1994), pp. 1-76.
[537] Brecht cited in Wright, p. 34.
[538] So Holt: 'Zedekiah is portrayed as a weak man', 'The Potent Word of God', p. 167.

the national disaster, 38. 14-23; 39. 1-10), while Jeremiah is saved by a foreigner (who, like the prophet, escapes slaughter, 38. 7-13; 39. 15-18). Prophets themselves are further identified by their acts and prophetic proclamations: in Jeremiah 28, the term 'prophet' (נביא) is used of both Hananiah (vv1, 5, 10, 12, 15, 17) and Jeremiah himself (vv5, 6, 10, 11, 12), regardless of the authenticity of the message. Given this basic ambiguity—that conflicting words are being proclaimed in the name of Yhwh by two characters designated *prophet*—Yehoshua Gitay considers the measures taken in Jeremiah to present the words of this particular prophet as true, citing the presentation of his personal struggle (an internal conflict which matches—indeed, is brought about by—the external conflicts the authentic prophet must face) as a 'crucial element'.[539] Interiority too is conventional rather than personal. The Confessions, read by Skinner as a laying bare of 'the inmost secrets of the prophet's life',[540] so closely resemble in language and form the Psalms of lament, that, as we have seen, Carroll argues that they are imported to develop the fictional figure of the prophet (much as certain Psalms are traditionally linked to particular events in the life of David, who is then thought of as their author).[541] Thus depictions of the inner struggles of Jeremiah, individual and individualizing in that they are particular to this text and the presentation of this prophet, are woven from language and forms from without: rather than wearing his heart on his sleeve, Jeremiah's heart—his inner life—is itself a mantle of prophecy externally assembled from materials to hand. But even if Carroll's

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[539] 'As the prophet is aware of his audience's probable reaction to his critical message,' writes Gitay, 'the prophetic books reflect the inner tensions of the prophets as sensitive human beings.' Yehoshua Gitay, 'The Rhetorical Presentation of the Prophet Jeremiah (According to Jeremiah 1:1-9) in *Prophecy and Prophets* ed. Yehoshua Gitay (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), pp. 41-55 (pp. 42-43). Similarly, Dubbink recognises suffering and conflict to be a defining aspect of the prophetic career, but considers Jeremiah's personal vulnerability, despite the promises that he will be a 'fortified city' (1. 18), a mark of the unverifiable, vulnerable word: 'The prophet is drawn as a picture (in the Confessions, but not only there) of a man in a challenged position. He does not doubt that his version of the word of YHWH is right, but he suffers, afraid that he may not be shown to be convincing to others.' Dubbink, p. 31.
[540] Skinner, p. 202.
[541] See Carroll, *From Chaos*, chapter 5.

thesis is resisted or rejected—with, for example, the counter argument that it is the

historical Jeremiah himself who makes use of this conventional language to express

his very private experience—he nevertheless resembles Barthes's writer who is

constituted as writer by a lexicon that precedes him, who is 'born simultaneously with

the text' as a 'tissue of quotations' through whom 'only language acts, "performs",

and not "me"'.[542] Like gender in the writing of Judith Butler, for whom 'there is no

gender identity behind the expressions of gender', the prophetic identity 'is

performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results',[543]

and so is re-inscribed (re-born) with every subsequent act of performing—through

recitation of the messenger formula ('Thus says Yhwh'), and the enactment of

symbolic actions—the divine word. Perhaps it is Barthes's writer who resembles the

biblical prophet (and Barthes, of course, likens the writer to a shaman) whose call, or

commission, is marked by the reception of the divine word: Jeremiah is given ('to

give, to put' נֹתֵן) words from a source which precedes him—'See, I have put (נָתַתִּי)

my words in your mouth' (Jeremiah 1. 9)—in a gesture which also defines and so

constitutes him. And his identity as prophet is quite literally a *pregnant moment*, since

in a reversal of liberal suppositions, his role as prophet stems not from his personal

sensibility, but (again like Butler's concept of gender) is a scheme which precedes

even his birth: 'Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you (יְדַעְתִּיךָ) [...] I

consecrated you (הִקְדַּשְׁתִּיךָ) to be a prophet (נָבִיא) to the nations' (Jeremiah 1. 5).[544]

Past, present, and future combine in the call to create a recognisable prophet: his

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[542] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 143.
[543] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 25. Butler's use of the term 'performativity' presupposes neither subject nor actor, but the very means by which the actor-subject is constructed.
[544] 'No occasion is specified for this reception of the divine word and its placing in the prologue must be understood as an affirmation of the status of Jeremiah *as a prophet* (nabi'). Carroll *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 94. Original emphasis.

present reception of this status is made meaningful by its formal, close similarities to past commissionings—particularly that of Moses (Exodus 3-4) and Gideon (Judges 6)[545]—and the anticipation of a future of conflict (1. 17-19).

Assembled like a motor-car out of the prophetic elements of call, word, act, and conflict, Jeremiah is a gestic figure in a book built from a montage of textual gests—the pile up of discrete and posturing genres. While to some extent functioning as a container for the disparate elements inscribed under the rubric of 'words/things of Jeremiah', the possibility of that function being understood in terms of author or point of origin is undermined by these formal peculiarities. Author-bound readings of Jeremiah tend to posit a series of interiorities, like Russian Dolls with Jeremiah representing the interior (or kernel) of the text; Jeremiah's genius or spiritual insight, the interior of the man; and Yhwh/God, the interior or source of this genius—the words placed in his mouth. The text itself, then, is understood to be the product of a reverse movement of exteriorization traced through word or voice: Yahweh 'says' to his prophet, who 'says' to the people; and what Jeremiah says is subsequently written down, an act which the scribe Baruch laboriously confirms to his interrogators—'He calls (יִקְרָא) all these words to me with his mouth, and I write (כֹתֵב) them down with ink in the book' (Jeremiah 36. 18)—which is handed on by scribes, this time like the baton in a relay, and is brought 'renewed life' with each recital or re-performance.[546]

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[545] For detailed textual comparisons between these three closely associated narratives, see Norman Habel 'The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives' in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft* 77 (1965), pp. 297-232; Carroll *Chaos* pp. 31-58; and John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: the Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Lousiville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 35-63. Habel argues that Jeremiah models his own call narrative on that of Moses and Gideon; Carroll, that the editor of the anthology creates the narrative to lend Jeremiah a legitimacy and genuiness that will be denied other prophets (Jeremiah 2. 8); Van Seters presents an unusual view that the call of Moses narrated in Exodus 3-4 is in fact modelled upon that of Gideon and Jeremiah—to figure Moses as prophet and judge par excellence—and not the other way round.

[546] Fishbane, *Text*, p. xi. Even by this account the prophet's role as originator is somewhat displaced: insofar as the words are understood to be a representation and so expression of his religious genius,

The book which rolls out before the reader, however, lacks the progression that 'suggest[s] the unfolding of a single message towards a predestined conclusion; an eschatological, theological model', rather, it is like Barthes's own 'The Death of the Author', made up of 'fragmentary, discontinuous paragraphs articulated by no clear linear logic',[547] which Moriarty argues, 'prevents the discourse cohering into the continuous utterance of a single subject: it de-authorises discourse'.[548] As Barthes's essay performs its own agenda, so Jeremiah, while performing both prophet and prophecy, functions prophetically to prevent the surface of both history and personality from solidifying or seeming fixed. No shelter or point of security is possible—no temple, no palace, no hero, no text, no word—but rather the continual reopening of these economies.

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they are his own, but presumably, insofar as they are deemed true, they are also the words of God. However, as the words of God, their origins lie beyond the prophet, commonly construed as a messenger or mediator, and so are more (or in another sense, less) than his own words.

[547] Moriarty, p. 101.

[548] Moriarty, p. 101.

Chapter 2

OF BROKEN POTS AND DIRTY LAUNDRY: THE JEREMIAH LEHRSTÜCKE
(JEREMIAH 13. 1-11; 18. 1-12; AND 19.1-13)

> Then you shall break the jug in the sight of those who go with you, and
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> shall say to them: Thus says the Lord of Hosts: So will I break this people
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> and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be
>
> mended. (Jeremiah 19. 10-11)

> Considering something as a 'text' means [...] precisely to suspend
>
> conventional evaluations, to subvert established classifications.[549]

'Must we assume then, that empires tottered every time Jeremiah broke a cup?' In

answer to his own question, David Stacey allows that 'the slightest action, or even

thought, of the great prophets might be of universal significance', but concludes that,

'we must, however, credit the Hebrews with common sense and, therefore, we must

presume that it is possible to make a distinction between significant prophetic dramas

and what one might call the neutral actions of a prophet, just as it is between his

oracles and his everyday conversation.'[550]

Stacey's criterion of *common sense* leaves unexamined the conventions

(common) which grant significance (sense) to certain words or actions but not

others:[551] factors which mark out one thing as meaningful in the midst of those which

are more mundane. This invites a closer consideration of the mechanics of

signification and the production of meaning in the dramas whilst also considering

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[549] Susan Sontag, *Where The Stress Falls: Essays* (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 66.
[550] David W. Stacey, *Prophetic Drama in the Old Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1990), p. 67.

their function as dramas, a term which suggests an analogy between the prophetic act and a theatrical performance.[552] While it may be anachronistic simply to describe an ancient phenomenon in terms relating to and defined by contemporary theatrical conventions, an examination of those conventions is instructive insofar as it will engender a greater appreciation of the complexity of demonstrative signification whilst highlighting the considerable differences that exist between the prophetic events and the more familiar (to us) theatrical event.

The prophets are predominantly understood to be communicators, and while prediction is part of their repertoire, emphasis is placed throughout upon the role of the prophet as forth-teller rather than fore-teller with the eccentric activities attributed to them operating as a divine word. A communication when performed, however, thwarts attempts to construe it as a simple univocal event: the potter at his wheel, for example, once presented dramatically as word and so text becomes prey to the (potentially un-limited) practice of interpretation; thus recognised as part of a performance, a complex art with multiple texts at play, in which gesture can either uphold or subvert a script, ideas such as univocality prove inadequate. Since the event exists only in narrative form, as text in the narrower sense, the complexities of the event treated as (re-imagined) performance are compounded with the complexities of the (written) linguistic sign: the play of pun or paronomasia.

In the course of this chapter I shall approach—from two perspectives—three prophetic dramas from the book of Jeremiah: the drama of the potter's vessel in Jeremiah 19; the prophet's visit to the potter's house in Jeremiah 18; and the action with a linen girdle in Jeremiah 13. In sections 2 to 3, I shall consider performance as a

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[551] Stacey does glance briefly at some of the factors which signal that a drama is in progress, but without examining them in detail. Stacey, p. 68.

[552] The significant actions of the biblical prophets are variously called *prophetic symbolism*, *symbolic actions*, and *prophetic performances*. I shall continue to use Stacey's preferred *prophetic drama*.

communicative and signifying practice by engaging with semiotic theory, more

specifically theatrical semiotics, then in sections 5 to 7, move on to the form of the

theatrical event by revisiting Bertolt Brecht, considering in particular his experimental

learning-plays, the *Lehrstücke*. I shall endeavour to provide, with regular summaries

and orientating forwards, a clear path through the argument. My interest is to

appreciate—or at least to approach an appreciation of— the prophetic performance as

a textual event (a quality sought by Brecht in his experiments with form) which is,

following Susan Sontag on Barthes, 'precisely to suspend conventional evaluations, to

subvert established classifications';[553] which sounds a lot like prophetic events in

general. To begin with, however, I shall consider the more traditional treatment of

prophetic dramas, highlighting some of the common themes that have directed the

course of research and which have, in turn, impacted upon the understanding of the

role of the Old Testament prophets.

1. *Shaman or Showman? The Acts of the Biblical Prophets*

'Malleable in manner', suggests David Petersen, a particular understanding of the role

of the prophet 'expresses something about a particular society.'[554] Pliant and

compliant, the prophet gladly assumes the different guises given him—from the

artistic and poetic Romantic to the turn on, tune in, and drop out Hippy[555]—guises

that guide our readings of his words and actions, the words and actions themselves

then seeming to confirm, the given image. The coincidence of image with words and

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[553] Sontag, *Where the Stress Falls*, p. 66.
[554] David L. Petersen, 'Introduction: Ways of Thinking about Israel's Prophets', in *Prophecy in Israel: Search for an Identity*, ed. by David L. Petersen (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 1.
[555] 'In late eighteenth-century Germany, prophets were understood to be romantics, expressing the spirit of natural poetry. In nineteenth-century England and Holland, prophets were understood to be

action is inevitably reductive, the former an economy unable to account for all sayings and stories, the latter never fully yielding to the construction. Hence the dialectic of discovery articulated by Westermann: the eighteenth-century understanding of the books as unbroken units becoming vehicles through which the voice of a living person/author might be heard in the nineteenth-century, the tension between book and man then setting a twentieth-century scholarly agenda.

It is something of this twentieth-century debate, particularly that of the latter half, I shall now consider. To begin with, the way in which biblical prophets are separated from more spurious practices, as showmen rather than shamans, which will lead to a consideration of their declarative role as preachers and performers, accompanied by an assessment of how these various models of the prophet relate to the prophetic texts.

1.1. *Magic and Religion*

Critical examination of the significant actions of the biblical prophets has been—at least in part—defensively driven. Evidence from other ancient cultures suggests that mimetic practices of this kind were thought to have effective power, altering or influencing the events they signified; consequently they have been considered examples of *sympathetic magic*. This last term was made popular (though not coined) by James George Frazer (1854-1941) to describe a worldview that acknowledged a sympathy between like things—the Law of Similarity—or things which have been in contact—the Law of Contact.[556] Frazer, who believed that this worldview resulted from a 'mistaken conception of the association of ideas',[557] traced its evolution from

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sober rationalists expressing strict moralisms, and in the 1960s in the United States, prophets were often viewed as counterculture figures.' Petersen, 'Introduction', p. 1.

[556] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion,* abridged from the second and third editions by Robert Fraser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 26.

[557] Frazer, p. 32.

magic, which he described as 'a spurious system of natural law',[558] through religion, to the empirical sciences.

In order that a distinction be made between such practices and those of the prophets, biblical scholars have preferred to explain the link between prophetic act and coming event in terms of the personal will of Yhwh. If prophetic actions were at all effective, it is commonly suggested, 'their results were not attained through mysterious impersonal forces alone, but through prayer and personal intercession.'[559] Whilst protecting the prophets' theological credibility, this distinction also provides a heuristic device by which exegetes may distinguish between magic and religion. The separation, calibrated in terms of the personal will of Yhwh, depends upon a distinction between magic and religion that demonstrates a considerable dependence (direct or otherwise) upon Frazer.[560] In his 1962 *Old Testament Theology*, Gerhard Von Rad explains Israel's distinctiveness in terms of 'the dwindling part played by magic in this religion', continuing, 'its absence already gives the Israel of the time an exceptional position within all the fairly comparable forms in the history of religion, especially the religion of the ancient East', thus presuming for Israel a precocity which only makes sense in the framework of Frazer's evolutionism: his assertion that 'magical thought is a definite early form of man's picture of the world, a certain mode of looking at things and their relationships, and of maintaining one's position within them',[561] could well have been lifted straight out of *The Golden Bough*. Von Rad, however, the parts company with Frazer (whose final destination is in the natural sciences) by insisting upon 'the peculiar nature of Jahwism' which despite the

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[558] Frazer, p. 26.
[559] J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962), p. 54.
[560] For the influence of Frazer on Biblical Studies, see Stacey (1990), and Ann Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996).
[561] Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, 3 vols, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), I, p. 34.

magico-religious connotations of its cultic categories of clean and unclean, is to be understood in terms of 'Jahweh's invasive power, revealing himself on all sides as personal will [...] absolutely incompatible with the impersonal automatic action of the operation of the forces of magic'.[562] Israel's progress out of magic, it would seem, finds its peculiar destination in a personal will that presumably should not be surpassed in order to return to the impersonal, albeit this time in science. Similarly, and in reference to the apparent execration of Jeremiah 51. 61, J. Lindblom acknowledges that 'such magical usages are common among more primitive peoples', but that 'magical ideas of this kind are of course alien to the great prophets. In their opinion Yahweh himself was working in his words. The magical colouring is only superficial'.[563]

Stacey's observation that 'Old Testament scholars, in general, have not given the subject [of magic] as much thought as it deserves; and at times there has been a tendency to fall into clichés'[564] may still have currency, but there are and have been dissenting voices and biblical scholars who have examined the phenomenon more closely. Robert Carroll, for example, challenged Frazer's evolutionary distinction between magic and religion by suggesting that magic is an essential component of all religion, which he defines as an approach to life dominated by 'rituals of manipulation'.[565] While many such rituals are indeed proscribed in Israel, he continues, others, such as sacrifice, are legitimised. Whilst considering the biblical representation of such rituals, Carroll nevertheless manages to re-inscribe something of Frazer's evolutionism by suggesting that later Yahwist writers transformed the 'primitive magic of early prophecy into the account of the rational activity of the

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[562] Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 35.
[563] Lindblom, p.119; an opinion repeated on p. 217.
[564] Stacey, p. 234.

prophet as spokesman of Yahweh'.[566] It is perhaps better to consider passages such as Deuteronomy 18. 9-14, the Bible's most explicit ban of magical practices, as less a later denial of earlier, primitive practices than, as Ann Jeffers suggests, an 'ideological consensus to edit out magic and divination as theologically unsound';[567] an editing out which seems to be more a matter of treating-as-foreign, than treating-as-primitive.[568]

Carroll and Jeffers would agree that Israel's uniqueness is selective and only to be found with any assurance at the literary level, representing the particular ideology of a literate elite and no more. Similarly, John Sawyer states that 'there is no need to doubt that, among the diviners and soothsayers of ancient Israel as in other societies, such a belief [in sympathetic magic] was to be found.' He continues with the observation, 'In the biblical narratives the phenomenon is far removed from the realm of magic and wizardry, so emphatically banned in Mosaic legislation.'[569] The feats of the prophets, which include not only prediction (I Samuel 2. 27-34 and 4. 11), but the ability to wither arms (I Kings 13. 4-5); to call down fire from the sky (II Kings 1. 9-12); and to purify water (II Kings 2. 19-12); and so on, are set within a Yahwistic framework and are now read as witnesses to the power of that god, whatever the pre-biblical history of the traditions.[570] Nevertheless, it is sometimes the fame of the name which allows a narrative such as II Kings 2. 23-24 (in which Elisha

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[565] Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Canon* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 59.

[566] Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, p. 59.

[567] Jeffers, p. xiii.

[568] This attitude was probably not current until the period of the 2nd Temple and reflects a new ideology of pure Yahwism uncontaminated by foreign harlotries. See Jeffers, p. 259.

[569] John F. A. Sawyer, *Prophecy and The Biblical Prophets*, rev. edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 12.

[570] As Sawyer notes, narratives of this kind are less prominent in the so-called Writing Prophets, but 'miracle-working is part of the essence of the phenomenon [of prophecy]' and the visions, predictions of Jeremiah et al. means that the distinction between the sets of prophets is 'one of degree, not of kind' (p. 16). Read as witness to the power of God, the rationale given to Moses' miracle of turning his staff

curses a group of boys for calling him 'baldhead', and with gory effectiveness)[571] to

be included in the biblical tradition when, as Stacey notes, 'The element of caprice

that exists in some cases suggests that the action ought to be disowned as instrumental

magic.'[572]

1.2. *From Magic to Theatre*

Separated from the practices of the nations by biblical scholars, dependent upon

Frazer's categories, and bent on continuing a Deuteronomistic-style cleansing, the

actions of the prophets are given a rational explanation: they are to be seen as

emphatic or symbolic modes of communication, akin to a theatrical performance. The

retention of magical form is explained in terms of the evolutionary growth of the

actions out of such rites, a common and still prevailing assumption summarised by

Stacey: 'indeed prophetic drama does have the appearance of magic, but the theology

is Yahwist. The prophet is not coercing the deity but submitting to his will.'[573] But the

acts are often thought to retain not just the form, but some dynamic power reminiscent

of their magical roots though understood in the theological terms of Yhwh's effective

word. 'The prophetic symbolism of the Hebrew, so essentially linked to the spoken

word of the prophets', suggested Wheeler Robinson in 1927, is to be regarded 'as

possessing similar objectivity and intrinsic power, but to an even greater degree', yet

it is 'not magic, for it was not coercive of Yahweh; it was religion, the religious act of

one whose consciousness was made the vehicle of the divine will'.[574] Wheeler

Robinson's oft-cited essay has itself proved to be an effective word continuing to

influence scholarship. Thus we find in recent publications, such as Jack Lundbom's

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into a snake, 'so that they may believe that the Lord…has appeared to you' (Exodus 4. 4-5), would
apply to all such narratives.
[571] The story continues: 'Then two she-bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys.'
[572] Sawyer, p. 249.
[573] Stacey, p. 4.

1999 commentary on Jeremiah: 'These actions, like the spoken word in all its fullness, were efficacious in bringing things to pass.'[575]

Stacey suspects that this separation, maintained at the level of religious content rather than outward form, is an attempt to have it both ways, and so asks, 'Is the prophet effective because his actions are dynamic, or because Yahweh prompts him? And if Yahweh prompts him, is it necessary also to make use of the notion of the dynamic quality of prophetic action?'[576] Stacey's dissatisfaction further stems from a realisation that such negotiations depend upon a definition of magic-as-coercive, which necessarily simplifies what is now understood—following considerable anthropological research into the subject since Frazer—to be a far more complex phenomenon.[577]

Simply rationalising these actions so that the dynamic and declarative aspects of the prophet's art eclipse the magical does not go far enough in Bernhard Lang's opinion. Holding that the 'symbolic acts, although marking the transition from magic to religion, were still deeply rooted in a magical world view' reflects 'the common view established in the 1920s and recognised in biblical scholarship ever since',[578] he argues that, under the influence of such scholars as Wheeler Robinson, 'Hermann Gunkel's elegant distinction between certain magical acts and "simpler and more innocent" demonstrations was easily ignored or simply forgotten'.[579] Lang criticises as uncritical the prevailing understanding of magic—'created from isolated bits of

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[574] H. Wheeler Robinson, 'Prophetic Symbolism', in *Old Testament Essays*, ed. D. C. Simpson (London: Charles Griffin and Company Limited, 1927), pp. 1-17 (p. 6).
[575] Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), p. 138.
[576] Stacey, p. 270
[577] Stacey (pp. 234-259) argues that the variety of phenomena which come under the heading magic are far more complex than Wheeler Robinson's formula, based on now surpassed anthropological studies, allows. Citing research since Frazer—work by Durkheim, Mauss, and Douglas—Stacey suggests that magic would seem very often to be a response to an experience rather than an attempt to control it.
[578] Bernhard Lang, 'Street Theatre, Raising the Dead, And the Zoroastrian Connection in Ezekiel's Prophecy', in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation*, ed. by J. Lust (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), pp. 297-316 (p. 302).

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magical lore, found the world over'—and then points out that one of the main characteristics of symbolic acts is that 'they never belong to a known and pre-established repertoire of gestures and customs, but are invented for the occasion.'[580] It is on the basis of this tailoring that he configures the prophet as 'imaginative and creative performer' whose actions are akin to public street theatre, an art form he represents as both didactic and overtly political.[581]

1.3. *The Prophet as Dramatic Messenger: Message and Form*

Cast as performers rather than practitioners—a difference based on the distinction neatly summarised by Wheeler Robinson's aphorism, 'magic constrains the unseen; religion means surrender to it'[582]—the declarative role of the prophet becomes defining. This in turn confirms the predominant understanding of the prophet as messenger; a concept formalised form critically, but of which the implications are unclear. For this reason, I will briefly revisit some of the key studies on the subject and reconsider its modelling of the prophet (and determination of the prophet's words and actions).

James Ross, in a 'brief but seminal essay',[583] names Ludwig Köhler as 'among the first to demonstrate the existence of the prophetic *Botenspruch*' (literally, messenger saying).[584] Analysing Deutero-Isaiah's free use of the form, Köhler discovered sixty-one examples of sayings, 'couched in the standard messenger style'[585] which includes the opening כה אמר יהוה (Thus says Yhwh; followed by

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[579] Lang, p. 302.
[580] Lang, p. 305.
[581] Lang, p. 305.
[582] Cited in Stacey, p. 234.
[583] Petersen, 'Introduction', p. 15.
[584] James F. Ross, 'The Prophet as Yahweh's Messenger', in Petersen, *Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 112-121 (p. 112) (first publ. in Israel's Prophetic Heritage (1962), pp. 98-107).
[585] Ross, p. 15.

qualifying titles) and the standard conclusion יהוה נאם (Utterance of Yhwh).[586] Ross himself further defines the form, first by noting that the verb שלח (to send), ordinarily used in accounts of sending messengers (divine, Genesis 24. 7; human Genesis 32. 4; and prophetic, Exodus 3. 10; Jeremiah 1. 7), is also found in prophetic inaugural visions and the introductions of subsequent oracles, then by detailing other stock phrases, including 'Go and say', and 'Hear the word'.[587] He compares the biblical messenger speech with extra-biblical sources—the Mari and Ras Shamra texts—and concludes that 'the form of the prophetic oracle was often derived from that of a typical ancient Near Eastern messenger speech as found in both biblical narratives and in the literature of Israel's neighbours'.[588]

Ross moves on to inquire about the relationship of the messenger to the sender and the locus of his authority, providing the immediate, if rather obvious answer: it is 'that of the one who sends him'.[589] The nature of this conferred authority is such that the messenger, who is 'to be treated as if he were his master', is then identified with that distant figure—which Ross believes may account for 'the occasional confusion between Yahweh and his [heavenly] *mal'ak*' in the biblical narratives.[590] Although the messenger event seems to be a kind of performance, Ross never makes this comparison overtly, but it is present in his choice of diction in the continuing argument: 'For the real source of his authority we must *step behind the scenes*, so to speak, into the divine council itself.'[591] It is this heavenly decision-making body,

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[586] Less a 'standard closure' than a 'focussing device' in both Amos and Jeremiah, suggests Karl Möller (citing H. van Dyke Parunak and others). Karl Möller, *A Prophet in Debate* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), p. 76.

[587] Ross, p. 113.

[588] Ross, p. 114.

[589] Ross, p. 114.

[590] Directing our attention to Hagar's belief that she has seen God himself (Genesis 16: 7-13). Ross, p. 114.

[591] Ross, p. 114. My emphasis.

depicted as actively messenger-sending,[592] and prophet-sending in Isaiah 6 and Jeremiah 23 which, Ross concludes, forms the theological background of prophetic messenger speech as a whole.

Despite his indication of the perceived close identity between the messenger and sender, certainly by the recipients of the message, Ross confirms that the prophets 'did not identify themselves with the one who sent them; there is no "mystic union" with the divine'.[593] At the same time he affirms that they '"stood in the council" of Yahweh' and did not simply utter their own thoughts. The distinction, he readily acknowledges, is not easy to draw: 'does a messenger speak only the words of his lord, or are they in some sense his own?'[594] Ross leaves this question unanswered.

Claus Westermann also credits Köhler (albeit alongside Lindblom), with the discovery that 'prophetic speech as such, and as a whole, is messenger speech'.[595] In his 1967 study, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, Westermann is motivated by an assumption that 'the "messenger formula" stems from a time before the invention of writing—from the time, therefore, in which the transmission of a speech to a place faraway was confined to the messengers' oral repetition alone'.[596] Although the advent of the written missive brought about the cessation of oral transmission, oral form was retained and employed in the new technology (as magic form, according to some scholars, was retained in the Israelite religious practices of the prophets; a new technology in the evolution away from superstition). According to Westermann, correct recognition of that form should by rights return the reader to the oral event; hence his declared agenda 'to penetrate the real intention of the prophet' by close

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[592] As a spirit was sent from the council to entice Ahab in 1 Kings 22. 20-22; and Satan to test Job in Job 1. 1-12, and 2. 7.
[593] Ross, p. 118.
[594] Ross, p. 118.
[595] Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. by Hugh Clayton White (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1991), p. 82.

examination of 'the linguistic form of the prophetic utterances'.[597]

Westermann's investment in the orality of prophecy is considerable, and is informed by his understanding of the interrelated topics of the history of religious revelation and the nature of the prophetic event. The office of prophet, he argues, is unlike that of seer or mantic or oracle priest since it is not continuous; rather, it is specific to an historical period. Prior to the prophetic era, revelation was 'characterised by directness':[598] God spoke directly to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and addressed the Judges through his מלאך, a transitional figure who exists only as long as the message. The period after the prophecy is characterised by the 'tendency to make God more transcendent' in which 'the word of God is now identical with the existent written word'.[599] Prophecy, then, marks an interim period 'in which the speech of the messenger is the form designated for the indirect revelation of God. [...] God sends messengers'.[600]

This schema makes sense of Westermann's claim that, 'the whole phenomenon of prophecy was not possible at just any time in world history, but only in this epoch in which the oral message was still a message in a real sense.'[601] And this in turn leads to his all-important equation between prophecy and orality, with the demands of orality then seen to determine the very form of a prophetic event. If the prophet is an oral messenger, 'prophecy must then be understood from the viewpoint of the message-transmission procedure'[602] and for this reason Westermann attends little to either the reception of the message or its commission, concentrating rather on

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[596] Westermann, p. 100.
[597] Westermann, p. 11.
[598] Westermann, p. 99.
[599] Westermann, p. 100.
[600] Westermann, p. 100.
[601] Westermann, p. 104.
[602] Westermann, p. 102.

'the act of bridging the distance'.[603] Successful transmission of a message, he

assumes, requires that the message itself be easily retained, and so short, and

understandable. In effect, Westermann equates the authentic prophetic event with the

small pericope, rather than the rambling writings of the books.

Westermann makes much of the oral recitation of a message by a living

person: it is 'preeminently a personal event' with high significance given to the

messenger; the prophet is poorly appreciated when described as '"the mouthpiece of

God"'.[604] The prophet's personal significance is severely limited, however, by

Westermann's detailed description of the formal requirements which distinguish a

message as such: requirements which determine not only the framework of the

message, but the structure of the content also, since a 'fixed form can even be seen in

the message'.[605] Furthermore, the assertion that 'the prophets have designated

themselves as messengers of God and were understood as such by those to whom they

brought their messages' suggests considerable self-effacement, as does Westermann's

understanding of the function of the strict use of formulas which authorise the

message and 'which [are] repeated by the messenger before the addressee, to be the

word of the sender, corresponding, therefore, to the signature in our letter form'.[606]

When all is said, it is hard to consider such a prophet as anything much more than a

mouthpiece.

Westermann's prophet, who must learn short and so easily retainable lines—

authored by another—to present them in a strictly conventional manner, seems a lot

like a repertory actor. Westermann himself clearly appreciates live performance, and

one senses something like regret accompanying his negotiation of the written record

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[603] Westermann, p. 102.
[604] Westermann, p. 105.
[605] Westermann, p. 111.
[606] Westermann, p. 100.

of past productions. Nevertheless, in his emphasis upon the formal and conventional means by which the prophet's message is shaped and conveyed, he calls attention to the intertextuality ('sequences which have meaning in relation to other texts')[607] and so textuality of every prophetic event. The signature-like formula, 'Thus says…', whilst authorising a particular recitation and displacing the thoughts, feelings and intentions of the messenger in favour of those of its author-sender, functions because it recalls and recites messenger formulas generally. In this way, the form of prophetic speech foregrounds its own formality—this is *message*—rather as Brecht's readable theatre foregrounds its own theatricality—this is *theatre*.

The very formula, which for Westermann has a limiting and authorising function, contains potential for un-limiting. Whilst Westermann considers that this offers access to an authentic, prophetic utterance, studies since have recognised that the very iterability of a formula makes it impossible to determine whether it is used as an authorising ploy 'from the prophet or the subsequent traditioning process'.[608] A belief that careful study of prophetic forms would enable a reconstruction of the actual speeches now seems mistaken. As John Sawyer argues, a repeatable form may or may not be used, or may or may not be altered by an individual prophet, and similarly, a transmitter.[609]

1.3.1. *The Prophet as Dramatic Messenger: Message and Method*
Georg Fohrer, while acknowledging that 'the great individual prophets of the pre-exilic period […] think of themselves as representatives and messengers of their

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[607] Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 38.
[608] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 631.
[609] Sawyer, pp. 26-27.

God',[610] is reserved about the claims made for the messenger speech. He does not, for example, deem the presence of the messenger formula as license enough to term everything messenger speech. Fohrer's main concern, however, is that emphasis upon the messenger speech—'to gain an apparent objective base for the prophetical saying as God's word'—sells short the prophet's personal experience; a purchase he describes as 'too dear'.[611] Not surprisingly, Fohrer provides an account of the formation of an oracle in which the prophet's 'secret experience'[612] constitutes the first and most fundamental stage. This is followed by a stage of 'interpretation' in which a distinction is drawn between true and false prophecy, after which there is a third stage of 'intellectual revision' when glossolalia is translated into 'comprehensible and rational words'.[613] The final stage is that of 'artistic development';[614] only during this last phase is the message adapted to a recognisable rhetorical form. The influence of the prophet's charismatic experience, however, is not lost and, according to Fohrer, explains their often unrefined language and abrupt transition between images.

In contrast to Westermann's Brechtian prophet, Fohrer describes an actor who makes use of a Stanislavskian method[615] who finds motivation for a given performance through profound experience formalised only at a late stage in rehearsal. Nevertheless, the Method prophet intends 'to convey the will of Yahweh'[616] and so remains above all else a communicator. Differently charismatic is Hermann Gunkel's

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[610] Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, trans. by David Green (London: SPCK, 1968), p. 345-346.
[611] Fohrer, p. 352.
[612] Fohrer, p. 349.
[613] Fohrer, p. 350.
[614] Fohrer, p. 351.
[615] Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938) whose system of involves such techniques as emotional memory recall in which an actor examines his or her store of experiences and the emotions attached to them to direct a particular performance and give it psychological truth. See David Magarshack, 'Stanislavsky', in *The Theory of the Modern Stage: An Introduction to the Modern Theatre and Drama*, ed. by Eric Bentley (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 219-274.

Preacher prophet, who looms up before the reader with the imperative 'Hear!'[617] But

this figure's liveliness also reveals our disadvantage, for '"Hear!" is the way they

begin their work, not "Read!"'[618] We as readers are unavoidably removed from the

prophetic event and our dependence upon the prophetic books is ironic since 'the

prophets themselves treated these pages, which are so precious to us, quite casually:

they thought only of momentary results and not at all of later generations'.[619] The

apparently random style of the prophets' written texts, which Fohrer suggests is a

result of the continuing influence of their secret experience (and so evidence of a

profound integrity?) is in Gunkel's opinion a result of their casual attitude towards

documentation. Either way, the prophetic text, while telling us all we know of the

prophetic event, also reminds us of our distance from it, a sadness voiced more

recently by Ronald Clements: 'The Old Testament prophets were preachers rather

than writers and the nature of prophecy is generally that of an orally proclaimed

message to a circle of listeners [...] written preservation of what had earlier been

spoken in public represents a secondary stage of the prophetic activity.'[620]

The charismatic prophet as preacher, pushed from the page by his passionate

pleading, is already well on the way to becoming a performer, but Gunkel is anxious

that the modern audience, used to hearing the prophets read with liturgical

detachment, recognises too his demonstrative style:

> We hear the texts of the prophets read formally in a liturgical framework in
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> our worship services and we may easily be led into thinking that they were
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> speaking like our preachers, with whom we are apt to compare them.

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[616] Fohrer, p. 352.
[617] Hermann Gunkel, 'The Prophets as Writers and Poets', in Petersen, *Prophecy in Israel*, pp. 22-73 (p. 24).
[618] Gunkel, p. 24.
[619] Gunkel, p. 27

> Those Israelite prophets, however, spoke much differently. There an
> ecstatic man shouted his wild threats among the people; there his speech
> often was a strange stammering, a marvellous gibberish. And we see how
> he conducted himself! He collapsed in bitter pain, weeping and wailing
> about the coming disaster (Ezekiel 21:11); he beat his breast and clapped
> his hands; he wobbled like a drunk; he stood there naked or with a yoke
> around his neck or madly swinging a sword in his hand![621]

The prophet's passion not only pushes him from the page, but also urges him from mere words into action: it is the importance of his message, and the earnestness with which he preaches, which tips him over into performance.

1.4. *Review*

Prophets, it would seem, are performers: theatre people. If they are not acting with props—jugs, yokes, girdles—in their role as messengers of Yhwh, they are nevertheless carrying out a performance by speaking his words. This need not be as impersonal and mechanical as Lindblom suggests when stating that 'Yahweh Himself stood behind the prophets and worked through them',[622] effectively realising the relationship as if it were that of the ventriloquist and his dummies. Rather the various articulations of the relationship of messenger to message demonstrate a range of practices analogous to the alternatives represented by Stanislavsky and Brecht in the modern theatre. Both the subjectively borne (Fohrer) and the objectively shaped (Westermann) articulations of the practice of prophecy presume some sort of mediation, and so presume the existence of something to mediate, a point of origin in the will of Yhwh, a source of cosmic scripts.[623]

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[620] Ronald Clement, *Jeremiah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), p.1
[621] Gunkel, p. 25.
[622] Lindblom, p.54
[623] This is of course a crude representation of the various nuances—see Petersen, 'Introduction', p. 15.

Without radically displacing the messenger model of prophecy generally, Stacey offers some pertinent criticisms of the more unquestioningly declarative accounts of prophetic drama: that they depend upon very modern notions to discuss a very ancient phenomenon (with Bernhard Lang particularly in mind); that they do not account for the audience-free performances (Jeremiah 13, and the 400 km journey to the Euphrates for example); that they do not allow that some performances can be less clear than the oracles; and that they do not account for neutral events. Stacey concludes that 'a single explanation for all dramas will not do',[624] but then offers an explanation with the potential to cover a fair number of them. Taking his cue from the cult, which he understands to be less a memorial (a remembering of the escape from Egypt, for example) than a *telescoping of history* in which past event, present experience and future hope 'are all drawn together and expressed in the same celebration', Stacey the suggests that 'to ask which of these causes the others is to ask the wrong question, for all are manifestations of the divine will'.[625] To explain the dramas as in some way inaugural (and so sequential)—jug-breaking leads to, or is followed by, the destruction of Jerusalem—is similarly inadequate:

> An event has an existence in the will of Yahweh, in the mind of the prophet, in his oracle, in his drama, in the arena of history, and in the historical record. Which of these manifestations comes first in the chronological sense is unimportant.[626]

All manifestations are expressive (of a single, uniting reality: the divine intention), but not necessarily communicative. The appearance in time of certain manifestations

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[624] Stacey, p. 262.
[625] Stacey, p. 276.

before others—again, jug-breaking before the destruction of Jerusalem, for example—thus seems to give the first event a predictive (even causative) and so communicative force, but Stacey believes that his explanation holds good even for those dramas that are without audience: 'The reality is focussed and manifested in the dramatic action even if it is unappreciated.'[627] How and why this happens runs along the lines of *truth will out*: 'what is must proceed into expression because of the very weight of its being.'[628] On these occasions, ultimate source and foundation of the drama, the will of Yahweh (and so the ultimate among possible transcendental signifieds) also becomes the ultimate spectator, for 'even if it is not apprehended by people, it is apprehended by God.'[629]

Stacey avoids ascribing a communicative function to all prophetic behaviour, yet by considering certain instances to be enactments, embodiments even, of the divine will, he continues to appreciate the theatricality of it all. This in turn suggests that performance need not be understood in simply communicative terms, nor that the presence of an audience is essential—both useful insights into the nature of theatre. Stacey gives the prophetic literature a place within the economy of manifestations of divine will, as one instance of those manifestations, his review of the prophetic narratives, using historical-critical methods, suggests that he is intent on accessing actual historical happenings, thus giving the impression that the biblical literature is more a mode of access to the manifestations proper rather than that it constitutes one itself.

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[626] Stacey, p. 277.
[627] Stacey, p. 277.
[628] Stacey, p. 277.
[629] Stacey, p. 277.

1.5. *Conclusion*

The scholarly separation of Israelite prophecy from ancient Near Eastern magic, based around the axiom that 'magic constrains the unseen; religion means surrender to it,'[630] results in the practices of prophecy being awarded a primarily communicative function. This in turn allows the more demonstrative of these practices to be regarded as performances or prophetic dramas; the articulation of the prophet as messenger itself suggests that s/he functions as a performer of sorts. Throughout, the prophetic texts are treated as evidence for, or traces of, an event: something derivative and secondary to prophecy proper.

The idea that the prophet is a performer and prophecy a performance is suggestive and can stand further consideration; to this I now turn. I shall begin with a fairly standard theatrical reading of a prophetic drama; then, in the following sections begin to examine what constitutes theatre, firstly as a signifying practice, and then as a formal event.

2. *Model Theatre: Jeremiah 19*

> Thus says Yhwh: Go and buy a potter's earthenware jug. Take with you some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests, and go out to the valley of the son of Hinnom at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. (Jeremiah 19. 1-2)

The opening commission of Jeremiah 19 is followed by a 'a rather wordy harangue'[631] detailing the wickedness of the inhabitants of Judah—apparently ranging from general apostasy to the burning of children (Jeremiah 19. 3-9); Yhwh continues,

'Then you shall break the jug in the sight of those who go with you, and you shall say to them: Thus says Yhwh of hosts; So I will break this people and this city' (Jeremiah 19. 10-11).

Formal similarities between Jeremiah's prophetic jar-breaking and a mainstream theatrical performance encourage an interpretation along these lines, containing as it does all the elements we would expect of show: a playwright-director (Yhwh); a stage (the Potsherd Gate with the Valley of Hinnom, said to be a place for the burning of waste, as a backcloth); a performer (the addressee, presumably Jeremiah); a theatrical prop (the earthenware jug); and an audience (the elders of the people and senior priests, representatives of Jerusalem's ruling classes). With its stark symbolism, we might categorise the performance as minimalist or expressionist, possibly even experimental, but the clear demarcation between performer (with production team) and spectator challenges few if any formal expectations of the genre. Had there been a Jerusalem avant-garde, it is hard to imagine the play making much of an impression. As an example of theatre, it is reassuringly familiar.

Before considering the formal organisation of this particular performance, to which I shall return in the latter part of the chapter, I shall examine its signifying systems, the mechanisms at play, and consider some of their possible implications.

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[630] H. Wheeler Robinson, cited in Stacey, p. 234.

Keir Elam illustrates Veltrusky's insight that 'all that is on the stage is a sign'[632] with

an anecdote from Groucho Marx. Noticing scratches on Julie Harris's legs during a

performance of *I am a Camera*, Marx comments: 'At first we thought this had

something to do with the plot and we waited for these scratches to come to life.

But…it was never mentioned in the play and we finally came to the conclusion that

either she had been shaving too close or she'd been kicked around in the dressing

room by her boyfriend.'[633] The scratches, apparently accidental, certainly incidental,

became significant in the context of a theatrical performance. This phenomenon,

termed 'the *semiotization of the object*'[634] by Elam, has engendered theoretical

reflection and so, like Julie Harris's legs, invites closer inspection, beginning with

semiotics and some common terms associated with it.

3.1. *Starting Semiotics: Some Common Terms*
Fernando de Toro dates the appearance of semiotics in the study of theatre to 1975,

noting that the resultant theatrical semiotics, 'came and went with great speed. By the

late 1980's the discipline had been exhausted.'[635] Semiotics as a wider discipline can

claim to have had a longer period of influence, albeit a 'fluctuating one',[636] taking its

cue from the *Course in General Linguistics*[637] by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de

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[631] Bright, *Jeremiah*, p. 133.
[632] Jiri Veltrusky, 'Man and Object in the Theatre', in *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*, trans. and ed. by Paul L. Garvin (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1964), p. 84
[633] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Routledge, 1980), p. 9.
[634] Elam, p. 8.
[635] Fernando de Toro, *Theatre Semiotics: Text and Staging in Modern Theatre*, trans. John Lewis rev. and ed. by Carole Hubbard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 1.
[636] Yvonne Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 88.
[637] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye with Albert Riedlinger, trans. by Wade Basking (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959). For digests and discussion on Saussure, see Jonathan Culler, *Saussure* (Hassocks: The Harvester Press, 1976), and

Saussure (1857-1913) and the many writings of the American Charles Sanders Peirce (1829-1914).[638] Saussure's *Course* defines the sign as a two-faced entity made up of vehicle, or signifier, and concept, or signified. While this seems to suggest that according to Saussure, who was primarily interested in defining his own discipline, language is no more than a nomenclature—the sound-image 'tree' representing the external object to which it refers[639]—Saussure is quite adamant that signifier and signified are not equivalent to name and thing.[640] Rather, they only exist in each other's company as a *sign* (that is, as sound-image and concept, the latter term indicating a mental-image rather than a thing). Signs are defined within a given (linguistic) system, and other such systems may divide up, and so negotiate, the external world of things quite differently.[641] The sign (and its components) exists as one among a number of signs and is defined in relation to them differentially: 'a segment of language can never in the final analysis be based on anything but non-coincidence with the rest.'[642] Thus the sound image 'tree' exists only in so far as it is not to be confused with 'free'; the concept 'tree' similarly exists in so far as it is distinguished from the concept 'bush'. It follows that the relationship between signifier and signified can only be a matter of convention; to use Saussure's preferred term, it is 'arbitrary'[643] and a matter of difference.

Mostly concerned with linguistic systems, Saussure nevertheless recognised

Francoise Gadet, *Saussure and Contemporary Culture*, trans. by Gregory Elliott (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989).

[638] A more ancient heritage can be trace back to Vico's 'The New Science' (1725), cited in Terence Hawkes' *Structuralism and Semiotics* (London: Methuen, 1977), p. X; and Augustine, see Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. A. Lavers and C. Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), p.100.

[639] However, Gadet points to a number of passages in the *Course* which seem to contradict the thrust of Saussure's argument, and posit language as a nomenclature. Gadet, p. 32.

[640] Saussure, p. 66.

[641] Compare English 'stream' (defined by size), to its French counterpart, 'ruisseau' (defined in reference to the speed of flow). Culler, *Saussure*, p. 24.

[642] Saussure, p. 114.

the potential for the wider study of signs, for which he suggested the title 'La semeiologie'.[644] Semiology became the preferred term for the European study of signs after Saussure, *semiotics* being the term associated with Peirce,[645] whose theory of signs was developed virtually simultaneously, though independently. Peirce, a philosopher rather than linguist, rejected John Locke's differentiation between the sign, understood to externalise and so mediate a thought, and the thought itself which is present to the individual and so requires no such mediation since it is immediately known.[646] Every thought, argued Peirce, was itself a sign, meaningless until interpreted by a subsequent thought, which he called the *interpretant*. The result is triadic: 'an interpretation of a thought as a sign of a determining object'.[647] The *interpretant* then, is not simply an interpreter—which would mark an end point in signification and so a final analysis—but, since it is itself a further thought and so a further sign, requires a further *interpretant*, suggesting that the process, termed *semiosis* by Peirce, is without limit.

Unlike Saussure who concerned himself with the relationship between signifier and signified, Peirce took into account the relation of signs to their external referents. He described this relationship with a further three terms: the *icon* 'that represents its Object in resembling it'[648] as does a photograph or painting; *indices* 'that represent their Objects by being actually connected with them'[649] as a smoke indicates fire, or a finger indicates its object by pointing; and *symbols* 'that represent

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[643] Saussure accepts that there are degrees of arbitrariness, speaking of 'absolute and relative arbitrariness', Saussure, p. 131. Elsewhere he mentions the phenomenon which, while suggesting its own sound, also reveals convention: 'English *bow-bow* and French *ouaoua*'. Saussure, p.69
[644] Derived from the Greek σημειον.
[645] Peirce's preferred spelling being *semeiotic*. James Hoopes, 'Introduction', in *Charles Sanders Peirce: Peirce on Signs* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, p. 1991), p. 5.
[646] Hoopes, p. 6.
[647] Hoopes, p. 7.
[648] *Peirce On Signs*, p. 270.
[649] *Peirce On Signs*, p. 270.

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their Objects essentially because they will be so interpreted',[650] that is, by convention, for example, the linguistic sign.[651]

Semiotics[652] has demonstrated an almost all-embracing scope, engaging with topics as diverse as the fashion industry and canal-lock mechanisms.[653] As a discipline, it may be criticised for a tendency towards *positivism*,[654] which results in a proliferation of algebraic formulae as critical tools are continually sharpened for greater scientific accuracy. Barthes came to describe his brief flirtation with this highly theoretical aspect of semiotics as a 'a little theoretical delirium'[655] and his subsequent (poststructuralist) writings demonstrate the discipline's inherent ability to undermine positivistic leanings: the un-limiting potential of Saussure's arbitrary *sign* (with a signified unable to generate a signifier appropriate to it, and a signifier unable to limit itself to the simple denotation of a signified) and Peirce's interpretant which is itself no more than a further sign (ad infinitum), and which no amount of theorising can control without itself being arbitrary. To consider this a flaw of semiotics would perhaps be unfair, since it is semiotics itself that has exposed this tendency; rather than consider it a flaw, then, we might more usefully regard it a fruit of the discipline.

3.2. *Theatre and Semiotics: Framing and Ostension*

An article by theatre director Michael Kirby, which describes his experiments in performance, provoked a scholarly discussion that provides an instructive introduction

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[650] *Peirce On Signs*, p. 270.

[651] Theatre, insofar as it represents the external world by resemblance, would seem to be predominantly iconic. However, the conventionality of theatre, and the use of gesture show not only that symbol and index are present, but also that there is considerable overlap between the different kinds of signs. See Elam, pp. 21-27.

[652] I shall continue to use the term 'semiotics' since it is the one preferred by theatre theorists and not to declare a preference for the model of Peirce.

[653] The former in Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. A. Lavers and C. Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968); the latter in Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

[654] For a discussion on the tendency towards positivism in semiotics and structuralism, see 'Structuralist and Narratological Criticism', in The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: The Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 70-118.

[655] Cited in Moriarty, p. 73.

to the phenomenon of signification in theatre. Beginning with the claim that 'semiotics does not necessarily apply to all performance; there are presentations that may be referred to as "nonsemiotic."'[656] Kirby explains that semiotics 'can be seen to deal primarily with this process of decoding the encoded message',[657] functioning in an art-as-communication framework to convey the intentions of an author-producer. Whilst admitting the possibility that messages might be transmitted unconsciously, he adds that 'the intention of sending a particular message controls, to a great extent, the nonconscious material'.[658] The director, in the unique position of being both sender and receiver, is able to screen out any remaining nonconscious matter. Kirby distinguishes between *communication*, understood in terms of a simple, uni-directional model of sender-message-receiver, and *interpretation*, messages which are 'merely projected or read into the work'.[659] According to Kirby, semiotics, 'the demonstration of how meaning derives from a particular code', deals only with communication and not 'private idiosyncratic interpretation'.[660] It is this narrower definition of semiotics as a study of the encoding and decoding of an intentional message which allows Kirby to create a nonsemiotic performance simply by removing authorial-directorial intention. His test case is his own production *Double Gothic*, from which he claims to have expunged all semiotic material in an attempt to create a new kind of formalism.[661]

Kirby describes *Double Gothic* as a 'structuralist play'[662] since it is shaped around the events (*actants*) identified, by folklorist Vladimir Propp, as common to all

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[656] Michael Kirby, 'Nonsemiotic Performance', in *Modern Drama*, 25 (1982), pp. 105-111 (p. 105).
[657] Kirby, p.105.
[658] Kirby, p.105.
[659] Kirby, p.105.
[660] Kirby, p.106.
[661] Kirby understands *formalism* in terms of 'composition, balance, harmony, etc' which have the effect 'of creating new emotions, emotions that cannot be derived from nature or from messages'. Kirby, pp. 110-111.
[662] Kirby, p.107.

Russian fairy tales. By making use of Propp's descriptions as prescriptions, Kirby

creates characters which are no more than functions of the story, keeping these to a

minimum: a heroine; an antagonist; and a helper. As the name might suggest, *Double*

Gothic is actually two plays or story lines—though following the same structure—

spliced together to alternate, scene by scene, with each other. There are certain aspects

of the performance which, he notes, came about serendipitously. For example, his

selection of a wholly female cast was unintentional,[663] but, in retaining elements

typical of the gothic genre, including sex and romance, he found himself with a

lesbian drama. Other gothic-specific elements include organ music, thunder and

lightening effects, and howling dogs. Finally, or actually rather than finally, the play

is without end, since Kirby points out, 'everyone knows that no real harm will befall

the heroine of a Gothic and that she will live happily ever after. But more important

for a nonsemiotic play, the ending of a story is often what turns it into a metaphor and

gives it meaning.'[664]

Apart from the obvious question of whether Kirby's decision to make of

Double Gothic a nonsemiotic, non-message-driven performance is anything other than

a message—albeit it declaring a Magritte-like, 'I am not a message'—and an intention

not to intend, one must agree with Marvin Carlson that signification is 'constantly

involved'[665] throughout the show: the use of Propp's *actants*, for example, which

develop a semiotic element, 'that of the culturally supported morphology of character

relationships from which the "Heroine," "Helper," and "Antagonist" are derived';[666]

and of course, the many genre indicators—organ, storm, howling—which create

genre expectations even if those expectations are to be subverted. 'These elements'

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[663] Kirby, p.108.
[664] Kirby, p.110.
[665] Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Bloomington: Indianna University Press, 1990), p. 4.

Carlson concludes, 'bear messages even if they do not add up to an overarching message.'[667]

One must also register with Carlson some surprise at Kirby's easy separation of semiotics from structuralism, since it is not uncommonly claimed that they are one and the same.[668] Of course, Kirby's definition of semiotics—as simply relating to the business of encoding and decoding—is reductive to the point of being mistaken, and makes no reference to the insights of semiotic study, Saussurean, Peircean or otherwise.[669] Interestingly, this reduction—absolutely necessary for Kirby's claim that a non-semiotic performance is entirely possible—privileges the director throughout the business of (non)-communication, rendering the performer as little more than a mediating apparatus (a puppet, like Lindblom's prophet), and the audience a passive recipient of a (non)-message. The inclusion of both actors and audience, however, introduces a dangerous element of uncontrolled, unintended meaning.

Kirby's project, however, sets Carlson a challenge: to identify what might indeed constitute nonsemiotic theatre. His initial observation, that theatre's 'all-pervasive iconicity' (representing its object by resembling it—Kirby's thunder for example) has been recognised since Plato and Aristotle who were in agreement 'that theatre is based upon imitation',[670] leads him to the suggestion that 'there seems only one possible way to remove this semiotic dimension of the performance medium, and

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[666] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 4.
[667] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 4.
[668] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 3. See also Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), p.6. Nevertheless, though clearly interrelated—claiming the same sources: the work of Saussure and Peirce—Structuralism, as its title suggests, is concerned with the deep structures that generate and can be detected in human artefacts, such as the folk tale or literary text; Semiotics 'is more a field of enquiry encompassing things which can ordinarily be regarded as signs'. Mark Stibbes, 'Semiotics', in *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM, 1990), p. 618.
[669] With the single exception of a reference to Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics* which, oddly, he supposes to be in support of his own narrow definition of semiotics.
[670] Carlson traces this recognition back to Plato and Aristotle who while drawing different conclusions, agreed that theatre depends upon imitation. Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 6.

that would be to remove the entire element of mimesis'[671]—a defining feature, he notes, of the Happening.[672] A Happening replaces intention with improvisation and chance, but since it occurs 'in a "showing" situation' as 'an event set off in someway from the naturally occurring events of real life', the audience will inevitably view the performance as a construct and 'apply tentative "readings" to it'.[673] Carlson is arguing that the moment a performance is recognised as such, all elements so bracketed, however unintentional (the scratches on Julie Harris's legs, for example), are likely to be viewed as significant, and so semiotic. In this respect, the director is dethroned as absolute controller of signification.

3.2.1 *Framing*

Carlson's key concept in this discussion is that 'performance [...] is offered to an audience as an event *set off* in some way'.[674] This separation signals that signification is in play and that readings may begin. If the events are as haphazard as a Happening, it is the *setting off* which becomes essentially defining 'since [the spectators] are responding not to the elements being presented, but to the presentation of them within the frame of performance expectations'.[675]

Elam, in agreement, acknowledges that 'theatrical competence'—the familiarity with the codes and conventions of performance shared by performer and spectator—is dependent upon the even more basic ability 'to recognise a performance

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[671] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 6.
[672] A term which covered a many different activities, for example, Kaprow's *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* which took place at the Reuben Gallery, New York, in 1959, and confronted spectators with events in which 'flute, ukulele and violin were played, painters painted on an unprimed canvas set into the walls, gramophones were rolled in on trolleys'. As RoseLee Goldberg remarks, 'The audience was left to make what it could of the fragmented events.' RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art*, rev. edn (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), p.130. Indeed, a lack of mimesis, or at least clear referentiality, is the only factor that identifies the Happening.
[673] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 7.
[674] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 7. My emphasis.
[675] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 7.

as such.'[676] Once recognised, however, a fundamental competency common to western theatre comes into play: the audience must not intervene[677], thus allowing the performers to go about their business undisturbed. This cognitive division, reinforced by the framing devices of the opening curtains and dimming lights, is potent, instructing an audience to dis-attend the outs, by which Elam means the presence of stage hands, audience noise, and so on; though too much out-noise may break the frame.[678]

The conventions that define a performance, it would seem, have the double duty of constituting an audience: alerting it to its role whilst instructing it to quieten down and attend, or dis-attend, as appropriate. That end achieved, subsequent stage conventions—including unnatural conversations in which the performers take it in turn to speak whilst facing out to the auditorium—can be received by the spectators, in their role as audience, as representations of real life. The whole phenomenon is observed by the social scientist Erving Goffman who, recognising that theatre yields data applicable to all social interactions, records that the audience must make an automatic and mostly unconscious adjustment of expectation so that it is barely aware that the actions on stage are in fact iconic representations of actual actions from which they differ considerably.[679]

Theatre's dependence upon a spectator's familiarity with other theatrical performances means that a performance and its frame are, like the prophetic messenger formula, intertextual. Neither performance nor frame are pure, rather they draw upon any number of cultural, typical, and popular references and competencies.

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[676] Elam, p. 87.

[677] Or at least, make no uninvited interruptions.

[678] Elam, p. 88.

[679] Goffman refers to the conventions of western theatre as one example of the many 'frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events'. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 10.

Each particular performance both depends upon prior expectations whilst at the same time informing them further, creating what Hans Robert Jauss might describe as 'horizons of reading': frames of reference without which an aesthetic experience would have little meaning.[680]

Marvin Carson recognises that a possible answer to his quest for a non-semiotic performance could be the removal of the proscenium arch that literally frames traditional theatre, and 'the creation of a performance not recognised as such by its audience'.[681] As an example of this, he directs our attention to Augusto Boal's Invisible Theatre, in which the performance takes place in a non-theatrical space for 'a public unaware of it as theatre':[682] one woman helping another in a local market, for example, for the (unwitting but educative) benefit of the bystanders. Clearly the frame has been removed, and so too 'the audience apprehension of ostension,' but even then, semiosis does not end but rather, an 'elaborate semiotic process'[683] comes into play. The performers must follow the cultural codes of appropriate behaviour in these locales so that they will be interpreted by the bystanders as village women, not actors, thus 'the specific removal of a performance semiotic has by no means removed these events from the semiotic process'.[684]

Failing in his quest, Carlson concludes by commenting on 'the virtual impossibility of creating a non-signifying object in any society, since there is no reality except what is intelligible'.[685] He thereby allies himself with the wider research

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[680] Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 139.The work of art, Jauss argues, is without inherent meaning, rather it answers questions posed by a horizon of expectation. Jauss aims to reconstruct these horizons in order that the interaction between a work and its reading audience might be better understood. This of course implies that in different contexts, and faced with different questions, the work of art is likely to give different answers. For an account and critique of Jauss, see Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, pp. 54-58.
[681] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 8.
[682] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 8.
[683] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 8.
[684] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 8.
[685] Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, p. 9.

of Goffman claiming that the frame with which we separate off theatre as such is little different from the frames with which we determine our discourses and behaviours in the interactions of everyday life. There is one further experiment which Carlson does not attempt, rightly since it would only confirm his present conclusions about the significance of framing and the semiotic nature of all human interaction: the creation of a performance in which the performers themselves are unaware of their status as such—by spy-cam for example. Of the performances in Jeremiah, a number of which are framed by the fairly standard commission to action, הלוך וקנית לך, 'Go and get for you' (for example Jeremiah 13. 1; 19. 1), Jeremiah 36. 9-26, which details the journey of a scroll in the hands of Jerusalem's scribal elite, resting between two overt performances (Jeremiah 36:1 and 28), is not clearly construed as a performance itself. Nevertheless, observed by the reader-as-spectator as a paradigmatic example of the rejection of the word of Yhwh, it reasonable to read it as just such an unwittingly performed play—a point to which I shall return in the following chapter.

Emphasis on framing as a key to signification means that the semiotic object has been neglected for a time. We have developed considerably Veltrusky's insight that 'All that is on stage is a sign' by recognising and considering the importance of an object's being onstage. It is the nature of the theatrical sign that I shall now address.

3.2.2. *Ostension*
Defining semiotics, Umberto Eco states that it is 'not concerned with the study of a particular kind of object but with ordinary objects insofar (and only insofar) as they participate in semiosis.'[686] In company with Elam, Carlson, and Goffman, he explains that ordinary objects, when framed as part of a performance, become significant: 'the

very moment the audience accepts the convention of the *mise-en-scène* (literally, 'setting-in-scene'), every element of that portion of the world that has been framed (put upon the platform) becomes significant.'[687]

Eco cites an example, proposed by Peirce, of a drunken man exhibited at the Salvation Army. Peirce, he tells us, recognised that the man was being used as a sign and without reaching a final answer, considered what kind of sign he could be. Taking up the same question, Eco offers him as an example, not of the virtue of temperance as the Salvation Army might have it, but of 'the most basic instance of performance': ostension.[688] The drunk has been ostended, or shown, and effectively (as is characteristic of objects when they are ostended) 'de-realised': 'As soon as he has been put on the platform and shown to the audience, the drunken man has lost his original nature of "real" body among real bodies. He is no more a world object among world objects—he has become a semiotic device; he is now a *sign*.'[689] Picking up Peirce's definition of a sign being something which stands to somebody for something else, Eco represents the drunken man as standing to that Salvation Army congregation as the sign, drunken man, of the class Drunken Men. In depicting drunkenness, Eco further recognises that the drunken man 'has become an ideological abstraction: temperance vs. intemperance, virtue vs. vice'.[690]

The insight is not peculiar to Eco; it recalls the work of the Prague Circle, also called the Prague Linguistic School, to which Jiri Veltrusky belonged. The books and articles they produced during the 1930s and 1940s, which demonstrate the influence

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[686] Umberto Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', in *The Drama Review*, 21 (1977), pp. 107-117 (p. 112).
[687] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p. 112.
[688] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p. 110.
[689] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p. 110. Original italics.
[690] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p. 116.

of Peirce and Saussure and also Russian Formalism,[691] distinguish between the practical, aesthetic, and ideological functions of a given object of cognition.[692] Petr Bogatyrev, for example, gestures toward a stone or a hammer, neither of which possess an inherent significance or ideological function:

> However, if we take a stone, paint it white, and then place it between two fields, something different happens. Such a stone will accrue a specific meaning. Now it will no longer be merely itself, namely a stone as an item of nature, but will acquire special significance of indicating something other than itself. [...] A sign to mark the border between two plots of ground.[693]

Similarly, he continues, the hammer, when crossed with a sickle and prominently displayed, no longer represents mere tools, but symbols of the USSR: 'A phenomenon of material reality has become a phenomenon of ideological reality: a thing has changed into a sign.'[694] Some objects, he notes, can be used simultaneously as material things and signs simultaneously. As an example, he cites the legend of Theseus who agreed that his ship would return home with a white sail if he lived, but a black one if he died. Thus the sail, 'whilst functioning as a sign [...] continued to fulfil its practical role as a material thing'.[695] Bogatyrev here prepares the way for a discussion of the joint material and semiotic functions of clothing. Elsewhere he deals specifically with the theatrical sign. A stage object is a material object often with a practical function but, making the same point as Eco, he observes that spectators

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[691] Ladislav Matejka and Irwin R. Titunik, 'Preface', in *Semiotics of Art: Prague School Contributions*, ed. by Matejka and Titnuk (Cambridge: MIT press, 1976), p. ix.
[692] Peter Steiner, 'To Enter the Circle: The Functionalist Structuralism of the Prague School', in *The Prague School: Selected Writings, 1929-1946* (Austin: University of Texas, 1982), p. ix.
[693] Petr Bogatyrev, 'Costume as Sign', in Matejka and Titunik, pp. 13-19 (p. 13).
[694] Bogatyrev, p. 13.

'behold these real objects, however, not as material objects, but only as a sign of a sign, or a sign of material objects.'[696] A piece of bread, for example, becomes on stage a sign denoting a piece of bread, but in claiming that it is also a sign of a sign, recognises that a piece of bread carries a secondary level of signification. Just as the stone or hammer denote not only their class of stones and hammers, but are also able to bear further meanings, namely boundary and political ideology, the piece of bread may well be used to connote poverty.

If the first level of meaning—stone as stone; bread as bread—is somewhat tautological, the secondary level is somewhat parasitical; a point recognised by Roland Barthes who, in a somewhat parasitical move of his own, writes about the ideological significance of everyday objects and events in his series of short essays collected in *Mythologies*.[697] In each, Barthes demonstrates that everyday objects and events—soap powder, striptease, and wrestling, for example—seemingly (innocuously) denoting themselves, all participate in the ideological formation of common sense reality: mythmaking. Detergent signifies deep cleaning, and its apparently useless foam, luxury; together 'they involve the consumer in a kind of direct experience of the substance, make him an accomplice of a liberation rather than the mere beneficiary of a result; matter is here endowed with value-bearing status'.[698] Barthes describes his uncovering of this process as 'semioclasm',[699] with his role as semioclast arising from 'impatience at the sight of the "naturalness" with which newspapers, art, and common sense constantly dress up a reality, which […] is undoubtedly determined by history'.[700]

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[695] Bogatyrev, p. 13.
[696] Bogatyrev, p. 34.
[697] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Anne Lavers (London: Vintage, 1972).
[698] Barthes, p. 37.
[699] Barthes, p. 9.
[700] Barthes, p. 11.

Michael Moriarty suggests that it is the very bracketing out of an object's utilitarian function that enables Barthes 'to "hear" previously unsuspected messages'.[701] It would follow that the more an object is 'untrammelled by utility',[702] the more its secondary signifying function becomes its only function. Barthes writes of the Eiffel Tower that 'even before it was built, it was blamed for being useless',[703] and although a number of 'utilitarian excuses' justified its eventual construction, 'they seem quite ridiculous alongside the overwhelming myth of the Tower'.[704] And now Barthes can state that 'it has reconquered the basic uselessness which makes it live in men's imagination'.[705]

Nevertheless, where function remains, meaning is there also, for it is the parasitic nature of secondary signification or myth that drains an object of its primary meaning so that bread is free to become poverty, detergent to become deep cleansing and luxury. This process is dangerously unlimiting, for once tautology and practical function are overcome or emptied and secondary signification begins untrammelled by those more primary concerns, new meaning begins with freer range. Loss of primary meaning or utility does not only spell greater recognition of an object's existence as sign, but a greater freedom to signify also, so it is that the Tower, 'this pure—virtually empty—sign [...] *means everything*'.[706] And Barthes, in the writing of Susan Sontag, becomes like Fohrer's prophet in his role as messenger of that untrammelled meaning: 'Like that euphoric register of religious understanding which discerns treasures of meaning in the most banal and meaningless, which designates as the richest carrier of meaning one vacant of meaning, the brilliant descriptions in

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[701] Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 20.
[702] Sontag, *Where the Stress Falls*, p. 77.
[703] Roland Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower', in *A Roland Barthes Reader*, ed. by. Susan Sontag (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 239.
[704] Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower', p. 239.
[705] Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower', p. 40.

Barthes's work bespeak an ecstatic experience of understanding.'[707]

With Barthes, it would seem, we have left the world of theatre to recognise

that all the world's a stage and that objects are indeed liable to theatricalization on a

multiplicity of unsuspected stages. Returning, however, to our original setting, there is

a further twist in the tale of the transformation of the object that Elam describes as the

'transformability of the sign'.[708] Semantic versatility is not the exclusive right of

secondary signification, but can occur also at the level of denotation: a single stage

item can stand for a range of different signfieds, resulting in an 'extraordinary

economy of communicational means'.[709] Two illustrations will be enough to explain

this phenomenon, the first from Bogatyrev: 'The famous shoes of Charlie Chaplin are

changed by his acting into food, the laces becoming spaghetti (*Gold Rush*); in the

same film two rolls dance like a pair of lovers.'[710] In the hands of the actor, then, the

stage object may function in a totally new way. This is not a new insight, however, for

the second example is the speech of Launce, the clown, from Shakespeare's *The Two*

Gentlemen of Verona:

> Nay, I'll show you the manner of it. This shoe is my father; no this left
>
> shoe is my father: no, no, this left shoe is my mother; nay, that cannot be
>
> so neither—yes, it is so; it is so; it has the worser sole. This shoe, with the
>
> hole in, is my mother and, and this my father. A vengeance on't! there 'tis:
>
> now, sir, this staff is my sister; for, look you, she is as white as a lily and as
>
> small as a wand: this hat is Nan, our maid: I am the dog; no the dog is
>
> himself, and I am the dog—O! the dog is me and I am myself; ay, so, so.

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[706] Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower', p. 237. Original emphasis.
[707] Susan Sontag, *Where the Stress Falls*, p. 77.
[708] Elam, p. 12.
[709] Elam, p. 12.
[710] Bogatyrev, 'Semiotics in the Folk Theatre', in Matejka and Titunik, pp. 33-50 (p. 36).

(Act II, Scene 3, in lines 1-29).[711]

Framed as a theatrical sign, the stage object becomes transformable—simple reference to itself is lost, and it is able to represent any number of other things.

3.3. *Review: Making sense of common sense*

If, as Stacey supposes, Jeremiah's contemporaries had the common sense to distinguish between the significant and neutral actions of the prophet, we may assume that commonly recognised signals (framing devices) alerted them to the occasions when a broken cup spelt disaster and not just clumsiness. Stacey proposes that the signals are stylistic, informing us that 'dramas are usually carried out in a deliberate, almost ceremonial way'.[712] Thus ritualised, he continues, the breaking of a jug would leave 'little room for doubt in the onlooker's mind that the prophet is doing something out of the ordinary'.[713]

The terms *deliberate* and *ceremonial* imply that a modicum of forethought and planning took place in the production of prophetic dramas. This brings us to a key feature of Stacey's argument: the centrality of the prophetic consciousness. Stacey tells us that 'the prophet himself distinguished between his own words and actions and those that he felt constrained to speak or perform in the service of Yahweh'.[714] Thus prophetic dramas are recognised as such precisely because the prophet intended them to be so and framed them—deliberately and ceremonially—accordingly. It follows that the common sense of the prophet's contemporaries is dependent upon the uncommon sensibility of the prophet himself in his apprehension and mediation of the

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[711] William Shakespeare, 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona', in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Alexander Text* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1951, 1978), II.iii, ll. 15.
[712] Stacey, p. 68.
[713] Stacey, p. 68.
[714] Stacey, p. 68.

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intentions of Yhwh. If Stacey does not demand that the dramas be understood

primarily as devices of communication, he certainly regards them as expressive: a

final, externalising moment in a movement originating in the divine will.

But the terms deliberate and ceremonial may equally be applied to actions

which have no such basis, and so Stacey must address the problem of false prophecy

in which, '[h]owever impressive the outward phenomena, the divine power was

lacking'.[715] The phenomenon of false prophecy (a category in which Stacey includes:

the oracles of the godly prophet proved wrong; those of the sincere prophet mislead

by Yhwh; those of the misguided prophet who thought himself right; and the words of

'timeserving liars and deceivers'),[716] demands that the common sense required in

order to recognise a significant action as such must be accompanied by patience—

wait and see—as the final criterion by which the pertinence of a particular drama may

be judged.[717] Thus alongside his discussions on common sense and the prophet's own

discernment as key factors used to distinguish a prophetic drama from a neutral

action, Stacey implies something of the independent influence of the frame: that a

performance recognised as such—by its being deliberate and ceremonial, for

example—is seen as significant, regardless of the intentions, sincerity, or chain of

command which gave rise to it. Indeed, the semiotic pertinence conferred upon any

action or object thus foregrounded, loosens its signifying potential from the control of

a director or performer, be it human or divine. In theory then, those observing

Jeremiah might well deem the very scratches on his legs significant.

Which brings us to another, associated matter. While the theatrical frame

might be heavily gilded with intertextual patterning—'it cannot but bare the traces of

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[715] Stacey, p. 69.
[716] Stacey, p. 69.
[717] Stacey admits that this is 'an ironic situation, for, by that time, the truth or falsehood of the prophecy would hardly matter'. Stacey, p. 70.

other performances at every level'[718]—it is at the same time, and possibly as a result of this, surprisingly all-encompassing (since as Elam notes, the theatrical frame does not simply depend upon the conventions of theatre, but 'is liable to draw upon any number of cultural, topical and popular references').[719] Theatrical signification, as Goffman and Carlson suggest, is perhaps little more than a clearly defined example of the mechanisms of meaning at work throughout culture where all actions and events are viewed in terms of horizons of expectation which span far beyond the confines of a proscenium arch. This in turn would suggest that no action is in fact neutral and that even the most unconscious actions of a prophet could be construed as significant. By dismissing the neutral acts of the prophet, Stacey like Kirby, emphasises the intentions of an individual director/performer and so overlooks the possibility that every act of the prophet may become invested with meaning by virtue of the prophet's being a prophet. Ostended as prophet, Jeremiah himself becomes liable to semiotization in a manner unlimited by his conscious intentions. Thus, while Stacey assures the modern reader that there is now little need to make a distinction between the significant and neutral acts of Jeremiah, since 'the *obiter dicta* of the prophets are simply not recorded',[720] it would be as reasonable to argue that the events of his life that might otherwise be deemed neutral (though the idea that anything is quite neutral now seems questionable)—land purchase and scroll writing, for example—are invested with meaning simply because they are events in his life.

Once ostended, Jeremiah becomes a significant object, a text to be read. Thus in a comment which echoes Eco's discussion of the de-realized drunk and Barthes' emptying and filling signifiers, Jack Lundbom states that 'Jeremiah was himself the fullest expression of divine prophecy when his life was perceived to be the

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[718] Elam, p. 93.

symbol.'[721] Shorn of utility and tautology, the figure of Jeremiah moves from being simply a prophet, of the class of prophets, to become mythologised as an embodiment of the divine word. But not only has the figure become textualised, he exists quite literally as text, set in one of the most intertextual and culturally weighted frames of them all: the Bible—a setting in which every jot and tittle, like the scratches on the prophet's legs, becomes invested with significance and expectation by its audience of readers.

4. *Jeremiah and the Jug Drained of Usefulness (Reprise)*

The divine command הלוך וקנית בקבק יוצר חרש ('Go and get a potter's earthenware jug'),[722] signals the start of a significant event and so separates the elements of that event from the world of useful things. Jeremiah's בקבק ('jug'), thus separated off, is ostended as a sign. Liberated from its utilitarian functions, it is instantly transformed into a jug, from the genus jugs, and so it might have remained, a mere representative of its class, were it not the tendency of semiotization to inscribe an object with further consequence. The moment of ostension turns an otherwise mundane item into something of particular significance, endlessly fascinating, with every detail worth remarking upon at length:

> The noun בקבק appears only here and in v 10, and in 1 Kings 14:3; in
>
> the last passage it is a container for honey, but it is clear that it is a general

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[719] Elam, p. 93.
[720] Stacey, p. 68.
[721] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 139.

term for a container for water. Rashi equates it with the צלוחית; both

were evidently wide-bellied bottles with a narrow neck—the name is

onomatopoeic, from the gurgling sound made when pouring water. James

Kelso remarks that the narrow neck and consequent gurgling of the water

helps to aerate it as it is poured, and that its use by Jrm "was doubly

significant since it had the narrowest neck of all the pitchers, and therefore

could never be mended"[723]

Just as scratches do not stay as scratches when set on stage, so too an onstage jug is

unlikely to remain simply that. Already its wide belly and narrow neck have become

meaningful beyond the limits of simple description: to the audience of commentators

both peculiarities now signify something which can never be mended.

But this is to run ahead: for the moment, the jug must remain silent—

aberrantly so since it belongs to the class of empty vessels that is generally said to

make most noise. In fact, the expectations invested in the ostended jug are frustrated

for a full seven verses to make way for a sermon addressing the offstage 'kings of

Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem' (Jeremiah 19. 3). As if compensating for the jug's

protracted redundancy—relieved of its utilitarian function, it awaits a semiotic one—

the sermon provides it with interim relevance by making use of the only clue so far,

the word בקבק, which as Holladay informed us, onomatopoeically (and now

ironically) represents its erstwhile purpose as an emptier. Thus the physical, semiotic

and onomatopoeic emptiness of the jug combine in the punning prophecy of Jeremiah

19. 7: 'And I will empty (בקק) the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place.' So

too we find the associated concept of filling in Jeremiah 19. 4, 'they have filled

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[722] The Hebrew seems a little overloaded. Carroll suggests that the redundant יוצר (potter) is probably influenced by Jeremiah 18. 2. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 384. Holladay reads it with the

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(מלא) this place with the blood of the innocents'.[724]

The sermon also anticipates one of the few actual words a potter's vessel can reasonably be expected to make: a tingling crash—'I am going to bring such disaster on this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle (צלל)'[725] (Jeremiah 19. 3).[726] This is the very sound the jug plausibly *does* make when its prophetic significance finally becomes apparent: 'Then you shall break the jug (בקבק) in the sight of those who go with you' (Jeremiah 19. 10), an action to be accompanied by the prophetic statement, 'Thus says Yhwh of Hosts: Thus will I break (שבר) this people and this city' (Jeremiah 19. 11). No longer a tautological jug, the object is now inscribed with new significance as this city and this people, its brokeness, will be their brokeness.

The jug-breaking creates a striking—in fact, shattering—image. As a dramatisation of the destruction of a city and its inhabitants (and so of a way of life: a world of kings and priests and scribes and elders—a whole biblical cast list) it is an affecting one. Subsequent scholarly reviews of the performance pick up on this: 'terrifying [...] and in a way difficult for us to imagine' (John Bright of *The Anchor*);[727] 'sustained and devastating effect' (Walter Brueggemann for *Eerdmans*);[728] 'graphic [...] effective' (Robert Carroll of *The Old Testament*

LXX, as 'shaped': 'a flask shaped of earthenware'. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 534.

[723] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 539.

[724] The sermon itself is understood by a good number of commentators to be little more than filling: 'a Deuteronomistic commentary', Stacey, p. 146, or 'an expansion' made up of 'an amalgam of phrases' making more of an otherwise short episode. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1986), pp. 388 and 389.

[725] The sound may be that of cymbals, suggests Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 839.

[726] The destruction of Jerusalem is not uncommonly depicted by aural motifs: Jeremiah 18. 16; 19. 8; 25. 9.

[727] Bright, p. 133.

[728] Brueggeman, *A Commentary*, p. 174.

Library).[729] But as both a prophetic and a semiotic event, the jug-breaking is not simply a dramatic representation for the purposes of indictment, rather it also an interpretation. Indeed, presented as a prediction preceding the event it dramatises in temporal terms the way in which interpretation ever precedes the event or text to be read. The destruction of a people and a city is not a fast, controlled (and comparatively trivial) breaking of a jug. Jeremiah's clean and swift action glosses rather the months of siege, the consequent starvation and disease, the eventual breaching of walls and gates, and the slaughter and burnings which follow, and which are suggested a few verses earlier (Jeremiah 19. 8-9).[730] As Saussure's signifier contains and informs its signified, so the jug-breaking contains and informs an appreciation of the destruction of a city and its people. Thus it is a mythology in Barthes's sense in that it has 'a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us'.[731] As a divinely commissioned act (Jeremiah 19. 1) it points out an intention to destroy and so imposes on the destruction a theological perspective. Jeremiah's jug-breaking is an example of divine spin-doctoring: Yhwh's take on the destruction of his own royal seat. The destruction is not a mark of his defeat, but an act of divine retribution.

While the ostension of the jug as 'this city and this people' might seem to be an example of connotative signification and the stacking up of meanings, rather it is an example of the 'transformability of the sign'.[732] The jug, like Launce's shoe, functions at the surprisingly flexible level of denotation. Connotation, the semiotic

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[729] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 387.
[730] For an historical account, see J. Alberto Soggin, *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah*, 3rd edn trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM, 1999), pp. 280-282.
[731] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 117.
[732] Elam, p. 12.

term for Barthes's category of 'parasitic myth',[733] drains the jug further, not just of its

jug-ness but also of the historical meaning of destruction. While that meaning is not

hidden, it is impoverished by the higher claims of the Yhwh myth, insinuating its

theology more effectively than either Jeremiah's scripted proclamation or the

harangue that precedes it.

But the stacking up of meanings continues as each detail of the event is

perused and pursued by commentators: that 'the clay has been fixed or baked'

indicates 'the unchangeable state of affairs';[734] that the drama takes place at 'the

Potsherds Gate' suggests that 'Jerusalem and its inhabitants are to be consigned by

Yahweh to the rubbish heap';[735] that the event takes place in public implies that 'the

history-making word of Yahweh is not a secret matter';[736] and as we have seen, that

the narrow neck and brittle clay confirm that the jug once broken, and so city and

people, 'can never be mended' (Jeremiah 19. 11).[737] Connotations are also gathered

by the intertextual means of allusion and reference as commentators note that the

breaking of pottery is a symbol of destruction elsewhere (Psalm 2. 9), and that 'as a

method of execration, breaking earthenware artefacts had a long history, and no one

would have been left in any doubt about Jeremiah's meaning.'[738] And finally, it is

comparable to 'the action carried out against Babylon in [Jeremiah] 51. 59-64. [...]

irrevocability is the essence of the action'.[739]

The framing command, הלוך וקנית בקבק יוצר חרש ('Go and get a

potter's earthenware jug'), whilst indicating that the following narrative is to be a

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[733] Compare Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 115 with Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 90.

[734] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 385.

[735] William McKane, *Jeremiah 1* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), p. 458.

[736] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 174.

[737] In Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 541.

[738] Stacey, p. 147.

[739] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 387.

prophetic drama, and achieving this in part intertextually by nodding to other similar

dramas in *Jeremiah* and beyond,[740] fulfils another function. Presented as a word of

Yhwh by the so-called messenger formula, כה אמר יהוה ('Thus says Yhwh'

Jeremiah 19. 1), it stacks on top of the denoted meaning (prophetic drama), the

connotation (prophet), and so goes some way toward constituting the figure of

Jeremiah as such—visible and actively engaged in the business of prophesying. Read

as a theatrical event, framed along familiar theatrical lines, it is also able to constitute

the audience as an element distanced from and other than the onstage activities.

5. *Jeremiah and Form*

> Take with you some of the elders of the people and some of the senior
>
> priests. [...] Then you shall break the jug in the sight of those who go with
>
> you. (Jeremiah 19. 2, 10: NRSV).

Jeremiah's jug-breaking is witnessed by a clearly identified group of spectators. The

same cannot be said for all his performances, however. When the prophet is instructed

to take an unwashed linen loincloth to the Euphrates (Jeremiah 13. 1-11), for example,

there is no mention of an audience, and this coupled with the practical demands of the

performance (involving a four hundred mile trek across treacherous terrain) makes it

seem unlikely that anyone went with him. I shall return to the problem of the

spectator-less performance in subsequent sections. For the moment I shall examine

more closely the formal relationship between audience and drama in Jeremiah 19.

It is neither uncommon nor unreasonable to read the jug-breaking as an

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[740] Such as Jeremiah 13. 1 which is closely comparable, with an infinitive absolute of הלך followed by
a vav-consecutive perfect; a construction that occurs nine times in Jeremiah, including Jeremiah 2. 2,

example of didactic Street Theatre.[741] The destruction of the jug may then be regarded as a rhetorical device that adds emphasis and so urgency to the prophet's words: a message 'made more vivid by the decanter in Jeremiah's hands',[742] or an act 'necessary to penetrate the complacent self-assurance of Judah that "it can't happen here"'.[743] Since all Judah cannot be present, the gathering of elders is understood to form an audience of representatives. Read in this way, Jeremiah 19 suggests a simple, uni-directional model of theatrical communication in which the performer is active as sender, and the spectator is passive as receiver, thus approximating an event that Elam describes as one of 'the weakest forms of bourgeois spectacle'.[744] But even in the most mainstream of contemporary theatrical productions, there is good reason to reconsider the spectators' presumed passivity; it is after all, the audience that by laughing at comedy brings about its success, or by keeping silent during a tragedy confirms its gravity.

The complicity of the audience with a production, however, extends beyond its immediate reception of the event to the structures that brought the event into being. Out of the raw material of his failed negotiations with the Nero Film Company, Bertolt Brecht produced a real life drama which sought to demonstrate this greater complicity, and which will inform our reading of Jeremiah's jug-breaking: *The Threepenny Opera Trial*.

5.1. *A Threepenny Lesson: Learning from Theatre*
Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* (1929) was a box office success. The Nero Film Company sought to continue this success with a film version, and a contract was drawn up allowing Brecht the right to collaborate in the preparation of the film script.

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but only twice elsewhere.
[741] For example, Clements, p. 118.
[742] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p.842.
[743] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 176.

When Brecht attempted to make substantial alterations to this version, the right was withdrawn. He took the film company to court, but lost the case. Brecht later stated that it was never his intention to win; rather he wanted to engage in a sociological experiment in the relationship between the ideology and the practice of commerce.[745] Losing the case he proved his point, providing his own interpretation of the events. 'The author', he observed, is 'engulfed in the technological process which is seen as commodity production', and in opposition to 'the great bourgeois ideology'[746] that the author's right to his intellectual products is inviolate, the work of art is turned into a commodity and the demand to create saleable goods wins.

Aside from concerns over the alienated state of the author-producer, Brecht writes about the effects of such a system upon the product itself. In notes to *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1930), the commodification of a new work is blamed for inhibiting innovation for the sake of an evening's entertainment and a commercial success.[747] The term *apparatus* is used to indicate all means of cultural production: the technology, the promotional agencies, and the class that owns these means. The reciprocal relationship between these elements means that 'the apparatus is conditioned by the society of the day and only accepts what can keep it going in that society', concluding that 'an innovation will pass if it is calculated to rejuvenate existing society, but not if it is going to change it'.[748] The effect, then, of the commercial demands upon the arts, is seen to rebound upon itself: the status quo in the arts both reflects and perpetuates a status quo in society.

Brecht writes of his ambition to break this cycle. In an earlier essay, he

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[744] Elam, p. 34.
[745] Although Brecht did not win, he received 'a substantial money settlement'. Peter Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht: Dialiectics, Poetry, Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 35.
[746] Cited in Mueller, p. 80.
[747] Elsewhere he complains that the need for commercial success 'theatres it all down.' *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 43.

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proposes an educative role for theatre: 'Instead of sharing an experience, the spectator must come to grips with things.'[749] Thus the audience is to undergo a qualitative change, from passive consumer to active critic. In the same essay, however, Brecht also states that 'it is not the play's effect upon the audience, but its effect on theatre which is decisive at this moment'.[750] Brecht thus aims beyond the reception of a play, and seeks a target in theatre as an institution. But, he points out, an ambition of this kind 'can't be the result of some artistic whim. It has simply to correspond to the whole radical transformation of the mentality of our time'.[751] Brecht, it would seem, was contemplating revolution. A radically new kind of play, he hoped, would challenge the ideological function of the theatre, which in turn would impact upon its economic basis and lead to a change in the whole social order.[752]

5.2. *Review*

Elam suggests that beyond the audience signals that take place during a performance—laughter and applause, for example—'the spectator, by virtue of his very patronage of the performance, can be said to *initiate* the communicative circuit'.[753] Thus the exchange of money for goods implies that the passive spectator is more exploiter than exploited,[754] which is an aspect of the theatrical contract that Bertolt Brecht, aware that the commodification of entertainment demands commercial success, blames for inhibiting innovation. The apparatuses of the commercial theatre, he argues, forms a reciprocal relationship conditioned by the society of the day, only

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[748] *Brecht on Theatre,* pp. 33-41.

[749] *Brecht On Theatre,* p. 23.

[750] *Brecht On Theatre,* p. 22.

[751] *Brecht On Theatre,* p. 23.

[752] For details of Brecht's ambition at this time, see Brooker, *Bertolt Brecht,* pp. 34-35. Brooker argues that by 1933, alert to the increasing and restrictive powers of the Third Reich, Brecht ceased to write about changing the economic basis of theatre, and instead turned all his attention to the task of effecting a change in the audience, and no more.

[753] Elam, p. 34.

[754] A characteristic of passive consumption, commented upon by Walter Benjamin, Mueller, p. 84.

accepting what can keep it going in that society. With this comfortable reciprocity in place, expected and so anticipated by both parties, disruption can have extreme consequences, even to the extent of audiences storming the stage and theatres being closed down.

5.3. *Jeremiah's 'Audience'*

Hananiah ben Azzur the prophet, who proclaimed in the name of Yhwh, 'I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon' whilst dramatically breaking the yoke on Jeremiah's neck (Jeremiah 28. 2, 10), is presented as a figure promoting the status quo in Jerusalem society. In contrast, Jeremiah is presented as having no such comforting role; his audience must hear the shocking words כבה אשבר ואת־העם־הזה ואת־ העיר הזאת כאשר ישבר את־כלי היוצר ('So will I break this people and this city as one breaks an earthenware vessel', Jeremiah 19. 11). Thus far, and as recipients of a message, the spectators of Jeremiah's jug-breaking retain their passivity in relation to the prophet's words and action. However 'hyperbolic'[755] or 'vivid', however much it is designed 'to penetrate' or 'startle',[756] thus construed the event retains the form of unidirectional communication and as such is domesticated by comparison with familiar forms of theatre. Yet, as a message of this people and this city, given in the midst of people who are its citizens, the distinction between passive witnesses and active participants begins to blur.

Although Jeremiah's spectators have not paid for the privilege, and are presumably not expecting to see a crowd-pleasing farce, one may nevertheless argue that they have initiated the event insofar as it has been produced with them, or the nation they represent, in mind; and by its very presence the audience becomes one further element with a vested interest in the proceedings and so the potential to impact

upon them. The possibility that Jeremiah's audience may inhibit innovation, forcing the prophet to shy away from saying anything too challenging, is not seriously considered in Jeremiah.

But taking this further, present at a dramatised destruction of their own existence as a people and a city, amid the earthenware shards surrounding the Potsherds Gate, the spectators seem less like observers than onstage participants in an enactment of the destruction to come. The NRSV translation cited earlier provides separate verbs in the opening command, 'Thus says Yhwh: [...] *buy* a potter's earthenware jug. *Take* with you some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests' (my emphasis), and in doing so adds to the MT, which (fortuitously for my argument) has only one verb and reads: הלך וקנית בקבק יוצר חרש ומזקני

העם ומזקני הכהנים 'Go and get (קנה 'to get, to acquire') a potter's earthenware jug and elders of the people and senior priests'.[757] The instructions now sound like a list of ingredients in a recipe for disaster—you will need one jug, earthenware; one score of chief priests; an ounce of elders—thus making explicit how integral and representational is the presence of Judah's ruling class.

No longer outside the action, the witnesses are now onstage and so prey to semiotization. De-realized like Eco's drunk, they are no longer simply representatives of Jerusalem society, but have become elders, of the class of elders. Bearing few textual 'scratches' to comment upon, they nevertheless become worthy of interpretation. Lundbom considers the presence of elders to be evidence 'of Jeremiah's importance in the city and temple that he is able to enlist the cooperation

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[755] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 176
[756] Clement, p. 119.
[757] The LXX, Peshitta and Targums have a second verb, and most commentators accept these as the preferred reading: see McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 444.

of senior priests to witness a symbolic action',[758] and Carroll regards this as further evidence of redaction: '[Jeremiah] is not the victim of plots by priests and sages (as in 18. 18) but one who commands obedience. [...] The different representations of Jeremiah are discrete layers of tradition reflecting distinctive stages of the construction of the figure.'[759]

As a drama which breaks not only jugs but the expected boundaries between performer and spectator, Jeremiah 19 does not simply preach to the spectators of the disaster catching up with them but *dramatises* that capture by bringing the audience into the theatrical frame. Not unlike Nathan's parable, in which David's complicity is earned then turned against him, or the strategy of Hosea 1-3, which solicits Israel's moral judgement before placing Israel under it, rather than being observers and interpreters of a prophetic event, the elders with Jeremiah are positioned as players within an event that condemns them. A strange and disconcerting reciprocity between theatre and theatregoer is therefore brought about, with the elders finding themselves *theatricalized* in a dramatisation of the larger scale drama that will be the history of their people. But the broken jug and broken distinction between actor and spectator break any narcissistic confirmation between the two parties: one would expect the stage to be stormed.

Jeremiah 19. 1-13 contains no account of the action being carried out,[760] but the elliptical narrative of Jeremiah 19. 14-15, describing the prophet's return to the temple to give a similar message of doom there, is generally thought to be an

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[758] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 838.

[759] Carroll, *A Commentary*, p. 387.

[760] A statement that an act was fulfilled is recognised by form critics to be an element of the symbolic action, see Foher p. 356. The form is recognised, however, to be fluid: 'That it did take place, however, need not be doubted'. Stacey, p. 147; see also McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 457.

indication that it was.[761] In turn, the reaction of Passhur ben Immer the priest, who struck Jeremiah and had him put in stocks, is read as a negative review of the performance (Jeremiah 20. 1-6).

6. *The Prophet as Audience: Jeremiah 18*

Jeremiah's jug-breaking is preceded by a more familiar narrative in Jeremiah 18: 'The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Arise, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went [...] and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he re-worked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him' (Jeremiah 18. 1-4). A popular narrative, this has made its way into songs about the personal miracle of spiritual maturation, along the lines of 'break me, melt me, mould me, fill me',[762] despite its communal message and the violent destruction it portends: 'Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as the potter has done?'

The pattern of command, קום וירדת בית היוצר ('Arise and go down to the potter's house' Jeremiah 18. 2), followed by confirmation, וארד בית היוצר ('So I went down to the potter's house'), resembles the recognised form of a prophetic drama.[763] On this occasion, however, the story toys with the genre by positing the prophet as an observer engaged in interpretation, rather than as performer under direction. In effect, the familiar theatrical model of communication is obscured,

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[761] Jones regards these verses to be both a narrative of Jeremiah's return from the Potsherd's gate and a 'didactic amplification' of the preceding verses. Jones, p. 265.

[762] Anon., 'Spirit of the living God', in *Mission Praise*, compiled by Peter Horrobin and Greg Leavers (London: Marshall Pickering, 1990), no. 612

[763] Following Fohrer's form critical articulation of the genre. Fohrer, p. 356.

resulting in its frequent exclusion from the lists of prophetic dramas.[764] For Stacey, who defines the dramas in terms of their expression of a divine reality, no such exclusion is necessary since he regards the creativity which gives rise to them as something independent of the prophet, whose role is to be receptive rather than productive. This suggests that Jeremiah is already to some extent an audience to the dramas in which he is also the actor.

In Jeremiah 19 we have already noticed a blurring of the distinction between actor and audience. In Jeremiah 18 there seems to be something of a reversal, albeit with the performer unaware of his status as such. Recalling the arguments of Eco and Carlson, that recognition of a performance is a matter of a particular event being framed as such, displaces the conscious intentions of a given performer. In theatre as it is traditionally conceived the frame, whilst constructing an event as a performance, also constructs the onlooker as audience, and so prescribes the respective roles of activity and passivity. Brecht, who sought to bring about a qualitative change in an audience, from passive consumer to active critic, in effect sought to challenge the conventional expectations invested in the frame. His most sustained attempt at this effect being through the *Lehrstücke*.

The *Lehrstücke*, or Learning Plays, are politically motivated experiments in theatrical form that attempt to democratise the theatrical event by breaking down, for example, the active-performer, passive-spectator dichotomy. The experiments were not, however, undertaken simply to develop a new aesthetic, but to create a laboratory for a new kind of society. The *Lehrstücke* emphasise the (potential) textuality of theatre in general—they are quite literally, to use Barthes' nomenclature, *writerly*

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[764] Fohrer, for example, denies that Jeremiah 18 is a drama, since the prophet observes rather than acts. See Stacey, p. 143.

rather than *readerly* productions.[765] Walter Benjamin, Brecht's 'close friend and first champion',[766] shared with him the desire to formulate an aesthetic aimed at closing the gap between the production and consumption of art to promote its greater democratisation. In his essay *The Author as Producer* (1934),[767] he provides an account of how the *Lehrstücke* are designed to achieve this goal.

6.1. *A Little Aside on Walter Benjamin*

Benjamin recognises the twin demands placed on the progressive writer: '*on the one hand* one must demand the right tendency (or commitment) from a writer's work, *on the other hand* one is entitled to expect his work to be of a high quality.'[768] However, Benjamin considers these concerns to be mutual rather than conflicting, or recognises that that if conflict is present, it is dialectical and so creative.

Beginning with the Marxist premise that 'social relations, as we know, are determined by production relations',[769] he asks a 'more immediate' question than that which has preoccupied Marxist criticism—namely, the position of a work of art vis-à-vis the production relations of its time (that is, whether the work is reactionary or revolutionary)—Benjamin's question is rather, 'what is its position *within* them?'[770] Technique itself, he argues, can be either progressive or regressive and so he calls for a rethinking of the notions of literary form and genre in response to recent technological advances, particularly in the media. 'Commitment' rather than being 'a matter of presenting correct political opinions in one's art',[771] which by simply making use of the forms to hand re-inscribes traditional modes of production and is

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[765] Returning to Barthes's distinction, discussed in chapter one of this study.
[766] Eagleton, *Marxism*, p. 63.
[767] Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*, pp. 85-103.
[768] Benjamin, 'The Author', p. 86. Original emphasis.
[769] Benjamin, 'The Author', p. 87.
[770] Benjamin, 'The Author', p. 87.
[771] Eagleton, *Marxism*, p. 62.

therefore reactionary, demands new forms in keeping with new, democratised modes of production. The result, he continues, which may be considered a regrettable decline of literature (a bourgeois perspective), is in fact a regeneration in terms of a materialist aesthetic. As an example he refers to a proliferation of columns in the Soviet press that demonstrate a collapse in the distinction between an author and the public and considers this to be evidence that the authority to write has become a common property rather than the right of an elite.

Benjamin next tackles common Marxist strategies, arguing that the position of the committed writer in the press in the West, which 'still belongs to capital',[772] is no more than that of an 'ideological well-wisher'[773] reaching out from a bourgeois stronghold to revolutionise minds rather than the relations of production; an inevitably reactionary position. On the other hand, the writer who exploits the new technologies, the forces of production, but again without challenging the relations of production, simply descends into 'modishness'.[774] The really revolutionary way forward, he concludes, is to challenge the very means of production—labour, materials, machines and the relations between these—and the best way for writers to do this is though their writing. More consumers must be brought into the production process; spectators must become collaborators.

At this point, Benjamin presents Brecht as an artist who has chosen 'to address to the intellectuals the far-reaching demand that they should not supply the production apparatus without, at the same time, within the limits of the possible, changing the apparatus in the direction of socialism'[775] Using one of Brecht's own terms, he describes this act of change as a refunctionalisation (*Umfunktionierung*)—a

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[772] Benjamin, 'The Author', p. 91
[773] Benjamin, 'The Author', p. 93.
[774] Benjamin, 'The Author', p. 95.

transformation of the instruments of production—citing Brecht's *Lehrstücke* as a prime example of this kind of transformation in which the forces of production, the new technologies of film and radio, are utilised within new relations of production, namely the loss of a performer-spectator dichotomy, resulting in a progressive technique which combines tendency with quality: 'a peak achievement of both musical and literary technique'.[776] Thus in the *Lehrstücke* Benjamin perceives a truly materialist aesthetic: the art form is democratised and the gap between producer (actor) and consumer (spectator) is indeed removed.

Benjamin's contention is that form as much as content is a bearer of ideology. The realism preferred by the then guardian of political orthodoxy, Lukacs, which 'recaptures and recreates a harmonious totality of human life'[777] embodying the trends and forces of social relations of a particular period, finds its model in the works of nineteenth-century writers such as Balzac (1799-1850). Benjamin criticises the privileging of an historical style as reactionary, and Brecht mocks Lukacs with the paraphrase, 'Be like Balzac—only up-to-date.'[778] By likening Lukacs to a contemplative academic, Brecht implies that realism of this kind invites passivity and is therefore unlikely to bring about a qualitative change in readers or audience. Lukacs however, considers realist art to be progressive since it exposes the social and historical forces of its time, and is represented by Wright as cherishing 'the hope that readers would perceive the mismatch of their lived impoverished experience with the experience of totality embedded in the great work of art, and would feel collectively impelled to take up the fight for change'[779] But Brecht seems to consider realist

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[775] Using the term *apparatus* as Brecht does, to indicate all the means of cultural production. Benjamin, 'The Author', p. 93.

[776] Benjamin, 'The Author', p. 96.

[777] Eagleton, *Marxism*, p. 26.

[778] Cited in Eagleton, 'The Author', p. 71.

[779] Wright, p. 86.

literature as comparable to *culinary theatre*, offering a palatable whole to be consumed unquestioningly. With the *Lehrstücke* Brecht seeks not only to bring about the dyspepsia provoked by his epic theatre, but also offer something in the way of a treatment.

6.2. *The* Lehrstücke

Echoing Benjamin, Roswitha Mueller describes the *Lehrstücke* as the 'most highly developed'[780] experiments in the reconfiguration of an actor-audience relationship. Brecht characterised the familiar theatre of his day as culinary since it presented a finished item to be consumed and so is aimed at the prevailing, bourgeois tastes; if it educates at all, he comments, it is only insofar as it is an 'education in taste'.[781] Agreeing with Benjamin, Brecht argues that no radical innovation will effect a radical engagement with the audience until the very modes of production have been themselves radically altered. Brecht's concept of refunctionalisation calls for just such a reorganisation in the relationship between all the elements involved in theatrical production. The starting point is a *democratisation* of the relationship between author, stage, and audience.

Brecht himself considered his later plays to be regressive, certainly in terms of form. In material recovered by Steinweg, Brecht distinguishes between Major Pedagogy and Minor Pedagogy.[782] These refer to two theatrical strategies, the first pertaining to the theatre of the *Lehrstücke*, the latter to the epic theatre. It is the task of Minor Pedagogy to undermine the prevailing ideology from within and so raising the spectator's consciousness whilst remaining a spectator. Major Pedagogy, however, presupposes the realisation of socialist ideals with the result that the actor-spectator

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[780] Mueller, p. 82.
[781] *Brecht On Theatre*, p. 35.
[782] Cited in Wright, p. 12.

division is removed, 'the object being' observes Wright, 'to turn art into social practice, an experiment in socially productive behaviour.'[783] Thus the originality of the *Lehrstücke* is to be found in their radical form rather than their themes.[784]

The following sections describe four instances of Brecht's experiment with form in his move to this new theatre whilst demonstrating their flexibility as writerly performances.

6.2.1. *Activating the audience*

It is arguable whether *The Flight Over the Ocean,* performed at the Baden-Baden New Music festival of 1929, is a *Lehrstück.*[785] Nevertheless, the cantata marks a move towards a form that found its fullest expression in *He Said Yes* and *The Decision*, anticipating many of the features of these plays.

The Flight Over the Ocean is a celebration of technology, both in its theme— the first trans-Atlantic flight—and its form that made use of new media technology, namely radio. Rather than making modish use of the new technologies by simply assimilating them, the production was arranged to demonstrate their potential for communication. Written as 'original music for the radio',[786] it was also performed before an audience so that 'it could be used for an experiment, a way of showing, at least visually, how listener participation in the art of radio could be made possible'.[787] The stage was organised accordingly, with the broadcasting apparatus of singers, musicians, and technological equipment placed on the left, and a man with a score who sang the part of Lindbergh, screened off and to the right; the audience then being

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[783] Wright, p. 13.

[784] One reason why *Propagandist Plays* is an inadequate, if not incorrect, translation.

[785] It is usually cited as the first of the new genre, but Frederic Jameson, who reserves the collective title for those works distinguished by their association with the classroom, is unsure. He observes that in Germany at that time, the connotations of music were 'active and productive' and that improvisations and the performance of scores at home, both of which feature in this piece, 'was a far more natural matter than in many other countries'. Jameson, p. 61.

[786] Cited by Willett in Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three,* p. xii.

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told, 'you will see how Radio and listeners together perform the work'.[788]

Originally called *The Flight of Lindbergh*, the text was revised to prevent it from being understood as a celebration of one man's heroism rather than a victory of the technology of many, and Charles Lindbergh became 'The Pilot', referred to as 'Captain So and So'. In both these versions, the individual acknowledges his dependence upon the community of workers who built the apparatus. Thus the libretto professes the individual's dependence upon a collective, while the form provides an optimistic representation of the individual's place, and voice, within it.

6.2.2. A 'Court of Inquiry'

Brecht's second play to feature at the 1929 festival was *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent*,[789] simply called *lehrstück* (lower-case 'l') by its composer Paul Hindemith. According to the artistic directors, 'the *lehrstück* is intended to be a community play on the same plane as such community music'.[790] In *The Flight Over the Ocean*, Brecht had activated the audience by requesting that it take up a score and participate in the production. Later, when Hindemith wrote that the purpose of the *lehrstück* was just that, to let everyone participate, Brecht insisted that this was a misunderstanding. More than experimentation and participation, he argued, a performance of *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent* was intended as a one-time 'self-understanding'.[791] General participation would result in a 'shallow harmony' inadequate to counterbalance the formation of 'those collectives [...] which tear the people of our times apart'.[792]

The stage for *The Baden-Baden Lesson on Consent* was arranged as a court of

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[787] Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 315.
[788] Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 315.
[789] *Baden-Baden Lehrstuck vom Einverstandnis* also translated *The Baden-Baden Cantata of Acquiescence.*
[790] Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 325.
[791] Cited in Mueller p. 85.

inquiry:

> 'On a platform [...] the chorus is positioned at the back. The orchestra is on the left. In the left foreground there is a table at which the conductor of the singers and instrumentalists, the Leader of the Chorus songs and the Speaker sit. The singers of the Airmen's (or Mechanics') parts sit at a desk in the right foreground.'[793]

The matter on trial is the nature of help. Although the play turns around the issue of how best to help a pilot involved in an air crash, the most vivid scene is an interlude involving three clowns, one of whom, Herr Schmidt,[794] is a Giant. As the Giant complains that various part of his anatomy are hurting, the other clowns assist by cutting off the distressing body part. The scene is a rather crude demonstration of 'the complicity between the helper and the forces of power and violence'.[795] The conclusion, it seems, is that it is futile to expect help within a system that maintains a power structure of repression and violence.

Wright observes that, unlike Charlie Chaplin's clown who always, eventually, out-does his enemies, Herr Schmidt blindly accepts his defeat, trusting the help of others: Schmidt is to be understood as 'ideologically trapped' and blind to the ambiguities working against him.[796] If, she suggests, the audience initially views the two helpful clowns as the satirical weapons of the scene, they are caught out when it becomes clear that 'the dismemberment of Herr Schmidt is an attack on [the audience's] own cherished hopes and beliefs in a system which is supposed to provide

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[792] Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 328.
[793] Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 23.
[794] That is, Mr Smith, an Everyman.
[795] Mueller, p. 85.
[796] Wright, p. 60.

relief from suffering'.[797]

Brecht criticises culinary theatre for acting as a palliative for bourgeois society, that is, as its helper: 'The drug is irreplaceable; it cannot be done without.'[798] Thus he sees a continuity between the interrogation of a prevailing political system, and the interrogation of a prevailing theatrical system and its reward to ease, by escapism, society's ills.

6.2.3. *Athletes of the Mind*

Some years after the *Lehrstücke* experiments, Brecht remarked that the plays should not be scrutinized for,

> Proposition or counterproposition, arguments for or against certain opinions, pleadings or indictments that represent a personal point of view, but only physical exercises meant for the kind of athletes of the mind that good dialeticians should be. Well- or ill-founded judgements are a wholly different affair that bring into play elements that I have not introduced into these debates.[799]

This statement formed the starting point for Steinweg's thesis that, far from being 'recipes for political action',[800] the *Lehrstücke* were a means of teaching dialectical thinking. They were to be appreciated for their form, not their content.

The Decision,[801] written for, though rejected by, the 1930 Berlin festival,[802] was the first of the plays to be called a *Lehrstück* from the outset. Its theme is the

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[797] Wright, p. 60.
[798] *Brecht On Theatre* p. 41.
[799] Mueller, p. 85.
[800] Steinweg cited in Mueller, p. 85.
[801] *Die Massnahme,* sometimes also rendered, *The Measures Taken.*
[802] The festival board considered that the subordinate role of the music in relation to the text made the play unsuitable for a music festival.

'rational self-sacrifice of an underground agitator'.[803] It was not written to be

performed for an audience outside the event; rather, it was intended 'exclusively for

the instruction of the performers'.[804] Again it takes the form of a court of inquiry, but

this time involving four agitators who make their case to the Party, played by a mass

chorus. The agitators explain that, while conducting Communist propaganda in China,

they were compelled to shoot the youngest comrade. As they justify their deed, they

each take it in turn to play the Young Comrade in a variety of political situations,

'grouping as three confronting one'.[805]

　　　In a note to the participating audience, Brecht explains the case: '[The

Agitators] show him as a revolutionary in his feelings but inadequately disciplined

and too reluctant to listen to his reason, so that in the end he became a threat to the

movement.'[806] For example, when faced with coolies stumbling as they haul a barge,

the Young Comrade helps them up, making himself and the other agitators

conspicuous. The chorus asks, 'But is it not correct to take the side of the weaker?' to

which the Agitators reply, 'He was no help to the weaker, but hindered us from

making propaganda.' The chorus concedes, 'We are in agreement.'[807] During the

production, one song praises the USSR as a leader for 'The future of the world',[808]

another song praises 'Illegal Activity',[809] and the chorus exhorts the subordination of

every virtue to the virtue of fighting for the cause.

　　　Not surprisingly, The Decision has been criticised as a crude call for literal

self-sacrifice to the impersonal needs of the revolution. Certainly, the Young

Comrade proves his commitment by calling for his own execution. Mueller however,

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[803] Willett in Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. xiv.
[804] *Brecht On Theatre* p. 347.
[805] *Brecht On Theatre* p. 63.
[806] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 344.
[807] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 72.
[808] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 65.

resists this interpretation, claiming it to be incomplete: its theoretical tenets, she points out, 'are not meant to dominate the play as eternal truths',[810] arguing that he himself opens them up for discussion. At the end of his synopsis for the audience, Brecht concludes that, 'The performance is meant to provoke discussion of the political usefulness of this kind of event'[811] and the composer, Eisler, points out that 'it is very important that the singers should not treat the text as self-evident, but should discuss it during rehearsals. Each singer has to be quite clear about the political content of what he is singing, and should criticise it'.[812] To confirm the seriousness of these democratic intentions, all participants were handed a questionnaire asking whether they thought the piece was politically instructive. Question three asks, 'To which lessons embodied in *The Decision* do you object politically?'[813]

Brecht was prepared continually to change the commentary, stating, 'It is full of mistakes with respect to our time and its virtues, and it is unusable for other times.'[814] This applied also to the plays themselves: to the complaint that the Young Comrade should simply have been expelled from the Party, not shot, Steinweg reports that, 'Brecht replied that the play was so constructed that changes could be made at any time [...] there had been many amendments in response to the answers received.'[815]

6.2.4. *Yes and Nō Plays*
In *The Decision* Jameson detects unwritten (dialectical) possibilities: the Young Comrade 'might refuse, and be executed anyway; he might refuse and be carried on by his comrades, who might in their turn fail on account of him, or unexpectedly

[809] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 67.
[810] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 90
[811] Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 345.
[812] Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 346.
[813] Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 346.
[814] Mueller, p. 90.

succeed';[816] alternatives that are written out fully in Brecht's earlier pair of plays, *He Said Yes* and *He said No*. A young boy injured whilst on an expedition to fetch medicine, in the first play agrees to his own death in accordance with local custom and moreover to save the expedition as a whole. In the second, as its name suggests, the boy refuses to die, and the expedition is terminated. All three *Lehrstücke*—*The Decision*, *He Said Yes*, and *He Said No*—pivot on the political lesson to be derived from the primacy of the situation under scrutiny, and Jameson considers it out of keeping with Brecht's Marxism that any would reify or recommend heroic self-sacrifice as an eternal virtue.

With *He Said Yes*, described as 'an Opera for Schools', Brecht assumes the detached, inquiring form characteristic of the classical *Lehrstücke*; an austerity that continued beyond experimentation and became the Brechtian style.[817] The play's simplicity is partly due to its source: Arthur Waley's *The Nō Plays of Japan*. According to the composer Kurt Weill, the theme of consent or agreement was added to give it pedagogical value, since the base play—*Taniko* (The Valley Hurling)— lacked 'any motivation for its events'.[818]

> Nothing is more important to learn than agreement.
>
> Many can say yes; at the same time there is no agreement.
>
> Many are not even asked, and many
>
> May be agreeing to error. Therefore:
>
> Nothing is more important to learn than agreement.[819]

[815] Cited in Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 346.
[816] Jameson, p. 63.
[817] Willett, *The Theatre*, p. 96.
[818] Brecht, *Complete Plays: Three*, p. 335.
[819] Brecht, *Complete Plays: Three*, p. 47.

Steinweg cites some of the children's responses to a questionnaire provided post-performance: 'The play is inappropriate for our school because the [character of the] Teacher is very cold blooded'; 'How about having the Boy hesitate a bit?' 'The group must act in solidarity to bring the inadequate invalid home without straining;' 'Give the boy a check-up beforehand.'[820] A not uncommon adult criticism from liberals and Left alike was that the boy's sacrifice was comparable to the demands of conformism in the Kaiser's army of 1914.[821] Primary editions of *He Said Yes* witness to the impact of these comments in modifying the play. But beyond modifications to an original is the counter play *He Said No*. The second play, made possible by the inclusion of consent in the first, reformulates the theme of an individual's subordination for the good of the collective into a discussion on the validity of old traditions. The boy refuses to agree to his death and insists upon a new custom more suited to the needs of their circumstance:

> I am asking you too to turn back and take me home. If there is indeed
> something to be learned beyond the mountains, as I hope, then it can only
> be that in a situation like ours one has to turn back. And as for the ancient
> Custom I see no sense in it. What I need far more is a new Great Custom,
> which we should bring in at once, the custom of thinking things out anew
> in every new situation.[822]

Once again, as Jameson noted, the political lesson to be learned involves the primacy of the particular situation.

While, as Jameson notes, the political lesson pivots on the primacy of the

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[820] In Brecht, *Complete Plays: Three*, pp. 336-337. The ages of the children ranged from 10 to 18 years.
[821] In Brecht, *Complete Plays: Three*, p. xiii.

situation, and the consensus required for effective action, the theme of self-sacrifice is not itself wholly sacrificed. Rather, it is subsumed into the discussion on the Great Custom: individual sacrifice, if it is the result of unconsidered acquiescence, is pointless and the opposite of the desired dialectical attitude. To retain this dialectical balance between the themes of individual subordination and the usefulness of tradition, Brecht requested that, 'If possible the two little plays should always be performed together.'[823]

6.3. *Review*
It would be inaccurate to suggest that the *Lehrstücke* do away with the theatrical frame. Rather, one might suggest that they expand it to encompass all present within the performance, thus making explicit what Brecht suspects to be implicit in every theatrical event, namely the complicity of the actor and audience along with all the apparatuses involved in a production. If complicity contains negative connotations, Brecht seeks to bring about a positive outcome in a democratisation of the theatrical event, configuring it as an ongoing discussion in which multiple perspectives and interpretations are represented. The all-encompassing frame then might be understood to contain multiple other frames, as the line between performer and spectator is in continual motion and this suggests that another level of complicity, or rather collaboration, is in play. The individual is denied the right to be author, actor, or audience in any absolute sense and an interdependence is recognised to be present in any theatrical event.

The fluctuations of the frames within a frame effectively prevent any possibility of there being a unidirectional message to convey. The interpretations that

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[822] Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 59.
[823]Brecht *Collected Plays: Three*, p. 333. Willett points out that, since *He Said No* was never set to music, if the two plays were ever to be performed together, all the music would have to be dropped. In Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, p. xiii.

Kirby dismisses as nothing more than personal idiosyncrasies belonging to individuals in the audience (where he seems to believe they should remain) are now given a place within the act itself. This inclusivity, rather than bringing about a greater univocality, results in a number of disjunctions as the line of communication, from author and director through mediator to audience, is dispersed and the new coincidence between word, gesture, and interpretation in fact yoke together the potentially contradictory intended meaning with interpretation.

6.4. *Jeremiah as Audience*

> The word that came to Jeremiah from Yhwh: 'Come, go down to the
> potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.' So I went down to
> the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he
> was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked into
> another vessel, as seemed good to him. (Jeremiah 18. 1-4)

It has been usual for Jeremiah to play king, to represent Yhwh, but in chapter 18 he must concede that role and become a spectator. The consequent separation of the prophet from his preferred posture, his mimè of the divine, whilst remaining the official voice of the deity, brings about a number of disjunctions that confound active and passive articulations of the event. For example, cut adrift from the enacted message, the spoken message no longer remains part of a simple, unidirectional presentation, but is situated outside the action and so must be configured as a reading of it. The traditionally passive position of the spectator is now taken by the unmistakably active place of the interpreter. Conversely, the traditionally active role of the performer is now fulfilled by the wholly unsuspecting passivity of a potter. But this formal reconfiguration of roles gives rise to a still more profound rift in the figure of Yhwh, resulting in an emerging gap between the words and deeds of the deity.

Initially converging to suggest a simple active-passive hierarchy, word and deed, act and comment, agree that the potter represents Yhwh as doer, and the clay, a malleable, done-to Israel: 'Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord' (Jeremiah 18.5). But left unqualified, script and gesture put the deity in a position of irresistible privilege, with no motivation other than whim. However, the descent into a theology of caprice is avoided by the provision of a rationale based on Israel's tendency to rebel, here caricatured by a national confession: 'We will follow out our plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of our evil will' (Jeremiah 18.12). Thus Israel's apostasy is cited as licence for Yhwh's crushing and remoulding intervention.

Common wisdom suggests, however, that when a pot in progress spoils or turns out misshapen it is generally the fault of the potter, not the clay. Clay may range from wet to dry, smooth to rough, but never does it ever fight back; it can only respond to the artisan's skill.[824] Thus this attempt to steer theologically clear from creating a God of caprice suggests, however unintentionally, the dangerous possibility that Yhwh, represented by a not so infallible potter, might be not quite so absolute, lacking the necessary skills of his trade as patron of a city and people.

No longer adequately understood as a simple, rhetorical device, the drama is unable to provide a comforting theodicy for the catastrophic collapse of Jerusalem. It is a place for trying out, a court of enquiry in which key figures implicated in the events of 587 BCE can take on different roles, active-passive, representative-interrogative, in an attempt to understand and survive the disaster.

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[824] Bright comes close to blaming the clay by writing, 'as the quality of the clay determines what the potter can do with it, so the quality of the people determines what God will do with them.' Bright, p. 125.

The drama of Jeremiah 18 is narrated in the first person and from the point of view of

the spectator-interpreter. Similarly, Jeremiah 13 tells its story in the first person: כה

אמר יהוה אלי ('Thus said the Lord to me' Jeremiah 13. 1). Yet the command that

follows, הלוך וקנית לך אזור פשתים ('"Go and buy yourself a linen loincloth"'

Jeremiah 13. 1), indicates that the prophet is not now the spectator, but once again the

actor. In this new role he is directed to '"... put [the linen loincloth] (שמתו) on your

loins, but do not dip it in water"' (Jeremiah 13. 1)—an odd request perhaps, but not

particularly implausible. However, as they go on, the instructions do begin to stretch

credulity, requiring the prophet to, '"take the loincloth that you bought and are

wearing, and go now to the Euphrates (פרתה), and hide it there in the cleft of a

rock"' (Jeremiah 13. 4), then, '"after many days"', to '"go now to the Euphrates, and

take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there"' (Jeremiah 13. 6).

The whole performance ends with the unremarkable discovery, 'But the loincloth was

ruined; it was good for nothing' (Jeremiah 13 .7*b*).

What seems unlikely about this narrative is the fact that the river Euphrates is

about four hundred miles from Jerusalem, a distance which, according to Ezra 7. 7-9

takes four months to complete. Jeremiah's two return journeys then would occupy

him for more than a year. These logistics alone make the performance seem

improbable, but they render it ineffective as a communication, too. How are the

citizens to know about the events enacted at the Euphrates? If by report, then the

drama is redundant, the prophet could have stayed home and simply told a story. And

if it is unlikely that the prophet made the journey himself, it seems even more unlikely

that he took an audience with him.

To overcome these problems commentators have suggested that Jeremiah 13 records either a dream, or a vision.[825] The narrative, however, has none of the usual markers to support these suggestions. Instead, it is punctuated throughout by confirmations that that the instructions were indeed followed: 'So I bought a loincloth, according to the word of Yhwh and put it on my loins' (Jeremiah 13. 2), through to, 'So I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth' (Jeremiah 13. 7a).

An alternative and now preferred suggestion is that the Euphrates would itself have been designated symbolically, either by a river relatively nearby to Jerusalem, or a marker in its streets. Although this makes the presence of spectators entirely plausible, it should be noted that there is in Jeremiah 13, in contrast to Jeremiah 19, no reference of any kind, anywhere, to an audience. Of course, one may simply argue that the narrative infers, requires even, an audience in order to make sense. But as it stands in this first person account, the actor alone is the spectator of his own drama. The effect of this solipsistic stance, apart from turning the performance into something akin to private ritual, is a reinforcement of the textuality of the performance: without wanting to retreat from the argument so far, there is one other audience discernible within Jeremiah 13: the reader.

Similarly, the rarely if ever performed *Lehrstücke* are now predominantly approached by readers engaging with them as texts, or even by readers engaging with texts about the texts. The *Lehrstücke* are themselves already textual in that they are overtly *writable*: continually generating interpretation which becomes part of the event itself and so generating further interpretation. Thus to configure Brecht as an innovator of theatrical form might be reasonable, but to imagine him the genius of a

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[825] Holladay reports that 'to Calvin it was self-evidently a vision'. *Jeremiah 1*, p. 396.

new form, apart from contradicting his political aesthetic,[826] is also to ignore the extent to which the *Lehrstücke* are collaborative. Brechtian, as a number of his commentators note,[827] is something of an umbrella term or point of reference for a corpus of theatrical texts and events that cannot simply be identified as the product of an individual. The *Lehrstücke* themselves dramatise the collaborative generation of a Brechtian body of work, and therefore inscribe Brecht as much as Brecht may be said to have scribed them. The *Lehrstücke* further challenge the way in which Brecht has traditionally been viewed, particularly in English-language scholarship.

7.1. *A little aside about Brecht*

The classical articulation of Brecht's career, accepted by both English language and German scholars, follows something of a Hegelian form:[828]

1. The subjectivist-anarchist phase of the early plays such as *Baal* (1923).

2. The rationalist-behaviourist phase of the *Lehrstücke* (1929-1932) and *The Mother* (1932).

3. A synthesis resulting in a final mature phase of the best known plays, *Mother Courage* (1939), *Galileo* (1943), and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1945).

Elizabeth Wright, whilst discussing the critical reception of Brecht, notes that in both the East and the West, Brecht's conversion to Marxism—marking the beginning of the middle phase—has been acknowledged as pivotal. However, while English-language scholarship interprets this psychologically (as a move from self-indulgent

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[826] Eagleton writes, 'For Brecht and Benjamin, the author is a *producer*, analogous to any other maker of social product. They oppose, that is to say, the notion of the author as *creator*—as the God-like figure who mysteriously conjures his handiwork out of nothing.' Eagleton, *Marxism*, p. 68.
[827] See John Fuegi's *Bertolt Brecht*, and 'The Zelda Syndrome: Brecht and Elisabeth Hauptmann', in Thomson and Sacks, pp. 104-116.
[828] First described by Martin Esslin in 1959, see Wright, p. 6.

individualism to collective authoritarianism) the German response is more complex.

In Germany Brecht had been approached in terms of his political usefulness until, by

the 1970s, the general attitude towards his work had become one of *Brecht-Müdigkeit*

(Brecht-fatigue), itself a marketable commodity.[829] A critical revival was then set in

motion by Reiner Steinweg's 1972 book *Das Lehrstück* which provoked some

recognition of Brecht's development of a specifically materialist aesthetic.

Steinweg's study is not available in English but Wright's discussion, and a

number of publications during the last decades—including those of Peter Brooker,

Roswitha Mueller, Frederick Jameson and Christopher McCollough—indicate that the

insights of German scholarship have now begun to impact upon English-language

criticism. Making use of their representations of Steinweg's scholarship, I shall

explore Brecht's utilisation of Marxist theory in the development of the *Lehrstücke*.

While admitting that the tripartite schematisation of Brecht's career into early,

middle and mature phases is 'too neatly Hegelian', Suvian nevertheless finds 'no

acceptable alternative'.[830] The characteristically Hegelian implication of this scheme,

that each phase retains elements of its predecessor whilst at the same time moving

beyond it, thereby negating it, enables an articulation of Brecht's career in terms of a

dynamic movement culminating in the so-called great plays—*Mother Courage*;

Caucasian Chalk Circle; and *Galileo*—which, as McCollough remarks, 'seem to

approximate more closely bourgeois values concerning the matter of great humanistic

art [...] more easily appropriated into [...] "dramatic theatre"'.[831] This evolutionary

process is then understood, to use the subtitle of Willett's edition of Brecht's

theatrical theory, as 'The Development of an Aesthetic'.[832]

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[829] Wright, p. 8.
[830] Cited in Wright, p. 7.
[831] Christopher McCollough, 'Saint Joan of the Stockyards', in Thompson and Sacks, p. 97.
[832] The subtitle of *Brecht on Theatre*.

Presenting Brecht's development as an artist in terms of negations, is indicative of a common regret about the man and his politics that has been particularly prevalent in the West. A familiar response to Brecht the man, Peter Thompson observes, can be summarised, 'The more I learned about Brecht, the less I liked him.'[833] Sentiments of this kind are usually voiced in response to Brecht's harshly authoritarian style of direction and his personal—read sexual—morality.[834] Thus the tripartite scheme functions as a distancing mechanism, separating him from his early dissipated lifestyle and the crude Marxism of his middle years, allowing him finally to emerge as Great Artist having learned from, and overcome, his past. Underlying this ambivalence towards Brecht's biography, seen as necessary to, but necessarily transcended by, his art, one detects an ideology that is both Romantic and Idealist: the latter, in the sense of the human subject discovering itself dialectically through the negation of false consciousnesses, and the former, in the expectation of a correlation between the poet's life and work, for which a little bohemian recklessness is deemed quite usual, if not essential.[835]

The recognised middle phase in Brecht's career coincides with his study of Marxism under the direction of Karl Korsch in the mid 1920s. Alongside the better-known plays from this period—*The Threepenny Opera* (1928), *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1929), and *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1931)—is a distinct and distinctly lesser-known collections of plays collectively called the *Lehrstücke* (1929-1931). Making use of short, parable-like narratives as test cases for political

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[833] Thompson, 'Brecht's Lives', in Thompson and Sacks, p. 22.

[834] Detailed in Esslin, pp. 19-20.

[835] Interestingly, these are expectations that Brecht explores and rejects in his first play, *Baal*. This was written in response to Hanns Johst's expressionist play, *Der Einsame*, which portrays its protagonist—the real life writer Dietrich Grabbe—a man lifted above the crowd by his genius, and whose scandalous behaviour is celebrated by Society. Brecht's Baal, a poet also celebrated by Society, rejects, however, a life of patronage, refusing to be paid to embody 'their expectations of an artist or living out for them a fantasy of the bohemian lifestyle'. Tony Meech, 'Brecht's Early Plays', in Thompson and Sacks, pp. 43-55 (p. 46).

deliberations, they have, for the most part, been negatively criticised for their perceived rigidity of form and crude Marxist content. Esslin translates *Lehrstücke* as 'Didactic Plays,'[836] Gray, as 'Propagandist Plays.'[837] Wright suggests that both renderings are indicative (and I suspect in some degree causative) of the marginalisation of the plays by Western critics. Steinweg's re-evaluation of the *Lehrstücke* however, places them at the heart of the Brechtian dramaturgy, a consequence of which is that the traditional Hegelian interpretation of Brecht's theatrical development is considerably undermined. To position these peculiar, explicitly political, works at the ideological rather than chronological (and so superseded) centre of a Brecht corpus, is to acknowledge just how thoroughly political too are the more well-know, well-respected works.[838]

The organisation of Brecht's writing into three distinct and biographically described periods, whilst seeming to privilege the playwright above the plays (explaining the latter in terms of the former), demonstrates in fact the interdependence of Brecht-the-writer and Brecht-the-corpus: that a re-articulation of the Brecht corpus is necessarily a re-creation of the writer. It has been acknowledged that many of the

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[836] First, and influentially, in 1959, then in his 1980 edition, p. 42.

[837] Roswitha Mueller, 'Learning for a new society: the *Lehrstücke*', in Thompson and Sacks, pp. 79-95 (p. 79).

[838] The *Lehrstücke* were formed and performed during the final years of Germany's Weimar Republic, described by John Willet as 'a fragile, if vibrant institution', destined to collapse following the economic disaster of the Wall Street crash in America. In response to this crisis, the newly elected chancellor, Heinrich Brüning and his successors, reduced the liberal democratic government to a presidential dictatorship rendering the Reichstag virtually redundant, thus (albeit unwittingly) handing over to Adolf Hitler's successful National Socialist Party near-absolute power. The anti-modernist tastes of the Nazis soon stifled what had been a vibrant avant-garde in Germany. By 1933 the main figures of this movement, many of them communists and or Jews, were fleeing Germany. Brecht and his particular circle of collaborators were separated: Hanns Eisler to Vienna; Kurt Weill to Paris; and Brecht himself to Prague. But for a short period, 'modernist excitement' and its experimental fervour of the mid- to late-1920s that involved a particular interest in the use of new technologies (film and radio) in the arts, prevailed.[838] This included a widespread concern with the social and educational uses of the arts. The amateur performer—singer, actor, musician—was enlisted along with schoolchildren who were encouraged 'to practice an art rather than study art history and music "appreciation."' John Willett, 'Introduction' in Brecht, *Collected Plays: Three*, pp. ix-xxvi (p. ix).

plays published under the name Brecht are collaborations,[839] but the *Lehrstücke* are by definition sites of discourse which include voices and opinions other than those of a cited author. Effectively, Brecht's name functions as a shorthand for a theatrical event, or events; with the *Lehrstücke* placed at the ideological centre of Brecht's work, any sense that the corpus represents a continuity between the man and his art as a form of self-expression is undermined.

7.2. *Infinite Rehearsal*

Steinweg's assessment of the *Lehrstücke* as 'a model for the "dialectical simultaneity, the mutual dependence, and the reciprocal positing and counterpositing of theory and practice of theoretical thought and practical behaviour"'[840] sells the plays short, in the opinion of Mueller. The description, while correct, is equally applicable to Brecht's epic theatre, which also aims at a unity of theory and practice designed to achieve a qualitative change in the audience: from passive to productive. The epic plays examine the contradictions of capitalism, exposing its structures as contingent and historical rather than inevitable and natural.[841] The *Lehrstücke* differ by radicalising this stance. Not interested in representing the structures of a commercially driven society, they attempt rather to erase them, breaking down the central contradiction between producer and the means of production in theatre itself by rejecting both the fixed text and an actor-spectator separation. They are practical exercises in which the principles and strategies of a new kind of society are practised. Focussed on the primacy of the situation, they provide a model of the dramatic working-out of events in which a variety of suggestions and interpretations are provided whilst never

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[839] See for example, John Fuegi, 'The Zelda Syndrome: Brecht and Elizabeth Hauptmann', in Thompson and Sacks, pp. 104-116.

[840] Mueller, p. 85.

[841] Brecht's better known epic theatre, his term for plays such as *Mother Courage* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, was designed to bring about a change in the attitude of the spectator, from passive

providing a single answer.

Jameson is fascinated by the exclusion of the public from the *Lehrstücke* and the rotation of the actors through the various roles. It is, he suggests, 'what is in the theatre called a master class, but one which does not necessarily have a master director present either':[842] an 'infinite rehearsal' in which every alternative can be tried out and debated with text and performance blurring into an 'enlarged discussion.'[843] Unity of theory and practice must then become the inseparability of theory and text. The text does not represent or simply incorporate the theory; rather, the theory becomes a work of art in its own right.

7.4. *Gathering Interpretations*

The theatrical event of Jeremiah 19, with its apparently clear demarcation between actor (prophet) and audience (elders), is seemingly straightforward. On closer reading, distinctions begin to blur; no simple rhetorical flourish, the drama of jar-breaking breaks down the separation between messenger and recipients and seems less a forewarning to passive spectators than an enactment of events in which they are unavoidably a part. The drama in Jeremiah 18 gives to its audience of one the active task of interpretation: prophecy becomes the role of the reader (Jeremiah) in an event in which text (gesture) and interpretation do not comfortably coincide. The audience of Jeremiah 13, not including the prophet as his own spectator, is now the reader of the biblical text. As if to acknowledge this, more than one reading is embedded in the text—starter interpretations which are by no means definitive. Interpretation begins in Jeremiah 13. 9, but rather than a close-fitting, point-for-point account of the action, there follow three rather impressionistic, though not mutually exclusive, comments.

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reception to critical productivity, by estranging social activity and exposing it as contingent and historical.
[842] Jameson, p. 63.
[843] Jameson, p. 64.

The first, in Jeremiah 13. 9, suggests that the ruined loincloth signifies Yhwh's intended humbling of his people, whereas in Jeremiah 13. 10, it represents Judah's self-induced decay, 'This evil people who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own will [...] shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing'; then finally in Jeremiah 13. 11, the loincloth itself symbolises the intimacy of the people's relationship with their God, 'For as the loincloth clings to one's loins, so I made the whole house of Judah cling to me.'

Now gathered into the text, the interpretations become part of an event to which subsequent readers are the audience. Since none exhausts the significance of all the elements—no explicit reference is made to the river Euphrates, or the 'after many days' (Jeremiah 13. 6), or the burial—and none fits quite perfectly, subsequent readers are goaded into offering their own interpretations. For example, Origen read Jeremiah 13 as an allegory of supersessionism, the loincloth-Israel set aside by God in favour of the Gentile Church;[844] Jerome, that the garment was not washed symbolises Israel's initial purity.[845] Moving ahead, twentieth-century commentators eager to solve its riddles offer their own explanations. Bright notes that Jeremiah again 'plays the part of Yahweh', and that the loincloth 'clearly [...] represents Israel', but then asks, 'what of the soaking in Euphrates water [...]?'[846] Observing that some argue that it refers 'to political entanglements with Mesopotamian powers, which have corrupted the character of the nation', he adds his interpretation that the performance is 'symbolic of the exile'. He admits, however, that Judah should not be thought of 'a good piece of cloth' ruined only by the disaster.[847] Holladay argues that it is a real event from the career of Jeremiah presenting Yhwh's answer to Judah's pride. Noting

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[844] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 671.
[845] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 668.
[846] Bright, p. 96.
[847] Bright, p. 96.

that 'there is no phraseology to suggest the exile in vv 9-11, he concludes that פרתה,

the usual biblical word for the Euphrates with the directional ה suffix ('to the

Euphrates'), refers, in fact, to Parah (פרה; and so 'to Parah') near Anathoth, and that

this is a word-play representing, 'not simply that the local village is a convenient

symbol for the Euphrates', but 'the threat of the Euphrates to inundate Judah's

soil.'[848] For Brueggemann, the whole drama is a 'symbolic gesture' in the Jeremiah

tradition forming a replication of the entire national history of Judah. The three

interpretations, he continues, snugly fit the action, but in reverse order: the ruined

pride of Judah (13. 9) matching the ruination of the loincloth (13. 7); the people who

go after other gods (13. 10) are as far from Yhwh as the loincloth is from Jerusalem

(13. 4-5); and the house of Judah is to cling to Yhwh (13. 11) as the loincloth must

have clung to Jeremiah when it was worn by him (13. 1-2).[849] Like Holladay,

Lundbom explains that פרתה is to be understood as a reference to Perah, chosen to

indicate the distant Euphrates. In its original form—13. 10, he argues, is an

expansion—the action does not concern the exile, but 'only with the loss of pride and

Judah's ruin if it pins its hopes on Assyria.[850] McKane believes that Jeremiah 13 is

most probably a post-exilic parable 'of a prophetic insight of the historical

Jeremiah'.[851] 'The proposal', he continues, 'that there is a play which enables us to

reckon with both *ēn fārā* [the modern site of ancient Parah] and the Euphrates should

be discounted—it 'is not an economical hypothesis'. The symbolism of the removal

and concealment of the loincloth, he concludes, is indeed a reference to the exile.'[852]

Framed as a prophetic event, every scratch of this text, every fold of the

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[848] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 398.
[849] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 127.
[850] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 671.
[851] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 292.

garment almost, is *semiotized* and deemed worthy of comment; and when one interpretation is felt to be lacking, an alternative is offered in its place. The boundaries set by a fixed text and the separation of actor from spectator are transgressed as interpretation enters and renegotiates the narrative in an endless rehearsal of the drama—the where and when of its occurrence—and its consequence. Each new reader who produces the narrative anew cannot properly be said to be outside the performance; rather the reader is integral to it and so part of an *infinite rehearsal* in which alternatives are tried and debated—a master class in which, if as the text seems to suggest, there is a master director (Yhwh), his control of the series of prophetic gestures does not equal control of their meaning. He is more Master of Ceremonies at a performance which is also master class in the production of prophetic texts generated from an initial prophetic event.

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[852] McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 290.

Chapter Three

THE PROPHET, HIS SCRIBE, A SCROLL, AND THE KING: PROPHECY AS PRODUCTION AND DISRUPTION IN JEREMIAH 16 AND 36

> Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights; the
>
> accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so
>
> heavily worked that the letters feel like Braille. I like to keep my body
>
> rolled up away from prying eyes. Never unfold too much, tell the whole
>
> story.[853]

> And the Word became flesh—human flesh at first, then eventually animal
>
> flesh, parchment, processed sheepskin, or goatskin. Later still it became
>
> paper [...].[854]

Where once body and breath converged in action and speech, in the prophetic word

and event, now page and writing meet in the prophetic book. This exchange of

material corpora, in which the former represents dramatic immediacy, the latter,

apparent latency—the book remaining dormant until opened or unrolled and read (or

recited and so returned to body and breath)—marks both continuity and discontinuity.

The word now captured is pinned to the page and so preserved; but supposedly a sign

of a sign, and so already once removed from its preachment, it survives its sender

(who having composed it, is liable to be the sooner to decompose) and further escapes

his limiting presence. And so a suspicion of the written text prevails, not only among

commentators—those who love the letter and go to extraordinary lengths to keep it

from corruption, and those who love the preacher, and imagine, nostalgically, his

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[853] Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p. 89.
[854] Stephen Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 37.

freedom from the page[855]—but also (and ironically) the writers of Jeremiah who are keen to prove that neither jot nor tittle of the prophet's words have slipped away or been distorted (Jeremiah 36. 17-18), yet anxious and aware that this might be the fate of all writing (Jeremiah 8. 8).[856]

The word was once contained by the prophet, digested by him at the start of his career (Jeremiah 1. 9; 15. 16); transformed into written text it has become his container. So framed—the scratches on his legs are now readable inscriptions on the page—the prophet himself is indistinguishable in significance from his words; thus prophetic life and prophetic oracle are combined in a single prophetic event as *book*. Moments in his life now mingle with example of his speaking, and if the consistency of the resultant *text* is tortuous, scholars are keen to point out that there is nevertheless 'a remarkable consistency between "the man" and " the message"'.[857] Interestingly, those keenest to insist upon the historicity of the literary presentation of the prophet Jeremiah (those who belong to the tradition of liberal theology, broadly defined) are often the keenest to acknowledge the didactic significance of his life. Jack R.

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[855]In the former category are the text critics, such as P. Kyle McCarter, who seek to maintain the integrity of the most authentic text, defined as its most 'primitive' form. McCarter, p. 12. In the latter, the commentators of the tradition of liberal theology.

[856]Interpretation of the phrase 'the false pen of the scribes' (Jeremiah 8. 8) is far from settled: 'Like so much else in the book of Jeremiah,' writes Carroll, 'the verse is tantalizingly brief and referentially oblique.' It might represent a suspicion of scribal elaboration or commentary, or as Carroll himself suggests, writing as such: 'The prophet as preacher cannot be gainsaid by a written scroll of YHWH's torah because the scribal activity in producing such a document—whether as copying, elaborating, exegesis or writing it in the first place—is what makes it false. The written word cannot countermand the spoken word. Prophet is superior to writer.' But the written word is also troublesome for other reasons: in reference to the fate of two scrolls (Jeremiah 36. 23; 51. 63), Carroll notes that 'there is a tendency in the book of Jeremiah for written things to have a precarious existence'. Robert P. Carroll, 'Inscribing the Covenant: Writing and the Written in Jeremiah' in *Understanding Poets and Prophets: Essays in Honour of George Wishart Anderson*, ed by A. Graeme Auld (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 61-76 (p. 62). For an account of various readings of Jeremiah 8. 8, see William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 281-282.

[857]Given the great many inconcinnities in Jeremiah and the nature of his message, Dubbink can only describe this 'remarkable consistency' in the broadest of terms of both man and word opposed in concert 'to the mainstream contemporary thought'. Dubbink, p. 26. See also Stulman: 'One could even argue that in the book of Jeremiah the text *transforms* the person of the prophet into the message itself, so that the two—the person and the message—now coalesce and articulate together the poignant *dabar* ('word' or 'event') of the Lord.' Stulman, *Order*, p. 138. Original emphasis.

Lundbom, for example, argues that the book is 'a rich corpus of historical, biographical, and autobiographical material',[858] but also that 'Jeremiah was himself the fullest expression of divine prophecy when his life was perceived to be the symbol';[859] William L. Holladay proposes that the book is unmatched as a record of both the words and biography of a prophet, but also 'that his life became a paradigm to the people of Yahweh's action'.[860] At once deeply human—'Preaching the divine word has brought him nothing but anguish'[861]—and profoundly emblematic, the prophet is recognised to be more than a spokesperson, and in turn, his function more than proclamation: it is not only Jeremiah's *content*—his insights and arguments—that are prophetic, but also his person.

Similarly, it is not only the words of the book (its content), but the book itself that functions prophetically. References to Jeremiah writing—a letter to the exiles in Babylon (Jeremiah 29); another to the same destination but on a different occasion (51. 63); and a scroll, albeit dictated to Baruch ben Neriah, sent to the inner courts of the temple and palace (36. 1-4)—may indicate, as Carroll suggests, something of 'the transformation of orality into writing'.[862] However, beyond recounting the formation of a record (a technological means by which the range of the prophet's words might be both spatially and temporally extended), the writing of a book, indeed writing itself—an act that can be divinely commissioned (30. 2; 36. 1)—constitutes a properly prophetic gesture.[863]

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[858] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 57.
[859] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 139.
[860] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 361.
[861] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 117.
[862] Robert P. Carroll, 'Inscribing the Covenant' p. 62.
[863] Louis Stulman traces a move from orality to writing represented, for example, in the inclusio formed by Jeremiah 1 (the genesis of the oral proclamation; v. 9), and 25 (its written synopsis; v. 13), and recognises in this something of the theological *Tendenz* of the book as a whole in which 'the "written word", mediated by the scribal tradition, critiques the social dynamics of the old world order and authorizes the structures of society, values, and faith claims of the new Israel... As such, the new Israel is on its way to becoming a "people of the book"'. Stulman p. 183. Conversely, Carroll reads all

In this final chapter, I shall trace the transformation of prophet into prophetic text—not, however, by reconstructing the historical events that brought about the production of a book. Beginning by reading a passage in which Jeremiah does indeed step onto the biblical stage and so become the *symbol* (Jeremiah 16. 1-9), I shall observe how this leads to a gradual erosion of flesh and blood that results in its replacement by parchment and ink. I shall then seek to demonstrate that despite their endeavours to turn back from the page to the prophet, to situate a message in the context of a man—in essence an attempt to restore Jeremiah's function as the container and so controller of his words—commentators have nevertheless produced a figure who, as both begotten and begetter of a textual heritage, is suffused with the letter. Thus preceded, constituted, and succeeded by words, Jeremiah is not greater or more originate than the book he is thought to have fathered. In the latter part of the chapter, I shall begin to read Jeremiah 36, in which the words independently continue the ministry of the man who has, we are told, now receded entirely (that is, has gone into hiding). Having shed its prophet, prophecy gives up entirely the pretence of *belonging* to an individual—of being the outpourings of a person; more than a record of the words of Jeremiah, the scroll has itself an aura and function as word and word-bearer that had previously defined (inscribed) the man. To do so, I shall engage with the writings of Jacques Derrida, particularly his discussion of the aporia of the *gift*. An element of excess in an economy, the *gift* is an irritant, disrupting the round of exchange, but inevitably caught up within it—it is also, therefore, the *impossible*, the unthinkable, that which breaks open the horizons of the possible. Similarly, the self-destructive scroll, *given* to the economy of temple and palace, troubles these

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instances of writing alongside Jeremiah 8. 8, and so concludes that the verse undermines any confidence we have in the reliability of the written word—'The written torah cannot compete with the speaking person (who is a prophet.) Persons are more important than texts. Prophets in particular outrank texts.' Carroll, 'Inscribing the Covenant', p. 72.

institutions and spells out the cessation of the functions of each, re-opening them to the violence of the future and the divine. Although I shall make reference to Derrida throughout, I shall discuss his work more fully in the final sections.

1. *The Sign of the (Unre)Productive Prophet: Jeremiah 16. 1-9*

The greatest poem was his life.[864]

The gap that separates an historical Jeremiah from the book that reveals and conceals him would seem to close a little when the former becomes the concern of the latter: when events from the prophet's own life are taken up by the text, the more so when they are presented in his own words. Thus, the first person account of Jeremiah's commissions to celibacy and self-exclusion from feasts and festivals seems to offer at least some access to the man who, entering autobiographically into his own writings, records these matters for the reader. But by entering into this particular writing, in which his procreative and social functions are forfeited for a purpose which is solely semiotic, he simultaneously places himself 'outside of any function other than that of the very practice of the symbol itself'[865]—by turning himself into text, 'disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death, writing begins'.[866]

Rendered significant—made the sign of something unseen—these quite intimate details of the prophet's personal life, rather than conveying something of his sense of vocation and isolation, are exploited *as* text *by* the text and for its purposes with a disregard for anything but their semiotic value. The writing subject is neither religious hero, nor animated flesh; the writing itself attempts neither self-expression

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[864] Cheyne (1883), cited in Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 139.

nor self-justification—it is the autobiographical gesture of one without interiority, who offers himself only as *an unfolding exteriority*: as an unrolling scroll exposing nothing but a surface of words. As one who belongs among the prophets—those who craft signs out of close-to-hand items: out of fruit baskets (Amos 8. 1-3), and loincloths (Jeremiah 13. 1-11), and hair (Ezekiel 5)—the prophet now presents the raw material of himself as the stuff from which meaning may be manufactured. But just as fruit bowls are not the natural icons of corpses, loincloths not the self-evident symbols of ruin, Jeremiah is not *a priori* a statement of national termination—if he seems so, it is because, as scroll, this end has been marked upon him. Blank scrolls do not suggest their own content, do not ooze out their own writing; rather, they have it inscribed upon them. In this first section, therefore, I shall consider the writing-up of Jeremiah, both in chapter 16. 1-9 and in the commentaries that remark upon it, noting (among other things) the tension or disjunction that exists between the prophet himself—his celibacy and asceticism—and the meanings conferred on him; meanings that drain him of his existence as *world object among world objects*. Thus I shall begin by remarking upon the phenomenon of semiotic *derealization*, which like any stage object, he must inevitably undergo.

1.1. *The Flesh Made Word: The Semiotic Derealization of Jeremiah*
Unlike other prophetic dramas in the book of Jeremiah, the actions (or better, inactions) of Jeremiah 16. 1-9 involve neither theatrical props (jugs and loincloths) nor a specific setting (the Potsherd Gate or the Euphrates), but the prophet alone and in an unspecified place (16. 2).[867] Taking centre stage and addressing the reader in the

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[865] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 142.
[866] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 142.
[867] It has been suggested that the phrase 'in this place' may indicate that Jeremiah had license to marry elsewhere. Holladay, for example, cites M. D. Goldman's suggestion that Jeremiah was only forbidden to marry in his hometown of Anathoth, but dismisses this as too speculative. Since the phrase is paralleled with 'in this land' (also 16. 3), it presumably refers to Judah and Jerusalem. *Jeremiah 1*, p.

first-person—ויהי דבר־יהוה אלי לאמר ('The word of Yhwh came to me, saying'

16. 1)—the prophet (unnamed but presumably Jeremiah) announces the first of three

new words to be enacted: לא־תקח לך אשה ולא־יהיו לך בנים ובנות במקום

הזה ('You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons and daughters in this place'

16. 2). Were it not for the opening formula (16. 1 is absent in the LXX) this would

read as a pronouncement to the people; as it stands in the MT, Jeremiah the actor

speaks his own stage directions for the part he is to play—that of the celibate. The

second and third instructions continue the ban on intercourse (albeit now of a social

rather than a sexual kind) as the prophet announces that he is forbidden from entering

a 'house of funeral feasting' (בית מרזח),[868] indeed, from making any show of grief

at all (ואל־תלך לספור ואל־תנד להם, 16. 5),[869] and that he is 'not to go into the

house of feasting to sit with them, to eat or drink with them' (ובית־משתה לא־תבוא

לשבת אותם לאכל ולשתות, 16. 8).[870]

Read as a report made in first person prose, the passage may be construed as

an account of proclamations linked to incidents from the prophet's life *given in his*

own words. As autobiography, with both form and diction attributable to the historical

man, it can be supposed that he is palpable on the surface of the text and so peculiarly

accessible. Thus, paying close attention to both the style and vocabulary, William L.

Holladay is able not only to place the performances—reckoning them to have

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469. The 'land-city identification is a major feature of the tradition', notes Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 339.

[868] The only other biblical occurrence of מרזח is Amos 6. 7 where it is taken to mean 'revelry' (see BDB and NRSV); in post-biblical Hebrew and Aramaic it has the sense 'funeral rites'. As McKane notes, in Jeremiah 16. 5 'the reference is to a social occasion associated with bereavement—a meal in which the mourners take part'. McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 365. See also Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 470.

[869] Holladay argues that the switch in negatives, from לא in 16. 2, to אל in 16. 5, denotes a shift from permanent to short-term prohibition. *Jeremiah 1*, p. 470.

occurred in Jeremiah's twenty-sixth or twenty-seventh year[871]—but also to detect in the diction something of their personal cost. Celibacy, for example, is a 'sacrifice' with a poignancy that 'appears to have been particularly keen, given the number of references to bride and bridegroom (2. 32; 7. 34; 25. 10)'.[872] Opposing this approach at almost every point, Robert Carroll argues that since it is the introductory formula alone that transforms this 'highly edited'[873] text into a 'series of divine commands to the speaker rather than the community', Jeremiah 16 cannot be cited as a basis on which to make claims about the prophet's private life.[874] There is evidence only, he continues, of the stitch-work of scribes who, among other things, have embroidered the prophet on to a pre-existing proclamation. Other scholars, while accepting that the text contains accretions and interpolations, manage to estimate its historical value quite differently: rather than demonstrating the editorial invention of the prophet, the man has been obscured by the reworking of his original words. John Bright, for example, does not mention the lack of the first person formula in alternative versions, but posits the existence of 'a poetic original' underlying the 'pedestrian' prose.[875] And David Stacey, who distinguishes between the editorially shaped account and the

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[870] מִשְׁתֶּה, 'feasting', here refers to a joyful celebration (see 16. 9) and is therefore distinct from מָרְזֵחַ. McKane, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 365 (cf. Holladay *Jeremiah 1*, pp. 470-471).

[871] Comparing the vocabulary with that of passages he has already dated—Jeremiah 9. 21 and 14. 1 - 15. 9—Holladay situates the performances around 601-600 BCE at which time, he argues, the prophet would have been convinced that national disaster could not be averted. Though not stated overtly, that he accepts that the text represents the *ipsissima verba* of Jeremiah is apparent in his comments. In reference to the possibility that 16. 9 alludes to a marriage feast, for example, he writes, 'Jrm may be content simply to leave the matter ambiguous, wishing by the expressions in v 9 to bring an inclusio to v 2'. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, pp. 471-472.

[872] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 649.

[873] The mix of singular (16. 2) and plural (16. 9) forms of address, and (citing Theil's assessment that 16. 3b, 4b, and 9 represent Deuteronomistic expansions) the editorial shaping of the piece, lead Carroll to state that this is 'a highly developed section that will not yield a simple or undisputed meaning'. *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 338. Alternatively, Holladay regards the change from single to plural forms as an indication that after their reception by Jeremiah the commands were to be proclaimed. *Jeremiah 1*, p. 468.

[874] 'Was Jeremiah celibate then? To this question I would answer: "the text does not permit us to answer such a question because it is not the unmediated record of somebody's life." Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 341.

[875] Bright, p. 112.

events it reports, detects in the latter the story of an lone figure surrendering 'some of man's greatest blessings, the comfort and love of a wife and children'[876]—in so doing, he like Holladay, depicts Jeremiah as the kind of ancient Kierkegaard or Kafka that Carroll believes to be unsupportable.[877]

Any discussion addressing the extent to which Jeremiah is either editorially formed or redactionally distorted, presents as a problem the relationship between the prophet and the page (that is, the degree to which the text refers to or represents an actual historical man). In so doing, it takes no account of the manner in which the prophet (historical or fictional) is already constructed as text quite apart from any written representation of him. Jeremiah is not simply depicted or created by words on a scroll, but as recipient of the יהוה דבר (the word of Yhwh) is himself a figure composed out of the very stuff of signification. If commanded to forego his potential for reproduction in the cause of prophetic production (the dissemination of the word), for example, not only is he denied the opportunity to procreate (to propagate his name and line), he must suffer a further deprivation—the loss of material particularity. Stepping into the limelight, Jeremiah now functions like the drunk about whom Umberto Eco writes 'as soon as he has been put on the [Salvation Army] platform and shown to the audience [he] has lost his original nature of "real" body among real bodies. He is no more a world object among world objects—he has become a semiotic device; he is now a *sign*'.[878] Jeremiah, generally active as performer and/or interpreter, has on this occasion become a (passive) stage object ostended—that is, *shown*—and so prey to the *derealizing* effects of theatrical signification: his physical

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[876] Stacey, p. 139.
[877] See Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, pp. 341-342.
[878] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p. 110.

presence no longer referring to itself, but to something else—'something absent'.[879]

Arguing from a summary of C. S. Peirce's definition of the sign as 'something which stands to somebody for something else in some respect or capacity',[880] Eco proposes that the drunk refers not to the drunken man that he is, but *a* drunk: 'The present drunk—insofar as he is the member of a class—is referring back to the class of which he is a member. He *stands for* the category he belongs to.'[881] Thus Jeremiah's physicality (and in this narrative, his sexuality), must recede or be bracketed off in favour of textuality; as Eco states, 'there is no difference between our intoxicated character and the word "drunk"',[882] so too, there is no difference between our inspired character and the signifier 'prophet'.

Not waiting to be written up by the endeavours of scribes with a scroll, Jeremiah the prophet—indeed, Jeremiah *as* prophet—is by this very definition constructed both *from* and *as* text. Made prophet through his reception of the divine word (Jeremiah 1. 9-10), the title then frames and inscribes him; his every action, being the action of a prophet, is liable to be construed as significant, his life becoming 'the fullest expression of divine prophecy'.[883] While this holds true of all narrative depictions of Jeremiah—his sufferings so frequently discussed as an emblem of the pathos of God[884]—it is particularly so of Jeremiah 16. 1-9 in which he is overtly called upon to function as a sign—to become a divine text. Denying him the opportunity for physical reproduction whilst removing him from significant social

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[879] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p. 110.
[880] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p. 110.
[881] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p. 110. Original emphasis.
[882] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p.110. This phenomenon is termed 'the semiotization of the object' by Kier Elam. The very fact that their appearance on stage brings about a suppression of practical function in favour of the symbolic or signifying function. But this in turn places the object within quotation marks, in that it moves from being a real table to a representative of the class 'table'. Not only does this occur to objects, but also to the actors with the result, as Elam puts it, 'the actor's body acquires its mimetic and representational powers by becoming something other than itself, *more or less that individual.*' Elam, pp. 8-9.
[883] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 139.

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involvement, the actions themselves seem designed to dramatize the loosening of the body-prophetic from its existence as *world object among world objects*—wrought in *derealized* skin and bone, the flesh is made word.

1.2. *The Prophet-Sign: Signification in Jeremiah 16. 1-9*

For the moment, both prophet and drunk are held within the tautological economy of *denotation*, signifying nothing more than the respective categories of prophet and drunk (although these are not themselves terms free of value). As any stage object— jugs and loincloths, for example—bodies are further inscribed by the so-called second level of signification: *connotation*. In the absence of 'other semiotic media—for instance, words', writes Eco, 'our tipsy-sign is open to any interpretation',[885] under the sign of the Salvation Army he signifies intemperance, and by extension, the harm of drink. The signifying potential of bodies is further exposed (if not exploited) in the writings of Roland Barthes, who is alert to the possibility that even a forelock can function as an inscription. Commenting on Mankiewicz's film *Julius Caesar*, he notes that 'insistent fringes' spell 'Roman-ness',[886] and sweating—'labourers, soldiers, conspirators, all have their austere and tense features streaming (with Vaseline)'[887]— moral feeling: 'Everyone is sweating because everyone is debating something within himself.'[888] But these pantomimic indicators of nationality and mood are deemed illustrative of a mode of signification that is itself significant. According to Barthes, these superficial signs masquerading for depth—Vaseline-sweat for 'tormented virtue'[889]—are indicative of a 'degraded spectacle'[890] in which the artificial is passed off as natural. In the confusion, neither body nor sign fair well: the former must put up

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[884] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 139.
[885] Eco, 'Semiotics of Theatrical Performance', p. 110.
[886] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p.27.
[887] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 27.
[888] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 27.
[889] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 27.

with the status of being little more than a manifestation of inner turmoil, the latter, as a mere imitation of causation.[891]

Ostended and so converted from a prophet, to *prophet* of the genus *prophets*, Jeremiah becomes the sign of his class. But unlike the jug in Jeremiah 19, which must wait some seven verses before receiving further signification, Jeremiah is transformed in an instant to *celibate*. Although he now represents something new, he nevertheless continues to signify at the level of denotation: *celibate* of the class *celibates* and perhaps *ascetic* of the class *ascetics*. Monasticism is not, however, his calling; his appearance under the sign of דבר־יהוה (the word of Yhwh) suggests that celibacy and abstinence are to be the bearers of further meanings. This expectation is met as each action in turn is awarded significance, interpretation following straight after the individual commands in the form of explanatory כי ('for', or 'because') clauses: celibacy, *for* both children and parents 'in this land' shall perish (16. 3-4); non-attendance at wakes, *for* Yhwh has removed his peace (שלום) from 'this people' (16. 5b-7); and self-exclusion from feasts, *for* every expression of mirth (ששון) and gladness (שמחה) shall be banished (16. 9).

Carroll, who suggests that the passage is best read as a series of statements to the people (and not as a symbolic action at all), summarises it as a prophetic proclamation advising the people that 'marriage is to be avoided because the having of children will bring only grief and mourning', that 'the mourning-feast is to be

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[890] Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 28.
[891] Barthes is keen to expose the conventionality of that which is supposed natural and unchangeable. In his preface to *Mythologies* he writes: 'The starting point of these reflections was usually a feeling of impatience at the sight of the "naturalness" with which newspapers, art and common sense constantly dress up a reality which, even though it is the one we live in, is undoubtedly determined by history.' p. 11. Michael Moriarty notes that in Barthes's view, 'the body is particularly prone to mythical appropriation for it can so easily appear as the natural basis of an (ideological) representation'. Moriarty, p. 188.

avoided because the people's well-being […] has been removed by Yhwh', and that 'feasts associated with weddings' are to cease since 'no form of communal consolation or celebration (i.e. commensality) is to be permitted because of what is going to happen to the people'.[892] Taken as a series of dramas, however, the association between action and explanation requires greater explication. Without reference to semiotic theory, Stacey detects a disjunction between Jeremiah's celibacy as a signifier and the death of a whole population by disease, sword and famine as its signified (16. 4); celibacy, he points out, 'is not an expression of general doom' and would more suitably indicate 'an Israel of lonely males'.[893] Offering four possible answers to the question 'how does [celibacy] signify such a horrible disaster?' he begins by proposing that the exegete might make the best of a bad sign by forging the most reasonable link 'between the drama and reality'.[894] Citing as an example the comments of Holladay, who reads celibacy as a sign of the fractured relationship between Yhwh and his people, Stacey argues that while theologically sound, this explanation is not 'a completely legitimate inference from the text' since 16. 3 'does not speak so much of the end of the covenant relationship as of the violent deaths of large numbers of people'.[895]

The second approach outlined by Stacey is to accept that editing 'has pressed upon Jeremiah's vocational asceticism the appearance of a significant action when in fact it is no such thing'.[896] That the 'editor reckoned to see significance where the prophet saw none' indicates a distance between the text as it stands and Jeremiah's prophetic ministry—'we only know how the editors handled the matter'.[897] Coming

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[892] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 339.
[893] Stacey, p. 139.
[894] Stacey, p. 139.
[895] Stacey, p. 139.
[896] Stacey, p. 139.
[897] Stacey, p. 139.

close to this approach, Douglas Rawlinson Jones nevertheless manages to suggest that the actions were intended by the prophet to be meaningful. Impatient with 'modern sceptical interpretations', he argues that if Jeremiah was not the author, then it must have been penned by 'Baruch or a similar figure [...] trained in the Deuteronomistic school', who had been around before the fall of Jerusalem and so 'knew what he was talking about'.[898] Jones then assumes rather than examines the appropriateness of the signs with the bald statement that Jeremiah 'became a visible proclamation for all to read of the deprivation all must face'.[899]

The third approach explains the association in terms of *atmosphere* rather than representation—'Celibacy is misery and deprivation, and misery and deprivation are prophesied for Israel'—thus while the drama is not completely mimetic, neither, is it completely arbitrary.[900] Finally, the fourth suggestion, not unlike the second, recognises the role of editors who adjusted the interpretation 'to make the significance of the action consistent with what actually happened': whilst the original drama might have had an entirely different meaning, the author of 16. 4 'could think of nothing but the fall of Jerusalem'.[901] Stacey concludes that a 'true explanation' may involve elements of all four approaches, but indicates a preference for the second, which he says must not be overlooked 'because the editorial contribution is so obvious in these verses'.[902]

Stacey does not consider the possibility that the prophet's celibacy might have a more pragmatic purpose. Lundbom's interpretation turns on the understanding that

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[898] Jones, pp. 228-229.
[899] Jones, p. 230.
[900] Stacey, p. 140.
[901] Stacey, p. 140.
[902] Stacey, p. 140. Stacey's preferred approach challenges his own appeal to the role of 'the common sense of the Hebrews' in determining what is or is not intended as a significant action, since by this assessment meaning is not given by the prophet himself, but awarded by the editors who reflect on the detail of a life framed by the aura of prophecy. Stacey, p. 67.

since death awaits both children and their parents, it would be 'better not to marry'.[903]

Thus, rather than representing a doom laden future, Jeremiah is presented as a model

of the most prudent lifestyle at a particular juncture in their history. Like 'modern

Jews, in the light of the Holocaust', Lundbom suggests, Jeremiah came to recognise

'the irresponsibility of marrying and bearing children in such circumstances'.[904]

Lundbom points also to the comparable counsel given by Paul in I Corinthians 7. 25-

31, that the faithful should stay as they are whether single or married (a reference

which Holladay uses as a point of contrast: Jeremiah's action is not a word of advice

prior to a glorious end time, but a call 'to extinction as an act symbolic of Yahweh's

decision for the nation').[905]

Holladay, Lundbom, and Jones attempt to demonstrate that the connection

between the man and his meaning is reasonable, even logical, with the latter

stemming, if not deliberately then self-evidently from the former. Stacey's critique is

based on the assumption that the sign should indeed work in this way; his suggestion

(that the interpretation has been added by later editors), from his recognition that in

this instance it does not. Whether it is argued that the interpretation was intended by

the prophet, or derived, fittingly, from the prophet's actions by sympathetic peers, the

historical Jeremiah is posited as the controller and container of interpretation and

therefore functions as the *economy* of the text. Thus, the historical Jeremiah is equated

with the semiotic signifier, and the signifying effect of his celibacy is accounted for in

terms of a similarity or suitability between the action and the interpretation as its

referent (with celibacy presented as either resembling the broken marriage-covenant

with Yhwh or indicating the best course of action to be taken, given the deprivation

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[903] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 761.
[904] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 756. Brueggemann makes a similar analogy with 'those who so fear nuclear holocaust in our time that they do not want to have any children who might be subjected to the terror'. Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 151.

brought by the coming destruction). Whether this results from an expectation that prophetic dramas work mimetically, or from reading the כִּ as an indicator of the imitative nature of the sign, Holladay, Lundbom, and Jones assume that meaning is already present in the prophet's actions—that the prophet as signifier contains, at least in part, his own signified (that the sign is transparent or translucent), or that the signified is an extension of the signifier. This in turn suggests that a strong and necessary bond exists between the historical prophet and the prophetic book, and that the former can be apprehended in the latter. Made a sign, however, it is the historical Jeremiah that is bracketed out (*derealized*): Jeremiah as signifier is a separate, textually born entity, released from his existence as world object among world objects. It is as signifier that he relates to his signified in a relationship that is arbitrary and conventional rather than necessary and natural.[906] Like the sign-children in Hosea 1, whose names—Not Loved, and Not My People—subvert the supposedly familial tie between author and text (the names negating the expected relationship between parent and child), and whose sign-names when changed (Hosea 2. 1-3) undermine the imagined bond between signifier and signified,[907] Jeremiah's celibacy seems rather to demonstrate discontinuity and disruption. While Hosea produces meaning by the begetting of children (their significance then undermining that natural connection), Jeremiah produces meaning in the absence of human reproduction, his childless signification allowing no charade of natural continuity at all. Although commentators might expect there to be an *iconic* or *indexical* relationship between the signifier and signified (signification by resemblance or by indication, respectively),[908] the

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[905] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 469.

[906] That the connection between a sensible signifier and an intelligible signified is arbitrary is a lynchpin of Saussure's description of linguistic signification. For example, Saussure, p. 69.

[907] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, pp. 115-120.

[908] The terms used by Peirce to describe the means by which a sign signifies its referent: the *icon* 'that represents its Object in resembling it' as does a photograph or painting; *indices* 'that represent their

disjunction between action and explanation in fact foregrounds the arbitrariness of the association—that it is there simply because the text says so. Celibacy no more spells death than broken jugs spell destroyed cities, or ruined loincloths, national humiliation. Indeed, to create such a link is to give the explanation a primacy of meaning by which the action is then read, effectively reversing the anticipated relationship between signifier and signified (a reversal turned into an historical process in Stacey's fourth approach) and so demonstrating that meaning emerges by an arbitrary and mutually self-defining process that is neither natural nor logical.

If biologically fruitless, celibacy proves nevertheless to be fecund. Turned into text, the sign produces not flesh and blood progeny, but words (which here proclaim the end of flesh and blood). Built around plural participles of ילד (to bear, to bring forth, to beget), the writing spawned by the prophet's celibacy begins with a proclamation that emphasises natural, biological continuity:

For (כי) thus says Yhwh:

Regarding the sons and regarding the daughters

those born (הילודים) in this place

and regarding their mothers

those bearing (הילדות) them

and regarding the fathers

those begetting (המולדים) them

in this land [...]   (Jeremiah 16. 3)

Objects by being actually connected with them' as a smoke indicates fire, or a finger indicates its object by pointing; and *symbols* 'that represent their Objects essentially because they will be so interpreted', that is, by convention, for example, the linguistic sign. Thus icon and index denote signs which seem to be, at least in part, motivated. *Peirce on Signs*, p. 270.

But the announcement which immediately follows—'They shall die of deadly diseases (ממותי תחלאים ימתו). They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried; they shall become like dung on the surface of the ground' (16. 4a)—brings this natural cycle to a sudden and absolute end in which no one is left to lament or even bury the dead. All biological production, marking the continuity of generations, is to be abruptly discontinued leaving nothing but a memorial in language—flesh is again made word.

Deprived of a materiality other than textuality and the right of reproduction other than prophetic production, the gradual erosion of Jeremiah as *person* is now continued by the command that he must signify through his absence. In the further two dramas (Jeremiah 16. 5-9), the prophet is made meaningful by his non-attendance at noteworthy celebrations, indicating the removal of Yhwh's peace and the (subsequent?) loss of joy (16. 5, 9). Though superficially more iconic than celibacy— the prophet's withdrawal resembling the withdrawal of well-being and happiness— the sign nevertheless denies the reader the satisfaction of close-fitting signification. Reproducing Stacey's question, we may ask, 'How does Jeremiah's absence from funerals and feasts signify the loss of peace and joy?' to find that no final or logical answer is forthcoming. There is little, if anything, in the book of Jeremiah that indicates that he might represent either quality; and if (as elsewhere) he is playing God, the proliferation of text that Jeremiah's absence engenders undermines his enactment of divine withdrawal by filling the silence one might expect to be its consequence with the words of the supposedly departed divine. Even if the drama is deemed suitably suggestive (that to demand a more precise fit between the parts of the sign is to over allegorise the performance), the signifieds are not self-explanatory: the

concepts of *peace*, *mirth*, and *joy* that the drama enacts are not referents (secure end-points in signification) but signifiers themselves that require further explanation.

As Jeremiah is eroded, many commentators attempt to restore meat and bones to his paper-thin existence by discussing his symbolic isolation as a poignant self-sacrifice that must have cost the man much. He is both prophet and prophecy, who by representing the 'coming agony', becomes 'one on whose head the future sorrows break',[909] and whose sufferings 'took the focus almost entirely off the prophetic word and the symbolic act and put it on the prophet himself. Jeremiah's entire being had now become the message—a dual message about a suffering nation and a suffering God'.[910] It is interesting that those who argue for the accessibility of an historical figure in the book are also those who make the highest claims for his symbolic significance, since (as we have seen) the two aspects are far from compatible. By making him both message and man, he becomes an example of Barthes's *degraded spectacle* in which his physical self is treated as a manifestation of the coming turmoil, and his significance, a symptom of his sensibility. As both man and sign, he is the locus of quite contrary forces. Given an existence in time and place, Jeremiah is *realized* in history, but granted a symbolic function he is *derealized* semiotically. As such he becomes prey to two kinds of discourse. As a figure held in time and space, he is the object of questions about the distant phenomenon of Israelite prophecy; textualized, he departs from his place within the towns, temples, and troubles of his times, to become the symbol of supra-historical realities and a model of (continuing) spiritual truth. But as a blend of both—as both historical man and spiritual symbol—he is able to function as an identifiable point in the history of salvation, an embodiment of God (albeit partial) in an evolving religion.

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[909] Stacey, p. 143

1.3. *A Prophetic Lineage: Jeremiah's Celibacy and the Heritage of the Prophetic Word*

If there is little consensus about the way in which Jeremiah signifies, there is considerable agreement that his actions would have had impact. Stacey regards the prophet's abstinence from mourning to be a 'deliberate, public, unsocial form of behaviour', and Lundbom, 'a symbolic act meant to give offence',[911] which while congruent with his personal asceticism—'the prophet avoided a merry crowd after accepting his call'[912]—is comparable to the affront that would be caused by a priest or a pastor missing 'important opportunities for ministry': 'shocking' in itself, but less so than the divine message it conveys.[913] While his failure to minister might well be deemed 'scandalous',[914] it is his failure to *marry* that is supposed the greater concern. Bright's comment that bachelorhood was 'almost unheard of in ancient Israelite society', is upheld by most commentators: Jones calls it 'rare and exceptional'; Lundbom points out that Hebrew has no word for it (and refers to a Sumerian proverb which cites celibacy as a curse); and Holladay notes that Arabs still dub the single man 'forsaken' or 'lonely'.[915] Both Holladay and Lundbom cite the lament for Jehoiachin, in which childlessness is equated with worthlessness (Jeremiah 22. 30); Lundbom explains this evaluation in the context of Israelite theology—that marriage was regarded as 'a natural state built into the created order'[916]—and Holladay makes the additional point that through marriage the individual becomes 'part of a chain between past and future' now broken by Jeremiah who has been 'called to extinction'.[917]

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[910] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 139.
[911] Stacey, p. 141; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 757.
[912] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 760.
[913] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 761.
[914] Jones, p. 230.
[915] Jones, p. 229; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 756; Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 469.
[916] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 756.
[917] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 469.

But the prophet who breaks a family line as he might break a jug (Jeremiah 19.

10) or ruin a loincloth (Jeremiah 13. 7), and who seems, if anything, to signify a series

of radical discontinuities, emerges *exegetically* as a point of continuity in an

alternative genealogy. The 'son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth'

(Jeremiah 1. 1), which may indicate that he is from priestly stock, is also described as

the 'spiritual *heir*' of the non-priestly Hosea whose marriage to a prostitute (Hosea 1.

2) is thought 'scarcely more conventional' than Jeremiah's celibacy, and whose

'preaching about bringing up children to die' (Hosea 9. 12) is thought to explain why

Jeremiah had no children at all.[918] It is from this latter parent that he receives his

prophetic DNA; a gene pool of tropes and ready-made images that results in visible

likenesses suggesting that he 'neither invents the broken marriage metaphor, nor

originates its network of symbolic meanings. He *inherits* it'.[919] But unlike his

forefathers, to whom he is indebted for the 'idea that the covenant is like a familial

bond',[920] he generates only text, not a new generation. But if he bequeaths nothing

biologically, he adds to a lineage of language and so rather than marking an end point

in 'the succession of Hosea, Amos, Isaiah',[921] he represents one link in the chain

which marks the dependence of 'Ezekiel upon Jeremiah and Jeremiah upon Hosea'.[922]

As the prophetic-genetic material is passed down it mutates. Holladay

observes that Jeremiah 16. 2 reverses the commission to Hosea—'Take for yourself a

wife[…]'[923]—and so argues that 'if one believes that Hosea deliberately married a

Harlot' in order to demonstrate the corruption of Israel's covenant relation to Yhwh,

'then one can go further […] Jrm married no one at all to demonstrate the end of

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[918] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 756.
[919] Diamond and O' Connor, p. 141.
[920] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 142.
[921] Jones, p. 26.
[922] Clements, p. 3.
[923] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 468.

Yahweh's relation to Israel'.[924] This evolutionary process is understood to be neither accidental nor impersonal (a matter of the survival of the fittest figure of speech), but evidence of Jeremiah's own receptivity and artistry. For example, Skinner, who writes of the prophet's assimilation of the teaching of his prophetic ancestors, says that Jeremiah found in Hosea 'a kindred spirit', both men having an 'exceptionally tender and emotional temperament'.[925] For Jones it is Jeremiah the man who is 'strongly influenced by Hosea', particularly his wilderness imagery in Jeremiah 2.[926] And according to Diamond and O'Connor, 'Jeremiah reads an old metaphor and writes a new narrative' and in so doing 'changes its narrative shape, [and] recasts its characters'.[927] By retaining only one of the two marriages in Hosea (Yhwh and Israel, but not Prophet and Prostitute), Jeremiah, they note, creates a more monstrous wife (driven by bestial lust), and a husband not only interested in shaming, but now filing for divorce.[928] Carroll emerges as belonging to a minority among his peers by arguing that the borrowings of language and tropes occurs at a textual level alone—in the anonymous hands of traditionists. For the most part, it seems that the unmarried and childless prophet is thought to have devoted his solitude to the task of reading, creative interpretation, and the fathering of a book.

1.4. *Text and the Single Prophet*
Single and celibate, Jeremiah 'lack[s] the status of headship in the family, the security arising from progeny who would not only provide care in old age but also continue the name and the identity long into the future'.[929] Thus a further consequence of his 'unfortunate and unnatural condition' is his exemption from participation, through his

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[924] Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 469.
[925] Skinner, p. 21.
[926] Jones, p. 64.
[927] Diamond and O'Connor, p. 142.
[928] Diamond and O'Connor, p. 141.
[929] Stacey, p. 139.

descendants, in the long-term fate of his nation, good or ill.[930] In this respect, he

seems more blighted than his people, who are granted at least some hope of a distant

future through their descendants (Jeremiah 3. 15-18; 12. 14-17; 16. 14-15; 23. 1-8;

30-33). But if failing to beget a *ben* or *bat Jeremiah*, the long-term survival of his

name is secured through a *book of* Jeremiah; a poignant achievement discussed by

Stanley Brice Frost.

Among the several ways by which 'death could be nullified, prevented, or at

least mitigated'[931] in ancient Israel—strategies that include the preservation of the

physical remains, and of the name[932]—Frost emphasises the importance of having

offspring. Thus in Job, he notes, Eliphaz describes the lot of the righteous man as one

who know that 'descendants shall be many' (Job 5. 25).[933] Alternatively, to destroy a

man utterly his male descendants must be destroyed, as David managed to do with the

sons of Saul.[934] Frost then considers the case of Absalom, who according to one

tradition had no son, and so set up a pillar to preserve his memory, called, 'to this

day', 'Absalom's Monument' (II Samuel 18. 18). The story, 'a typical aetiological

legend', contradicts the claim elsewhere that he had three sons and a daughter (II

Samuel 14. 27),[935] but the impetus for the erection—'I have no son to keep my name

in remembrance'—illustrates Frost's point that 'in the absence of an heir, the childless

man must, as so many have done with so many differing motivations, make use of the

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[930] Stacey, p. 139.

[931] Stanley Brice Frost, 'The Memorial of a Childless Man', in *Interpretation* 26 (1972), pp. 437-450 (p. 437).

[932] This occurs through the preservation of the physical remains, since 'the identity of the individual was conceived to be not wholly lost as long as his bones or some significant portions of them were safely conserved': to burn the bones, even of an enemy, was considered anathema (Amos 2. 1). Frost, p. 438.

[933] Although Frost acknowledges that this would also deprive the enemy of a vengeful kinsman. Frost, p. 442.

[934] Apart from Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who was lame (the nanny dropped him as they fled David's murderous crew) and so presumably regarded as non-threatening and taken into the royal household, though he eventually sided with Absalom (how sharper than a serpent's tooth...). II Samuel 4. 4; 9; 16. 1-4; 19. 24-30; 21. 7.

block of stone which will at least record his name'.[936] Similarly, the childlessness of

Nehemiah, who was in all likelihood a eunuch,[937] writes Frost, adds 'particular force

to the prayer which is so characteristic of the memoirs of Nehemiah and with which

they close: "Remember me, O my God, for good",' (Nehemiah 13. 31), and concludes

that 'Nehemiah records his good deeds, not simply to trumpet his own virtues but

rather to point to a life of achievement, a life of contribution and of assessable

worth'.[938] Frost then turns to Jeremiah, so caught up with the exclusively male

company of temple functionaries that 'the attractions of a normal home life with wife

and children had no appeal for him'.[939] Nevertheless, Jeremiah was not, it would

seem, starved of intimacy: Frost acknowledges that the prophet had found a suitable

partner in his 'friend Baruch, who was his close associate for some twenty years and

more years';[940] for better or (mostly) for worse, it seems, they shared 'ostracism,

unpopularity, physical dangers, and profound disappointments'.[941] And when 'the

curtain fell'[942] for this most theatrical of prophets, his fertile words (identified by

Frost to be Jeremiah 1-25. 13), combined with those of Baruch (26-45),[943] to be born

as the memorial of both.

An entity in its own right—more than the sum of the marriage that gave it

birth—the book of Jeremiah nevertheless retains features of each parent. Pouring over

its pages, devoted scholars have long remarked upon the prophetic tone of its voice

and the Deuteronomistic angle of its prose. Quite recently, Walter Brueggemann

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[935] But who Frost suggests may have predeceased Absalom.
[936] Frost, p. 444.
[937] Frost cites as evidence his function as cupbearer to Artaxerxes, a role customarily taken by eunuchs, and his reluctance to enter the temple (observing that, according to Deuteronomy 23. 1-3, castrated males are excluded from the congregation). Frost, p. 444.
[938] Frost, p. 445.
[939] Which he explains to himself as a divine prohibition against marriage, p. 446.
[940] Frost, p. 446.
[941] Frost, p. 446.
[942] Frost, p. 446.
[943] Omitting Jeremiah 31-32.

detected something of the impact of its parents' asymmetrical relationship on its formative years. In the 'intensely Yahwistic, imaginatively poetic' passages, he sees something of the prophet's vision, which he argues, is 'almost completely lacking in specific socio-political references'.[944] From 43. 1-7, however, which describes how 'insolent men' (הָאֲנָשִׁים הַזֵּדִים) accuse the prophet of being in the thrall of his friend—'Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us, to hand us over to the Chaldeans, in order that they may kill us or take us into exile in Babylon' (43. 3)—he deduces that 'Baruch is not an "innocent", disinterested Yahwist, but is party to the socio-political dispute'.[945] Brueggemann concludes that Jeremiah, so caught up in the intense theological crisis, allows the political implications of his words go where they will—calling him 'metapolitical' rather than politically unaware—but that Baruch is 'a much interested political "user" of [Jeremiah's] Yahwistic poetry'.[946] Brueggemann considers this less a distortion of the prophet's words than an 'application, [a] concrete explication of what is implicit in the poetry'.[947] The couple's opponents 'reverse the process and suggest that the poet is not only "used" by, but is motivated and counselled by the political operative'; perhaps, Brueggemann suggests, his opponents do not attack the prophet directly because he 'is too much beyond reproach' for such a charge to be credible.[948]

Construed as a means of mitigating death, the *book* of Jeremiah fulfils a role that is traditionally associated with writing, identified by Michel Foucault with the examples of the perpetuation of the hero's immortality (as in Greek epic), and the staying of an executioner's hand (as in *The Thousand and One Nights*).[949] If, however,

[944] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 384.
[945] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 375.
[946] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 375.
[947] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 375.
[948] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 370.
[949] Foucault, p. 142.

it is by writing that Jeremiah seeks a continuing (albeit textual) existence, it is by his

death—or at least, by the potential of his words to survive his death—that his writing,

now also his memorial, represents his absolute absence, not only from the world, but

the page. As Jacques Derrida writes,

> For writing to be a writing, it must continue to 'act' and to be readable
>
> even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for
>
> what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of
>
> temporary absence, [or] because he is dead.[950]

It is no more than common sense to suggest that writing has the advantage of

permanence—that a book can outlive its own author, and be read as his or her words

long after he or she is gone—but Derrida is here making a structural or logical rather

than commonplace claim. As Simon Glendinning puts it, 'the possibility of it

functioning again beyond (or in the absence of) the context of its production [...] is

part of what it is to be a written mark';[951] therefore a mark that cannot be repeated, or

to use Derrida's preferred term, is not *iterable*,[952] is not readable and therefore is not

writing. Similarly, 'in order for my "written communication" to retain its function as

writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance

of any receiver, determined in general'.[953] Again, this is not simply a pragmatic

matter, but a logical and defining one: if the recipient of a letter were to die before

reading it, the contents must (at least, in principle) remain readable for it to constitute

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[950] Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Limited Inc*, trans. by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 1-23 (p. 8).

[951] Simon Glendinning, 'Language', in *Understanding Derrida*, ed. by Jack Reynolds and Jonathan Roffe (New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 5-13 (p. 10).

[952] Iterability, is the 'structure of repeatability'. Jacques Derrida, 'Limited Inc a b c' in *Limited Inc*, pp. 29-110 (p. 48). Holding together both the Latin *iter* (again) and the Sanskrit *itara* (other), the term names 'the logic that ties repetition to alterity'. Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 7.

[953] Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 7.

writing.[954] With these potential absences marking out 'the possibility of the

message',[955] writing, by its very character, must be able to function apart from the

context in which it is current.

Not peculiar to the linguistic sign perpetuated in pen and ink alone, the

'emergence of a relatively permanent mark that can do without the current presence of

a determinable sender or recipient, is possible because, in principle, the possibility of

this absence is part of the logical structure of any sign, linguistic or not'.[956] Noting J.

L. Austin's anxiety that certain utterances might be used in an *infelicitous* manner,[957]

Derrida points out that this would not be so were it not possible for spoken statements

such as 'I do' to be open to citation out of context—a phenomenon Derrida dubs

citational grafting.[958] The sign, by its nature, can be transplanted or used in new

circumstances, and so to new ends: no context, he writes, 'permits saturation', but at

the same time, no 'meaning can be determined out of context', thus every iteration is

in some way also a singular event.[959] Thus the moment of writing—of Jeremiah's

permanent mark on the page, say—is also a moment of rupture, since the act of

writing involves its detachment from the writer: it includes, that is, the possibility of

the author's absolute absence. This is not, however, to say that the intentions of an

author are irrelevant, or that the context of canonical interpretations are insignificant,

but that the meaning of any utterance is not exhausted by either: that meaning is not

controlled by the presence or absence of an author, and that a sign is capable of

functioning in any number of contexts:

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[954] What if only one person knew the language?
[955] Derrida, 'Limited Inc a b c', p. 50.
[956] Glendinning, p. 11.
[957] For example, J. L. Austin, 'Performative Utterances', in *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 233-252.
[958] It is the 'possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication'. Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 12.
[959] Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 18.

> A written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is,
> with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription.
> The breaking force [*force de rupture*] is not an accidental predicate but the
> very structure of the written text. […] But the sign remains readable even
> if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if I do not
> know what its alleged author-scriptor consciously intended to say at the
> moment of he wrote it, i.e. abandoned to its essential drift. […] One can
> perhaps come to recognize other possibilities in it by inscribing it or
> *grafting* it onto other chains.[960]

That 'writing remains monumentally'[961] in a way that speech, which is spent in a breath, cannot is not contested. In so far as Frost gives a narrative account of an impulse for writing which stems from the writer's own sense of finitude, his description of the prophet's hope for self-perpetuation through text remains reasonable and affecting. If thought to suggest the existence of continuing parental links between author and book—that something of the prophet is in fact inscribed in its pages—Frost's study may be read as a dramatization of the commonplace understanding of the author as one who, in Barthes's estimation, is believed 'to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedent to his work as a father is to his child'.[962] Defined by its *iterability*, however, the written mark would seem to cut such umbilical ties—note the unusual conjunction of parental gender (father) with parental role (*nourish*), in Barthes's remark—and so eschew any claims of there being a necessary or natural and continuing bond between it and its producer. As Geoffrey Bennington comments,

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[960] Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', p. 9. Original emphasis.

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'writing is a form of telecommunication. [...] Everyone knows that the written word hugely extends the scope of language in space and time. [...] Everyone also knows that for all sorts of reasons writing exposes thought to the risks which sometimes, if not most often, seem to be more important than the advantages'.[963] It is, however, this potential for the infelicitous use of the sign that in Brueggemann's essay is shown to have felicitous possibilities. Persuaded by recent arguments that there is no reason to doubt the historical and actual existence of both prophet and scribe,[964] Brueggemann nevertheless treats them as ciphers *of* and *for* the text. In so doing he acknowledges that they now function as characters within a textual—that is 'fictive'[965]—setting in which they enjoy a considerable freedom from the task of direct historical reference. In Brueggemann's account, the (textual) partnership between prophet and scribe forms an allegory of sorts for the process of the formation of the canonical book—the application of authoritative but metapolitical poetry to concrete, historical contexts— and so demonstrates (even dramatizes) the essential potential of a corpus of words to be repeated, meaningfully, in a context apart from that determined by the conscious intentions of an author. While attributing the iterability of Jeremiah's words to their inherent generality (their freedom from 'socio-political references'),[966] his conviction (stated elsewhere) that in its final, canonical form—that is, with the historically specific interpretation of Baruch on board—the book of Jeremiah continues to 'push[...] into our present',[967] indicates that he believes it still graftable.

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[961] Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 45.
[962] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 145. Original emphasis.
[963] Bennington and Derrida, p. 43. Apparently, and as Carroll observes in his reading of Jeremiah 8. 8, anxiety about the *infelicitous* potential in the technology of writing is acknowledged in the book of Jeremiah itself. See Carroll, 'Inscribing the Covenant', pp. 61-76.
[964] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 370.
[965] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 376.
[966] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 374.
[967] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, pp. 18, 19.

This capacity of the words of Jeremiah 'to run beyond more managed horizons'[968] leads Brueggemann to make theological rather than linguistic or philosophical points. Noting that the prophet's poems are employed, for the most part, to bring about a 'coherence of Yahweh and Babylon',[969] he observes that this can be no more than provisional. With reference to the oracles directed against Babylon that occur at the end of the book (Jeremiah 50-51), he states:

> In the end, so the text asserts, Yahweh turns against Yahweh's own
>
> established ally, Babylon, and destroys it. The reason for such a turn, after
>
> such a rhetoric of alliance, is [...] that Yahweh make no permanent
>
> alliances which would permit the absolutizing of any historical structure or
>
> institution.[970]

Thus, in negative terms, Brueggemann equates the non-finality of any single application of the poetry with the refusal of Yhwh to forge permanent alliances with any structure or institution; in positive terms, that this is the means by which the text witnesses to 'Yahweh's sovereignty'.[971] Formed, or at least made known by the structural asymmetry of the sign—the non-equation between the words of the prophet and their application—the deity (here 'Yahweh') is articulated as one who is revealed in disjunction, in non-similarity, that is, in non-identification with that which is positively or securely known.[972] As a model of prophecy, it is one that regards it as

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[968] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 386.
[969] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 381.
[970] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 381.
[971] Brueggemann, 'The "Baruch Connection"', p. 386.
[972] To suggest that Brueggemann derives a theology free from the metaphysics of presence, or even a *via negativa*, from the prophetic text exceeds the evidence (given the many positive terms he uses of the deity in his commentaries). For the most part, his remarks are aimed at undermining simplistic interpretations that set out to equate 'the shape of the historical process with a single agent'. Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 19.

that which, to paraphrase Frederic Jameson, interrupts *the reified surface of history*[973]—but to this we shall return later in the chapter.

Brueggemann's reading foregrounds that which seems to have been quite strenuously avoided in the writing of many commentators: that, despite immense efforts to give the historical Jeremiah primacy, he is inevitably prey to the vagaries that befall both text and tradition. Rather than function as a principle of containment or a point of origin—a parent with a remaining, umbilical-like relation to the book— the prophet (represented by his poetry) is himself held within a dialectical relationship with Baruch who represents the scribal community, the prophet's interpreters. While this might result in the receding of the man in history, it secures the survival of the textual Jeremiah who has endured in a history of potentially endless citational grafting.

1.5. *Summing Up*
Stepping on to the biblical stage in order that he may become a sign, Jeremiah exchanges sexuality for textuality and social intercourse for theological discourse. The performances, marking the deaths of parents and children, the removal of peace, and the banishment of joy in Jerusalem and Judah, also play out the effacement of the historical prophet that results from his being made subject to the systems of signification. Though semiotically fecund, Jeremiah's celibacy and his absence from noteworthy events are emblematic of the derealizing of his flesh and blood self, of his disappearance as world object that frees him as text. Thus, while ending a natural, biological line, the son of Hilkiah is taken up as part of an alternative, continuing prophetic genealogy—a lineage of metaphors, language, and tropes in which he now features as a scroll amid a long line of scrolls. Despite endeavours to find or forge

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[973] Jameson, p. 40.

some form of continuity between the prophet's two modes of being—between the human and the textual—recognised as symbol and as both inheritor and progenitor of a textual tradition, his text life inevitably takes precedence. And while suggesting a future in perpetuity, and despite classical tropes to the contrary, the production of a scroll marks as much the severance of the words of the prophet from the authorial voice as they do its continuing resonance, indeed more so. Let the biblical trope of interpretation take precedence. In the Bible, writes Regina M. Schwartz, it is interpretation that is life-giving: at stake in the story of Joseph's interpretation of dreams 'is not truth—veiled only to be revealed—but survival'.[974] Interpretation, she continues, is enacted through 'the dialectic of forgetting and remembering, loss and recovery': Deuteronomy—itself a retelling—enjoins its hearers to remember and retell the story of the exodus, but the book is lost, then later found and re-cited; its fate represents the biblical story of text,

> The Book itself is imperilled, lost over and over. And so it must be
> remembered, recovered, rewritten, and rediscovered over and over, in a
> perpetual activity that defies the grand designs of fulfilment constructed by
> typology.[975]

Neither an unveiling of the past, nor the simple, static presentation of an ancient memory—an original (authorial) truth—the book of Jeremiah survives by its retellings, the person of Jeremiah, by his numerous revivifications. But since 'what is found is never the same as what is lost', for 'neither time nor language will indulge

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[974] Regina M. Schwartz, 'Joseph's Bones and the Resurrection of the Text: Remembering in the Bible', in *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory*, ed. by Regina M. Schwartz (Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 40-59 (p. 41).
[975] Schwartz, p. 46.

such identity',[976] each finding is a new telling which removes the words from their origin. To the writing, losing, and rewriting of a book we now turn.

2. *The (Re)Production of a Book: Jeremiah 36*

> And yet the books will be there on the shelves, separate beings,
>
> That appeared once, still wet
>
> As shining chestnuts under a tree in autumn,
>
> And, touched, coddled, began to live
>
> In spite of fires on the horizon […][977]

Having been slowly erased and replaced by text in Jeremiah 16. 1-9, the prophet is for the most part absent in Jeremiah 36 (to which we now turn and with which we shall now remain); the protagonist is a book that travels through temple and palace to the hearth of the king—quite literally, 'the written word has *replaced* Jeremiah'.[978] As Brueggemann remarks, 'what happens in this narrative is that the scroll of Jeremiah takes on an independent authority (i.e. independent of the person of Jeremiah) and comes to have a life of its own'; the result is that 'interest turns from the personality of the prophet to *the book of Jeremiah.*'[979] That interest is considerable both within the narrative, among the scribes and officials who come into contact with the scroll and demand to know exactly how it was produced, and among the commentators, who turn to the text for insights into how the whole book was produced.

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[976] Schwartz, p. 48.

[977] Czeslaw Milosz, 'And Yet the Books', in *100 Poems on the Underground*, ed. by Gerard Benson, Judith Chernaik, and Cicely Herbert (London: Cassell, 1991), p. 86.

[978] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 662. Original emphasis.

[979] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 345-346. Original emphasis.

Destroyed and so lost, the scroll, we are told, is re-written by the prophet and a scribe; its replacement, writes Clements, 'has become indispensable to show that Jeremiah's prophetic book was authentic to the prophet'.[980] Although virtually nothing is known of the contents of either scroll—only a glimpse is allowed (36. 29-30)—scholars have set about reproducing them both. While the results differ greatly, the impulse is the same: to recover an *Ur*-text or autograph that is demonstrably part of the present corpus, and which can connect the book with the prophet whose name it bears. Thus in seeking to confirm that there is an association between prophetic proclamation and the prophetic text, they replicate the concerns of the narrative, in which the continuity between Jeremiah's spoken and written word is repeatedly (and monotonously) asserted.

In this section I shall discuss the academic handling of the scrolls before turning to interpretations that regard the narrative as something more than the aetiology of a Jeremiah *Ur*-text. The history of the scrolls forms a drama of sorts with a cast that includes a prophet, his scribe, other scribes and officials, a king, and an un-quantified number of extras in a crowd scene. The performance traces the generation, reception, and final rejection of the prophetic word, and in so doing makes reference to other biblical texts, a factor that returns us to the question of the formation of the book and the processes of writing Bible.

2.1. *Re: Writing The Scroll—Jeremiah 36 as an Aetiology of the Production of Jeremiah*

Jeremiah 36 is a drama in three acts or 'three dramatic narratives',[981] each representing a separate though not independent event. Act One (36. 1-8), which is

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[980] Clements, p. 211.
[981] Stacey, p. 162.

little more than a brief tableau, stages both the reception and fulfilment of a divine command:

> [...] this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Take a roll of scroll (מגלת
>
> ספר־) and write on it all the words I have spoken to you against (על)[982]
>
> Israel and Judah and all the nations [...] Then Jeremiah called Baruch
>
> son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at Jeremiah's dictation
>
> (מפי ירמיהו) all the words of Yhwh that he had spoken to him. (Jeremiah
>
> 36. 1, 4)

Without pausing to explain why the task of writing was delegated, or why writing was deemed necessary at all, the narrative moves on to a more explicable instruction: 'And Jeremiah ordered (ויצוה) Baruch, saying, "I am prevented (עצור)[983] from entering the house of Yhwh; so you go yourself and, on a fast day in the hearing of the people in the house of Yhwh you shall read the words of Yhwh from the scroll that you have written at my dictation"' (Jeremiah 36. 5-6). The short and stylised scene then concludes with confirmation that the scribe completed his task: 'And Baruch son of Neriah did all that the prophet Jeremiah ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of Yhwh in the house of Yhwh' (36. 8). Act Two (Jeremiah 36. 9-26) dramatises both the mission of Baruch and its consequences. Beginning with an account of the scribe's first recitation of the scroll 'in the hearing of all the people' (36. 10), it then traces the progress of the scroll through the temple and court until it is

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[982] The NRSV translates על 'against'. Holladay and McKane opt for the more neutral 'concerning', but given that the scroll is produced in order that 'the house of Judah hears all the disasters that [Yhwh] intends to do to them' (36. 3), 'against' seems a reasonable rendering. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p, 251. McKane, *Jeremiah II*, p. 899.

brought to King Jehoiakim, who has it torn up and destroyed in a fire (36. 25). The act culminates with a royal command that both prophet and scribe—presumably now in hiding (36. 19, 26)—be arrested (36. 26). Act Three, though separated from that which precedes it by the chronological marker 'after these things' (36. 27), parallels the first. The prophet is again told by Yhwh to take a scroll and write on it (36. 28), and again it is Baruch who fulfils the task, rewriting all that had been documented before, though now with the addition of 'many similar words' (36. 32).

Although the account is formal, even mannered,[984] and includes dramatic scenes and theatrical gestures, few scholars agree that the events so portrayed need themselves be regarded as a prophetic drama.[985] 'It might, of course, be argued', writes David Stacey (reciting opinions that counter his own), 'that what was happening was *purely functional*. Jeremiah was prevented from speaking in the temple, so Baruch spoke for him.'[986] It would then follow that Jeremiah dictated his oracles to make Baruch's recitation possible—as an *aide memoire*?[987]—and so to continue his own ministry; as Bennington observes, 'we write when we cannot speak, when contingent obstacles, which can be reduced to so many forms of distance, prevent the voice from carrying'.[988] If, as is often suggested, the writing was

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[983] עצור, a qal passive participle, can mean 'in custody' (for example, Jeremiah 33. 1) or simply 'prevented'. The nature of Jeremiah's present restrictedness cannot be determined, and since the text shows little interest in the matter, it seems pointless to speculate.

[984] Though repetitious and full of apparently extraneous detail, Robert Carroll describes Jeremiah 36 as 'one of the finest pieces of writing in the book'. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 666. Similarly, Kessler considers the language to be 'excellent Hebrew narrative art', and Nicholson, an 'excellent example' of Hebrew narrative. Martin Kessler, 'Form Critical Suggestions on Jer 36', in the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 28 (1966), pp 389-401 (p. 393). E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), p. 40. Brummitt and Sherwood, however, note its 'constant repetition'—suggestive of its composition by 'minute-takers'— and so find Carroll's comment (particularly) 'uncharacteristically too kind to the Bible'. Mark Brummitt and Yvonne Sherwood, 'The Tenacity of the Word: Using Jeremiah 36 to Construct an Appropriate Edifice to the Memory of Robert Carroll' in Hunter and Davies, pp. 1-29 (p. 12).

[985] Bright, pp. 181-183; Nicholson, pp. 16-17, 39-57; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, pp. 253-262, for example, make no mention of the possibility of this being a prophetic drama or symbolic action narrative.

[986] Stacey, p. 163. My emphasis.

[987] So thought Mowinckel. See Kessler, 'Form-Critical Suggestions on Jer 36', p. 394.

[988] Bennington, p. 43.

prompted by a specific situation—namely, the battle of Carchemish[989]—it can also be argued that Jeremiah was simply 'anxious to secure his oracles for posterity'.[990] Thus through writing, the prophet 'hugely extends the scope of [his] language in space and time'[991] enabling his words to overcome obstacles and distance, and to be granted a future even as these same words threaten the future of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah.

Read as the report of a pragmatic rather than dramatic act (an interpretative approach that assumes its historical veracity), Jeremiah 36 is then hailed as 'one of the most noteworthy in the entire book' since it allows some insight into 'that process through which Jeremiah's sayings were collected and given literary fixation, and which ultimately resulted in the Jeremiah book as we have it today'.[992] Moreover, as 'the most informative narrative in the entire Old Testament concerning the preservation of prophecies in writing', it informs broader discussions in biblical studies by permitting 'one to see the process by which oral tradition became or written text', and so 'provides a link in the long process which led ultimately to the production of the written Bible and the Canon of Scripture'.[993] So invested, Jeremiah 36 has itself stimulated a considerable corpus of writings, not least among scholars hoping to identify the contents of the scroll, resulting, writes Perdue, with reconstructions 'as different as they are seemingly endless'.[994] With the notable exception of J. W. Miller, who proposed that it contained only the prose sermons

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[989] The events are dated to 'the fourth year of King Jehoiakim', that is 605 BCE, the same year that the armies of Nebuchadnezzar fought the Egyptians at Carchemish and took control of Palestine. Several commentators suggest that the change in the political scene in some way encouraged Jeremiah to begin documenting his earlier prophecies. See, for example, Bright, p. CI; p. 181; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 28; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, p. 117.
[990] Stacey, p. 163.
[991] Bennington, p. 43.
[992] Bright, p. 181.
[993] Clement, p. 210; Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 253; Jones, p. 435.
[994] Perdue, p. 21.

(material at one time identified as C type),[995] the scroll has for the most part (and

perhaps not surprisingly, given the tendency among scholars to equate prophecy with

poetry) been sought among the oracles of Jeremiah 2-25 (material once defined as A

type). Holladay, for example, identifies Jeremiah 1-10 as 'the most likely place to

begin' and, searching for a 'rhetorical shape, a sense of structure, the possibility that

the shape and structure will be marked by the repetition of key words and phrases',[996]

eventually produces a scroll that includes much of 2. 1-6. 8, prefixed with an earlier

version of 25. 1-7, and closing with 7. 1-12.[997] Thus far imitating Baruch by

producing a scroll of Jeremiah's words—albeit, in Holladay's case, a self-imposed

task—Holladay further mimics the text by expressing anxiety about the procedure.

Through the repeated assurance that it was indeed 'all the words' of the prophet that

were written down (36. 2, 4), the quizzing of Baruch (36. 17), and the scribe's

pedantic reply—'He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink on the

scroll' (36. 18)—Jeremiah 36 seems very keen to assure (the readers? the writers

themselves?) that no single consonant is lost in this 'absolutely water- or ink-tight'

passage of words from 'Jeremiah's mouth, to Baruch's ear, via the flow of ink, to the

scroll'.[998] So too, while admitting that 'any reconstruction of either the first or second

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[995] Perdue, p. 21.

[996] William L. Holladay, 'The Identification of the Two Scrolls of Jeremiah' in *Vetus Testamentum*, 30 (1980), pp. 452-467 (p. 454).

[997] I say *eventually* because with the publication in 1989 of the second part of his Jeremiah commentary Holladay makes some adjustments to his initial reconstruction, primarily by removing all elements of the call narrative completely. Compare Holladay, 'The Identification of the Two Scrolls', pp. 464-465 with Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, pp. 16-19. Jones similarly identifies Jeremiah 1-6 as an 'edited form of the original scroll' adding that 'the redaction process is so comprehensive that it is vain to seek precise identification'. Jones, p. 29. Bright, however, writes, 'now it is futile, on this, to speculate regarding the precise contents of this scroll'. Bright, p. LXI. Fohrer, who lists several other attempts at reconstructing both the first and second scrolls of Jeremiah—including Eissfeldt's diary-like construction; and Rudolph's sayings against the nations, including the oracles in Jeremiah 46-49—also comments that 'it is probably hopeless to try to reconstruct an original scroll', before then attempting one himself. Georg Fohrer, *Introduction To The Old Testament* trans. by David Green (London: SPCK, 1968), pp. 393-394.

[998] Brummitt and Sherwood, p. 11.

scroll is to some degree conjectural',[999] and as if similarly challenged to explain 'how

did you write all these words?' (36. 17), Holladay seems anxious to make clear that he

was also following dictation—that the scroll must contain oracles 'against Israel and

Judah and all the nations' (36. 2), and that these must belong to a given period, 'from

the days of Josiah until today' (36. 2)—and in so doing that he is being as faithful as

he can.

With the remarkable claim that, when correctly identified, the contents of the

scroll 'may sharpen our awareness of the ordering of these oracles in Jrm's mind

before he dictated them',[1000] Holladay exhibits not only a desire to reproduce

faithfully the very patterns of the prophet's thinking, but also (indeed, in so doing)

seeks to locate a space in which the words escape the troubles associated with

textuality; in this too, he reiterates the assertion of the text—that the prophet's words

once existed in a form outside writing.[1001] Both Jeremiah 36 and Holladay reproduce a

bias that Derrida has detected throughout the Western philosophical tradition which

gives primacy to speech and regards writing as a secondary record; indeed, in a

discussion as to 'whether engraving preserves or betrays speech', Derrida makes use

of this very chapter.[1002] While a suitable response might be to reiterate Derrida's

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[999] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 16.

[1000] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 16. In his earlier essay, Holladay reasons, 'if Jeremiah dictated a scroll, indeed dictated all the words of his first scroll a second time, along with similar words, then the contents of what he dictated had a *shape* in his mind—there was some kind of *order* to the material, order such as is appropriate to retention in memory. Jeremiah did not pull oracles out at random, like marbles from a bag.' Holladay, 'The Identification of the Two Scrolls of Jeremiah', p. 453. Original emphasis. Brummitt and Sherwood remark that 'Holladay's conjecture leaves him open to a potentially devastating act of metacommentary: it is not difficult to imagine Robert [Carroll] mocking his attempts to mine the dead prophet's cerebrum, and to tidy up a sprawling prophetic corpus by appealing (against all we have learnt from Freud) to the perfectly ordered, indeed chronologically labelled, archives of a mind'. Brummitt and Sherwood, p. 9.

[1001] Not only in Jeremiah 36, in which speech and writing seem to overlap rather than cohere, the spoken word preceding the letter, but also in Jeremiah 1 where the prophet receives words from on high.

[1002] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978), p. 9. It is right to question the extent to which an Old Testament text can be thought to display the tendencies of a tradition to which it does not properly belong. Carroll, however, argues that a suspicion of writing can be found throughout the book of Jeremiah as a whole, not only in the reference to the 'lying pen of

discussion of *iteration*—that the repeatability and graftability that marks all signs as signs undermines the distinction between speech and writing, which is based on the supposition that the latter is a mere carrier of the former and so somehow less original or more derivative—this would be to dismiss all too quickly (as if the impulse were peculiar) a nostalgia that informs both reading and writing, and which writing both encourages and frustrates.

Holladay's desire to re-capture the speech of the prophet in its most pristine form exemplifies the longing for pure voice and full presence that the written text—in this case the veil of Jeremiah—seems fated to obscure. Worse, writing seems designed to remind the reader of an author's absence and so too the impossibility of full presence in a way that speech does not. What is sought though the recovery of speech (which is literally carried by the speaker's exhalation/expression) is that which Derrida calls '*pneuma*, *spiritus*, or *logos*',[1003] theological terms which indicate the eschatological schema that is presupposed in a reader's or commentator's quest: that writing represents a fall or exile from a point of origin or place of pure beginnings, and that the written is a terrain of toil and text criticism in which one must labour to recover the unsullied word. Marking and making marks in the space between prelapsarian purity and the fullness of the *eschaton*, writing exists in a moment of contingency. And whether the possibility of (a return to) full presence is thought illusory or not, the reality of contingency remains; Regina Schwartz's words are here pertinent, 'we cannot recover any more than we can—to return to the veil that conceals a definitive truth—uncover', and that the 'effort is born of nostalgia, for the

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the scribe' (Jeremiah 8. 8)—of which, he suggests, 'it is the *writtenness* of the divine torah that constitutes its falseness'—but in the 'precarious existence' attributed to written things in general, being liable to destruction by both fire and water (36. 23; 51. 60). Carroll, 'Inscribing the Covenant', pp. 62, 64.

[1003] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 9.

object we long to recover is forever receding behind us, just as it recedes before us in desire'.[1004]

2.2. *Of Prophecy and Paradigms: Jeremiah 36 as Didactic Story*

By insisting that the inscription of prophetic oracles on a prophetic scroll is hermetically achieved, Jeremiah 36 seems anxious (too anxious?) to assert that this transfer can be trusted, and that the product does indeed contain all the divine words mediated by the prophet. In this much, it functions as an aetiology of sorts to account for (even authorise) the phenomenon of prophetic writings—a function that continues to impress present day commentators, which is perhaps why it has been frequently asserted that the historical value of the chapter is not undermined by the parable-like style of the telling; as Perdue observes, 'the historicity of chapter 36 has rarely been questioned, since it has provided such an important basis for authenticating the historicity of at least part of the Jeremiah tradition, and an indication, however slight, of the origin and growth of the book'.[1005]

Even so, many scholars suppose it reasonable to agree with Clement that 'the purpose of recording and preserving a knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the preparation of Jeremiah's scroll can scarcely have been simply to provide an aetiological basis for the existence of Jeremiah's book of prophecies'; the account, he argues, 'is altogether too minor and incidental [...] for this to have been the case'.[1006] Not that this need call into question the veracity of the chapter, for Clements is confident that 'it contains a wealth of circumstantial detail regarding events and personalities', but they, like the 'content and character of Jeremiah's actual prophetic

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[1004] Regina Schwartz, p. 48.
[1005] Perdue, 'Jeremiah in Modern Research', p. 21.
[1006] Clements, p. 211.

message' have been 'passed through the minds of the Deuteronomistic editors'.[1007] It

is this process—in which the thoughts and opinions of one mind are then transformed

by the (more knowable?) minds of others—that E. W. Nicholson believes to have

turned Jeremiah 36 into a 'didactic' or 'edifying' story,[1008] which, while providing

'valuable historical information', has a primary purpose that is theological.[1009] In its

'dominant motifs'—'the rejection of the word of Yahweh', and the king's role in

this[1010]—he finds 'a strong indication of the circle responsible for this narrative',

whom he also identifies as the Deuteronomists.[1011] Nicholson substantiates his

argument with the claim that Jeremiah 36 was 'consciously composed as a parallel to

II Kings 22 [which is part of the Deuteronomistic history] with the primary intention

of pointing to the contrast between the reaction of Jehoiakim to the Word of God and

that of his revered father, Josiah'.[1012] Listing the points of correspondence—that both

involve a scroll which begins its public ministry in the temple (II Kings 22. 8;

Jeremiah 36. 10); that in both the scroll is first handled by state officials (II Kings 22.

8; Jeremiah 36. 28); that both record the reactions of the king (II Kings 22. 11;

Jeremiah 36. 23); and that both give prominence to a prophetic oracle 'which ensued

that reaction' (II Kings 22. 15; Jeremiah 36. 28)[1013]—he then argues that these

similarities do not simply arise from 'the actual pattern of the historical events

recorded' and points to 'very deliberate contrast' drawn between the two kings—that

whereas Josiah rends (קָרַע) his garments on hearing the contents of the scroll (II

[1007] Clements, p. 210.
[1008] As such, he continues, 'they may plausibly be regarded as having evolved in a similar manner to the sermons and discourses'. Nicholson, p. 16.
[1009] Nicholson, p. 39.
[1010] Nicholson, p. 42.
[1011] Clement, who similarly suggests that 'the central purpose of the narrative is to demonstrate the rejection of the word of God by the responsible authorities in Jerusalem, especially Jehoiakim', would seem to have been convinced by Nicholson's analysis. Clement, p. 211.
[1012] Nicholson, p. 42.
[1013] Nicholson, pp. 42-43.

Kings 22. 11), Jehoiakim, the narrator tells us quite specifically, does not (also קרע;

Jeremiah 36. 24).[1014]

With minimal reference to the Deuteronomists, and believing that 'no one has

attempted a thorough analysis of them together',[1015] Charles D. Isbell similarly sets

about demonstrating the dependence of Jeremiah 36 upon II Kings 22. Producing an

argument in many ways comparable to that of Nicholson, Isbell notes that in both

narratives the scrolls 'lay claim to prophetic, and ultimately to divine authority', one

through the confirmation of the prophetess Huldah (II Kings 22. 16), the other, by

virtue of its prophetic provenance. Isbell also cites a number of linguistic similarities

not listed by Nicholson—the uses of רעה (evil) in II Kings 22. 16 and Jeremiah 36. 3,

7, and 30-31; the mention of חמה (wrath) in II Kings 22.13 and Jeremiah 36. 7[1016]—

and the shared theme of repentance.[1017] Then, having argued that the author of

Jeremiah 36 had the 'first edition' of the Deuteronomistic history close to hand as he

wrote, concludes that the narrator 'was able to design his own description of the

reaction of King Jehoiakim to portray such an obvious contrast to King Josiah'.[1018]

Given that both the key diction and the narrative outline of Jeremiah 36 can be

explained as creatively drawn from another noteworthy text, the extent to which this

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[1014] Nicholson, p. 43. Nicholson continues by listing other 'marked Deuteronomistic features in the Jeremiah narrative', including the use in Jeremiah 36. 1-8 of the terms שוב (return), תחנה (supplication), and סלח (forgive), which are 'highly characteristic of the Deuteronomistic literature'. Nicholson, p. 44. Nicholson continues his assessment of the Deuteronomistic characteristics of the story by comparing Jeremiah 36 with passages from the book of Deuteronomy itself.
[1015] Charles D. Isbell, '2 Kings 22. 3-23. 24 and Jeremiah 36: A Stylistic Comparison', in the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 7 (1978), pp. 33-45 (p. 33).
[1016] Isbell further notes the uses of the verb שרף (to burn), which occurs five times in the continuation of the Josiah narrative, and five times in Jeremiah 36. In II Kings 23 Josiah is said to have burned numerous items in his zeal for reformation: cult objects of Ashera (23. 4); the 'chariot of the sun' (23. 11); the sacred pole (22.15), etc. Jehoiakim, however, burns the prophet's scroll (36. 25).
[1017] Both narratives, argues Isbell, contain the theme of reform and avoidance of disaster focussed around the response of the king to the scroll. Isbell, p. 36.
[1018] Isbell, p. 43.

text can be deemed historical seems moot.[1019] No surprise, then, that Perdue cites Isbell as 'unlikely support' for Carroll's critique of the more historical readings.[1020] In his earlier writings, Carroll argued that 'the story reflects the reality of the scribal involvement in the development of Jeremiah's work', but that it was 'most unlikely' that the narrative is historical; rather, it has been 'created to legitimate the role of the scribe in the creation and transmission of the Jeremiah tradition'.[1021] Reading the account as 'a variation of Jeremiah 25. 1-14' with a structure comparable to that of Jeremiah 26,[1022] the only clues it would seem to offer regarding the production of the book as a whole is a demonstration of the way in which redactors 'reconstruct elements of the tradition' and 'transforms their significance'.[1023] In his later commentary, he too recommends that the narrative be read in conjunction with II Kings 22—'36 reverses the paradigmatic response of Josiah to the words of the book'[1024]—now referring to its function as the self-legitimising propaganda of scribes with little more than an aside, that 'the thesis that 36 represents the taking over of the tradition by the Deuteronomistic scribal school (as II Kings 22 provides a possible legitimation of the book of Deuteronomy) cannot be ruled out altogether'.[1025]

That Jeremiah 36 is the culmination of such complex literary endeavours only confirms to Carroll his contention that it cannot be taken as an historically literal account:

> Many scholars read ch. 36 as if it were a straightforward historical account
> not only of what happened on one particular occasion but as a reliable

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[1019] Brueggemann writes, it is 'a paradigmatic drama that transcends both the person of Jeremiah and questions of historicity'. *A Commentary*, p. 345.
[1020] Perdue, p. 22.
[1021] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 15.
[1022] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 16.
[1023] Carroll, *From Chaos*, p. 16.
[1024] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 664.

testimony of how prophetic books, especially that of Jeremiah came to be written. [...] The story is a fascinating piece of literature and one of the finest in the book of Jeremiah, but its historicity cannot be assumed without serious arguments to support that contention. Its literariness, its connections with 26 and 25.1-11 (the summary to part I), and its structural parallels with 2 Kings 22 should warn the reader not to read it simply as an eyewitness account of what happened in 605/604/601 (those datings alone should tell against such simplistic readings of complex texts!).[1026]

By any estimation, the chapter seems to be more than the report of an incident that has been theologically shaped and overlaid with allusion; it is a text that is also overtly an *intertext*. It is, as Barthes might write, a 'tissue of quotations' woven from the language and tropes of neighbouring texts with which it is openly courting comparison. Thus rather than faithfully recording external events, or simply producing history, its authors or editors are engaged in the business of 'mix[ing] writings, to counter the ones with the others';[1027] of reproducing biblical conventions; and of faithfully producing Bible. They, like the prophet, are the mediators of words who comment and contend with (written) histories to manufacture retellings and new scrolls. Known only by their manipulations of the raw material of scripture, they recede from view leaving only their traces in text; again like the prophet, their presence 'is no longer necessary for the divine word to be heard in society'.[1028]

Having elsewhere suggested that the written word in Jeremiah has a precarious existence,[1029] Carroll also acknowledges its ability to escape 'the exigencies of human

[1025] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, pp. 665-666.
[1026] Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 36.
[1027] Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 146.
[1028] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 662.
[1029] Carroll, 'Inscribing the Covenant', p. 62.

existence and [...] survive even the absence of its original bearer'.[1030] In Jeremiah 36,

its original bearer is 'prevented' from entering the temple (36.6), and although we do

not know the reasons for Jeremiah's restriction, the narrative setting enables the word

to undergo a trial-without-prophet by providing 'a relatively safe way of playing out,

by way of a dry run, the question of how to deal with the cessation of "live" prophecy

that will attend the prophet's death'.[1031] Jeremiah's absence thus sets up an exercise

designed to see how the written word fares. To the extent that prophecy deals in

futures, this was always going to be a business with risks (prophecy may fail and

prove false; perhaps worse, may be effective, and negate its own message—see

Jonah); but when written, it becomes *material*[1032] and so liable to share the fate of

things mortal: a book can erode or decay; can be lost or simply forgotten; or, as in

Jeremiah, be cut, torn, and burned. But although 'the scroll may be burned in the story

(v. 23)', writes Carroll, 'it can be rewritten (v. 32) in a way that an executed Jeremiah

could not be repeated'.[1033] Jeremiah is not in fact executed in the story—that end is

reserved for his extra-biblical stories[1034]—but the otherwise similar suffering and

rejection experienced by both prophet and prophetic scroll suggests that a precarious

existence is the fate of all word-bearers. This additional paradigm is picked up by

Holladay, who takes the point further by drawing an analogy between the fate of the

scroll and that of another suffering word (although, as his paraphrase of John 1

suggests, Holladay believes that the Book of Jeremiah is unable to take us a

theological step far enough): 'The word of God had not in those years become flesh,

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[1030] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 668.
[1031] Brummitt and Sherwood, p. 11.
[1032] The voice too, of course, is material, its sound waves dispersing and fading.
[1033] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 662. Original emphasis.
[1034] In *The Lives of the Prophets* the people in Egypt stone him; in the *Paraleipomena* he is stoned after returning from exile in Babylon. See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, p. 92.

but it had been deposited in written form, and that written deposit, at that moment, was despised and rejected by men and was destroyed.'[1035]

The royal rejection of the prophetically given word of Yhwh, a dramatic and dramatized reversal of the equally dramatic Josianic paradigm, is enacted in Jeremiah 36 with an intertextual fervour that undermines, or at least seems liberated from, historical reference. While complicating the issue of historicity, this sets up a complex theology, for though the story might be reducible to the rather banal lesson that *good kings heed Yhwh's word*, the text both embodies and depicts something of the effort and anxiety involved in its faithful production. Not only do the repetitious and slow motion descriptions of the process of translating speech into writing emphasise the painstaking care demanded of its reproduction, the intricate weaving together of scriptures to create the narrative intimates something of 'the feat of the imagination and agony of labour required in generating an idea of God and holding it steadily in place'.[1036] The pattern of loss or destruction and finding or rewriting suggests something of the nature of that process, and the need for continual reiteration; the reuse of biblical stories and tropes, something of the process of reinterpretation this entails. And though the story also presents a theodicy—a justification for divine failure to protect Jerusalem and the cities of Judah—it marks out Israel through Judah as a losable, findable, re-writable entity itself that suffers the fate of all bearers of God.

[1035] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 262.

2.3. *Conclusion*

'We are,' they said, even as their pages

Were being torn out, or a buzzing flame

Licked away their letters. So much more durable

Than we are, whose frail warmth

Cools down with memory, disperses, perishes.[1037]

Unlike the miraculous scroll of Rabbi Akiva, from which the letters flew heavenward

out of the fire, the scroll of Jeremiah must be laboriously rewritten after its

destruction. Once again, it is Jeremiah and Baruch who perform the task, which

suggests that the word has in fact failed the experiment, and that it does after all

require the continuing presence of its original bearers for its survival. The second

scroll, however, is a revised edition to which 'many similar words were added' (36.

32).[1038] This self-effacing aside hides the writers behind the written in a way that

Jeremiah 36 as a whole does not; it suggests that after a shaky start the word continues

to roll, albeit now propelled by the pens of anonymous writers (whose anonymity

ensures that the writings remain within the rubric 'the words of Jeremiah').[1039]

Although the narrative shift of interest 'from the personality of the prophet to *the book

of Jeremiah*'[1040] further indicates that it sponsors the written text (and so also the

numerous but unnamed writers involved in its production), many scholars

nevertheless respond by seeking out the prophet in order to authenticate the book by

its author. Though it is written in stylized form and makes reference to a number of

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[1036] Scarry, p. 198.

[1037] Czeslaw Milosz, p. 86.

[1038] The verb ף‍ס‍ו‍נ 'and there was added' is a niphal—a passive form ascribing the act of inscribing to no one in particular.

[1039] Fohrer is not alone in suggesting that 'the passive phrase in 36:32 [...] most probably refers to expansion of the scroll at a significantly later date'. Fohrer, p. 392.

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other texts, the narrative is deemed historical and read as an account of how Jeremiah continued his ministry by documenting his oracles, or else how he prepared them for posterity. Insofar as the final rejection and destruction of the scroll is also seen to represent the people's (or more specifically the king's) fatal rejection of Yhwh, the story is also deemed didactic—a negative paradigm of responses to God—but not necessarily the account of a prophetic drama. Certainly more plausible than a trek to the Euphrates (Jeremiah 13), the writing of a scroll also seems more reasonable. Because it makes rational sense and lacks the eccentric excesses of the symbolic actions as such—no gratuitous pot-breaking or girdle soiling here—the semiotic aspects of the gesture are played down.

3. *Jeremiah 36 as a Prophetic Drama*

> This word came to Jeremiah from Yhwh: Take a roll of scroll and write on
> it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all
> the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until
> today. (Jeremiah 36. 2)

Framed by the proscenium arch of the page, Jeremiah 36 (and so, to some extent, every biblical narrative; every narrative, even) may be deemed a 'dramatised presentation'.[1041] Playing out a number of (mostly negative) responses to the incoming (now written) word of God, it may also be thought a didactic or edifying story. But on these terms alone, it cannot be construed as a prophetic drama or symbolic action; nor, as Martin Kessler commented in 1966, has it been 'generally

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[1040] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 345-346. Original emphasis.

recognised as such'.[1042] Yet Stacey notes, it is 'at least reminiscent of the form recognised by Fohrer as the classic form for symbolic actions'.[1043] Of the defining elements of the genre—'Yahweh's command to perform the action, the account of the action itself (often lacking because the performance of the action was taken for granted) and the interpretation of the action'[1044]—all but the last can be located (36. 2; 4-8 and 9-26); it is perhaps 'because in Jer 36 the third element is lacking', rues Kessler, that 'scholars have been led astray in their assessment of the significance of this pericope'.[1045]

The nature of the significance of Jeremiah 36, however, is not thereby immediately revealed. Stacey only mentions Fohrer's template in passing, Kessler in a little more detail, but both scholars are more interested in justifying the claim that the story is to be read as a particular type of prophetic narrative than to account for the missing component. Yet if Jeremiah 36 is to be construed as the report of a prophetic drama, the absence of the element of *interpretation* indicates more than a failure to meet all the requirements on a form critical check list: as a significant or symbolic action it lacks a pertinent punch line. There is some irony here, since items which are not usually associated with the bearing of meaning—earthenware jugs and loincloths, for example—are given prophetic content, the scroll, an item the sole purpose of which is to carry a message, is not. As we have seen, indications of its actual content are given in the most general of terms (too general to allow conclusive reconstruction), and so Brueggemann's comment that 'the scroll is not designed to

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[1041] Carroll, p. 16.

[1042] Martin Kessler, 'Form-Critical Suggestions on Jer 36', p. 391.

[1043] Arguing that the drama is more than text deep, Stacey adds two further observations: 1) that the scroll contains news that is already old, and that reactions to the writing are 'hard to explain if the act of writing was not thought to have had a special significance in itself'; and that 2) the documentation of 'all our present prophetic oracles' must have had a practical purpose, but the editors of the chapter 'saw this incident as a peculiarly significant action'. Stacey, p. 163.

[1044] Fohrer, p. 356.

[1045] Kessler, 'Form-Critical Suggestions on Jer 36', p. 391.

give information, nor even to make an argument'[1046] seems very reasonable, though it militates against the thrust of most scholarly readings. What, then, are we to make of a drama in which the content and significance of a particular scroll seem secondary to the fact of its existence?

3.1. *Explaining the Drama of the Scroll*
In a second, slightly later essay, Kessler acknowledges the absence of an overt explication of the drama, but suggests that that it would have been unnecessary in the ancient context:

> This is one of those cases where the biblical record neglects to preserve
> that which was sufficiently evident to its contemporaries so that the
> explanation would have been superfluous. Every biblical scholar knows
> that one of our chief challenges consists in the rendering explicit of what is
> taken for granted.[1047]

What was taken for granted, he proposes, is that Jeremiah had 'completed an epoch in his mission as Yahweh's messenger, for the writing down of Yahweh's word emphatically suggests that its immediate hortatory purposes were no longer of primary importance, that it was now a historical factor, and that its execution was just round the corner'.[1048]

Thus according to Kessler, the publication of Jeremiah's scroll signals the termination rather than continuation of prophetic preaching: 'the final word had been spoken', he writes, 'the prophet having receded to the background, his voice remained

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[1046] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 346.
[1047] Kessler, 'The Significance of Jer 36', p. 381.
[1048] Kessler, 'The Significance of Jer 36', p. 382.

silent till the prophecies contained in the "book" became harsh realities.'[1049] As *book* the word becomes an emblem of closure—of finality and inevitability—whereas *voice* remains the figure of a still open future: the former a sealing in ink, the latter, a challenge to change. But by replacing live preaching, the book also anticipates the prophet's absence (following Derrida, *writing* structurally presupposes it) in a trial without prophet, and so returns us to Frost's notion of writing as a monument to the man. In place of live word is dead letter: or to cite Julius Wellhausen's poetic epigram—which could very nearly have been drawn from Jeremiah[1050]—'the water which in old times rose from a spring, the Epigoni stored up in cisterns.'[1051] For Wellhausen, this phenomenon explains the emergence of the central canon: 'it is a thing which is likely to occur, that a body of traditional practice should only be written down when it is threatening to die out', and which leads him to make a comment here pertinent in Kessler's discussion of Jeremiah, 'that a book should be, as it were, the ghost of a life closed'.[1052]

While for Wellhausen torah is the wraith of ancient Israel,[1053] Jeremiah's scroll, as ghost of a life closed, haunts court and king—and beyond. Jones, who still glimpses the spirit of the long dead prophet in its pages, believes that to be able to do so is essential for proper appreciation of the book, now as then. Also reading Jeremiah 36 as the account of a prophetic sign, he argues that '[Jeremiah's] purpose was not

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[1049] Kessler, 'The Significance of Jer 36', p. 382.
[1050] See, for example, Jeremiah 2. 13.
[1051] Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* trans. by Mr Menzies and Mr Black (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 410.
[1052] Wellhausen, p. 405.
[1053] Of Wellhausen's argument, Levenson comments: 'the Torah defines Judaism, and Judaism is the ghost of ancient Israel. [...] The ultimate apparition of this ghost, according to Wellhausen, was the Pharisees of Jesus' day, who were "nothing more than the Jews in the superlative"—narrow, legalistic, exclusivistic, obsessive, compulsive, and hypocritical.' Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 11.

simply to give permanence to his oracles, but to *speak* a new and powerful word'.[1054]

Thus he regards the written scroll a reassertion of *speech* and that it is the mechanics of the prophet's own live performance that enlivens the page. Reminding the reader that this is no book civilisation, he points out that the prophets 'used the clever devices of the orator, from the pun to the enacted sign, to bring their message home to ears not altogether disposed to hear'.[1055] Citing W. Robertson Smith—'In Hebrew, the best writing is an unaffected transcript of the best speaking'[1056]—Jones suggests that the text is prophetic in so far as it bears the traces of the prophet's own proclamation:[1057] 'Great effects have great causes', he tells us; the *great cause* of the book Jeremiah is the historical prophet of that name. To remove, as does Carroll, the real life that inspired the didactic stories, he continues, 'weakens their character and impact';[1058] only those whose sight is not spoiled by 'a sceptical appraisal', he concludes, can appreciate 'the full, dynamic impact of passages which are otherwise ordinary and pedestrian'.[1059]

Kessler, in support of his own argument, cites Jeremiah 51. 59-64—a symbolic action narrative that reports the production (51. 60), recitation (51. 61), and destruction (51. 63) of a different scroll—and concludes that 'in Jer 36 also the reading was designed to add emphasis to the fulfilment of the prophetic word which in both examples was climactic and final.'[1060] Unlike the 'letter' (ספר) of Jeremiah 29, which was sent to encourage and exhort 'the remaining elders [יתר זקני] among the exiles' (29. 1), the 'single scroll' (ספר אחד) of Jeremiah 51 spells out doom for

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[1054] Jones, p. 437. My emphasis.
[1055] Jones, p. 436
[1056] Cited in Jones, p. 436.
[1057] 'By the time of Jeremiah the professional, scribal type of production had also been developed, and resulted in the prose version of the tradition. The poetry and the prose are side by side, enabling a peculiarly effective discrimination to be made'. Jones, p. 436.
[1058] Jones, p. 26.

the imperial power. Published for a one off reading to be followed with a

summarising prayer (51. 62), the scroll is then to be tied to a stone and thrown into the

Euphrates—an act accompanied by the incantation-like formula: 'Thus shall Babylon

sink, to rise no more, because of the disasters (רעה) that I am bringing on her' (51.

64). Brueggemann assumes that this will be performed in front of an audience and

that Seraiah is therefore commanded to 'do something as dangerous as his brother

Baruch in ch. 36'.[1061] But there is nothing to suggest that the recitation is to be heard

or that the action is to be seen: there is no mention of any spectators and no 'perhaps'

of repentance and forgiveness (51. 61; cf. 36. 3, 7). Furthermore, although the words

of the prayer—'O Yhwh, you yourself threatened to destroy this place [...]' (51.

62)—and the incantation indicate something of the content of the scroll, it is the

placement of the story which alone implies that 'all these words that are written

concerning Babylon (אל־בבל)' (51:60) refers to the oracles against Babylon which

precede it (50-51. 58).[1062] In short, it is as if the inanimate city is the only spectator of

what is less a message than an execration—a 'ritual of doom', as McKane puts it; one,

he argues, that is out of place in the context of Jeremiah.[1063] It is certainly a different

representation of the prophet from the pro-Babylonian figure elsewhere in the

tradition, and so may, as Carroll suggests, serve as an answer to the 'question of

treason mooted in the treatment of 27-29, 37-40'.[1064] According to Brueggemann, this

is the report of 'a freighted political act' intended to undermine the absolutionist

claims of Babylon whilst giving hope to hopeless Jerusalem; in this much, it is not

[1059] Jones, p. 26.
[1060] Kessler, 'Form-Critical Suggestions on Jer 36', p. 395.
[1061] Continuing, 'whereas Baruch acts in defiance of the king in Jerusalem in ch. 36, Seraiah acts in defiance of the empire.' Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 485.
[1062] Or as Carroll argues, the story is placed at the end of Jeremiah 51 'in order to attribute 50-51 to Jeremiah'. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 855.
[1063] McKane, *Jeremiah II*, p. 1372
[1064] See, for example, Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 583.

without theological value.[1065] But since it is the prophet rather than Yhwh who initiates the action (compare Jeremiah 51. 59 with 36. 1-3), Stacey finds the story still troubling and points out that the 'element of submission to Yahweh is absent altogether'; if the narrative remains useful, he continues, it is 'because it gives a slant on prophetic drama other than that supplied by dedicated Yahwistic theologians'.[1066]

Kessler believes that the excitement caused by the scroll in Jeremiah 36 may be explained by the ancient association between magic and writing—that it is perhaps this conviction, more than the desire to silence its message, which impels Jehoiakim to his destructive counter gesture.[1067] Stacey agrees that 'notions of instrumental magic are certainly lurking here',[1068] but does not think there is any 'reason to suppose [...] that either in historical fact or in the written record, Jeremiah and Jehoiakim shared the same beliefs about dramatic action'.[1069] While the king might have thought that the destruction of the scroll would be instrumentally effective, the prophet would not: 'it was not a case of spell and counter-spell,' he writes, 'but of submission to God on one hand and an empty performance on the other'.[1070] Allowing that 'by putting his oracles in writing Jeremiah was making them, not merely more permanent, but more vigorous',[1071] Stacey nevertheless warns the reader that 'no account of prophetic drama will suffice if it represents the action as inevitably

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[1065] Brueggemann, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 486. See pp. 229-230 above.

[1066] Stacey, p.168. To counter this, Holladay follows the LXX version of this narrative in which Yhwh does initiate the action, and amends the MT accordingly. McKane regards the Greek text as no more than a smoothing over of the troubling Hebrew.

[1067] Kessler cites H. W. Obbink who writes that 'the holiness of the book is particularly due to the fact that it is the fixing of the (charged) word, which is fixed by means of the (magic) writing', and so gives a quite literal force to the commonplace supposition that prophetic symbolic actions were performed 'to enhance the word spoken by a prophet in Yahweh's name'. 'The Significance of Jer 36', p. 383; 381.

[1068] Stacey, p. 165.

[1069] Stacey, p. 165.

[1070] Stacey, p. 165.

[1071] Stacey, p. 164.

effective'.[1072] On the basis of Jeremiah 36. 3 and 7, he suggests that the written

prophecies need not be fulfilled and that 'several possible futures exist in Yhwh's

hand'—the disaster may be averted 'if Israel repents in time'.[1073] Thus for Stacey, the

scroll fulfils a commission not different in kind from that of the prophet's preaching

ministry; and though discussed under the rubric of prophetic drama, it is, in effect,

little more than functional. For Kessler, however, 'the stated purpose of the recording

of the oracles (i.e., to effect repentance) is secondary'.[1074] While the שוב (to turn, to

return) motif is common enough in Jeremiah, its occurrence in 36. 3 and 7 is quite

different from that in Jeremiah 26: Jeremiah 26. 3 contains a result-clause indicating

that Judah's repentance will bring about its salvation ('that I may change my mind

about the disaster that I intend to bring on them because of their evil doings'),

whereas 36. 3 does not: a response is still sought; forgiveness may even be given; but

it is too late to secure national safety. And so, while both chapters emphasise that the

prophetic word is to be heard, in Jeremiah 26 it is proposed that the positive response

of the nation may still avert a disaster, but in Jeremiah 36 disaster is deemed a *'fait

accompli'*.[1075]

This said, Kessler also argues that this is more than a write-up of prophecy

past; it is an example of prophecy present. On its journey through temple and palace,

the scroll divides its audience as the prophet himself had once done. Thus while the

scroll contains a summary of the prophet's preaching, chapter 36 presents 'a summary

of Jeremiah's entire prophetic career'.[1076] Since in Kessler's reading the desired

response to the scroll will no longer stay the disaster, what has become urgent is that

the scroll be deemed authoritative: that what has been published and publicly recited

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[1072] Stacey, p. 165.
[1073] Stacey, p. 165.
[1074] Kessler, 'Form-Critical Suggestions on Jer 36', p. 391.

must now be acknowledged as holy writ. (Having begun with a discussion of an historical worldview steeped in beliefs about magic, Kessler is thus able to suggest some kind of rationale for a doctrine of scripture.)[1077] The issue now is not the avoidance of disaster, but its correct explication, as the book becomes a symbol of right interpretation, the authoritative version of events to which 'no further word was expected or needed'.[1078]

3.2. *Conveying the Word of God*

Yet—contra Kessler—it is reception of the word that keeps the book open. Indeed, more than just keeping it open, reception becomes part of the book as Jehoiakim's action, the text tells us, provokes 'many similar words' to be added (36. 27-32). The (violent) closure that comes to Jerusalem and the court of Jehoiakim exhausts neither prophecy nor the scroll: writing and reading continue even after institutions and biological lines come to an end. Word alone is the survivor.

Apparently capable of remaking anything in its own image (of converting anything to hand into text), the word, having inscribed the (fading) body of the prophet in Jeremiah 16, now dispenses with it entirely. (Thus Jones, though claiming that the prophet and his proclamations still give shape and meaning to the text, is, in truth, creating the contours of an historical Jeremiah out of the only resource that has lasted—the text.) Taking centre stage (less as a clue to the process by which oracles were collected than what?) the scroll becomes a protagonist in place of the prophet, even upstaging the more animate members of the cast.[1079] But as *stage object* its

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[1075] Kessler, 'The Significance of Jer 36', p. 382.
[1076] Kessler, 'The Significance of Jer 36', p. 383.
[1077] 'The narrative likewise stresses the final point that the "book" was capable of surviving any attack, even from the most powerful man of the nation, for this book was not the produce of a man's whim, but God's word'. Kessler 'The Significance of Jer 36', p. 383.
[1078] Kessler, 'Form-Critical Suggestions on Jer 36', p. 395.
[1079] Summarising the research of the Prague School semioticians, Kier Elam writes, 'while the customary, or automatized, epitome of the dynamic subject is the "lead" actor, whose "action force"

practical function is displaced (bracketed off) in favour of a semiotic one, as the

paucity of references to the content of the scroll—which is indicated by little more

than stock expressions—suggests. The coincidence between these functions,

however—that the scroll, designed to carry meanings, now becomes a sign-object to

convey meanings—leads Kessler, Jones, and Stacey to expound its dramatic

significance in terms of its content, arguing that it represents either the confirmation

(inking-in) or continuation of its content: the fulfilment or furtherance of the prophet's

own words. While this makes up for the lack of explicit interpretation accompanying

the drama, it blurs the distinction between practical and theatrical function.

Placed on the biblical platform and so *ostended* or *shown*, the scroll loses its

nature as real object among world objects: it is now a sign and so refers to a category

to which it belongs: it is now a scroll of the genus *scrolls*. Similarly, stage writing

refers to *writing as such* (here *writing of doom* in the most general terms) rather than a

particular writing referring to something other than inscription. In this much it

resembles the impact of monumental writing in antiquity. The display of writing on

stele in predominantly oral cultures, observes Susan Niditch, 'serves a sacred function

and invests the stone with identity and referentiality for all time. It has such meaning

whether or not passerby [sic] can read the words.'[1080] While this pertains most

obviously to inscriptions made in stone, this kind of *iconicity*, as she calls it, similarly

affects the reception of scrolls; a most obvious example would be torah.[1081] Filled

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sets semiosis in motion, and the prime paradigm of the passive object is the prop or element of the set, the relation between these apparent poles may be modified or even reversed.' Elam, p. 15.
[1080] Niditch, p. 57.
[1081] 'People at home in oral cultures', Niditch writes with ancient Israel particularly in mind, 'sometimes treat writing with a respect accorded the numinous. Writing comes to be regarded as capable of transformation and magic, the letters and words shimmering with the very power of the gods.' Niditch, p. 44. Niditch cites torah as the epitome of this phenomenon. While this may seem to belong to a primitive, even naïve past, Michelle P. Brown reminds us that 'writing is as important as ever and occupies an almost talismanic position in our societies'. Michelle P. Brown, *The British Library Guide to Writing and Scripts: History and Techniques* (London: The British Library, 1998), p. 7.

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with the prophet's word, Jeremiah's scroll, like torah, is also word of Yhwh. But as word of Yhwh of the genus *words of Yhwh*, it still functions tautologically, bearing no further signification. The scroll that has been quite literally written upon waits to be further inscribed with dramatic meaning—none is forthcoming. Thus while pots, pans, and loincloths are loaded with interpretation—themselves rarely if ever the bearers of words—the scroll and its inscriptions, in effect, remain silent.

3.3. *In Conclusion: Writing Up*

> Professional scribes who would prepare writing on formal monuments no doubt could read what they wrote. But the purpose of writing in these cases is not primarily for record keeping or for future consultation or even in order that the inscription be read in its own time. [...] Such writing is monumental and iconic. It reflects a respect for the ways in which writing creates and transforms, a respect for writing more common among the illiterate than among those who are literate in the modern sense.[1082]

Herbert Marks comments that 'in limited cases, what the prophet himself transfers or conveys is finally nothing more than conveyance itself'.[1083] This 'reflexive figure', he continues, is a mode of self-reference 'whose paradigm is YHWH's self-originating and self-circumscribing gloss on his own name, *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, "I will be what I will be" (Ex. 3. 14)'.[1084] In this and other such tautologies, Marks perceives '*the absence of a signified* that *itself assumes the status of a signifier*'[1085]—a 'semiological

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[1082] Niditch, p. 59.
[1083] Herbert Marks, 'On Prophetic Stammering', in Schwartz, pp. 60-80 (p.62). The 'prophet' here refers to any prophet, not Jeremiah in particular.
[1084] Marks, p. 62.
[1085] Marks is here citing Thomas Weiskel. Marks, p. 61. My emphasis.

translation' of Kant's theory of the sublime: that '"unattainability" becomes a form of "presentation"'.[1086]

Marks takes this into a discussion of 'the prophet's relation to the transcendent order' in which the congealing of language caused by an encounter with the ineffable brings about a 'prophetic stammer': 'the "slow tongue" of Moses and its variations, the "unclean lips of Isaiah", the demur of Jeremiah, the mutism of Ezekiel.'[1087] Interestingly, the slow tongue of Moses results in the task of speaking being handed to Aaron—'You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do' (Exodus 4. 15)—just as, in Jeremiah 36, Baruch becomes the voice of Jeremiah. And not only Baruch, but also a number of other readers and reciters as Micaiah reports 'all the words he had heard' to the officials in the secretary's chamber (36. 12-13), and Jehudi reads the scroll to the king (36. 21).[1088] While this recalls the Mosaic model, delegation is not here related to slowness of speech; rather it secures the continuing reiteration of the word despite the absence of the prophet. In this much, it enacts the theories of Derrida: repetition presupposed that the iterability of the mark (written or spoken) is un-tethered to an original or defining context. But more than this, the drama becomes a performance of conveying in which conveyance, rather than that which is conveyed, is played out. That writing and reading (and not what is written or read), takes the foreground and yet is given no further significance, leaves the story, when read as a prophetic drama, strangely empty. Sent out as neither archive nor missive, the prophet's scroll is, as Niditch might say, *monumental and iconic*— meaningful even if the reader is unsure precisely what it contains. If we accept

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[1086] Marks, p. 63.
[1087] Marks, p. 64.
[1088] Like the monumental writing of Moses, which is broken and rewritten, this too is the fate of the scroll.

Marks's thesis, it is meaningful even without interpretation since this lack or absence itself functions as a signified. We are left with conveyance, a monotonous process at times observed in the most painstaking detail (36. 18), and if, as many writers have argued, the story 'functions as a model of "Bible-making"',[1089] it demonstrates the monumental effort taken to bring such a 'monumental artefact' into being.[1090] And it suggests something of the immense labour involved in bringing forth God, who, as Scarry observes (in terms recalling Kant's description of the sublime), is 'most prominently represented [by] his unrepresentability, his hiddenness, his absence'.[1091] The word of God becomes the business of continual repetition and re-reading; of reading and re-writing; of perpetual assertion, and conveying the unconveyable—if *book*, it cannot be closed (closure would spell the death of God as much as the death of any author) but must remain open to the overspill of writing.

4. *An Aside On Derrida, The Book, And The Bible*

Here we have discerned writing: a nonsymmetrical division designated on one hand the closure of the book, and on the other the opening of the text. On the one hand the theological encyclopaedia and, modelled upon it, the book of man. On the other a fabric of traces marking the disappearance of an exceeding God or an erased man. The question of writing could be opened only if the book was closed. The joyous wandering of the graphein then became wandering without return. The opening into the text was adventure, expenditure without reserve.[1092]

[1089] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 345.
[1090] Scarry, p. 181.
[1091] Scarry, p. 211.
[1092] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 294.

Jeremiah, writes Brueggemann, 'can never be summarized but only "followed"'.[1093]

Similarly, the writings of Jacques Derrida are not best served up as précis and bullet

points, as easily consumable digests. One writer recently remarked that 'any clear,

commonsense approach to Derrida's work labours under a severe disadvantage' and

'goes completely against the author's intention'.[1094] Since the comment is found on

page one of a fifty page distillation—an 'Essential' Derrida—we may assume that it is

deliberately incongruous;[1095] placed alongside Alister McGrath's summary of

deconstruction as 'the critical method which virtually declares that the identity and

intentions of the author of a text are an irrelevance to the interpretation of the text,

prior to insisting that, in any case, no meaning can be found in it',[1096] it is rendered

absurd: how can an author who coined such a concept be thought to *intend* any such

thing (indeed, to *intend* anything at all)?[1097] But Derrida cannot be reduced to

deconstruction—however that term be conceived—and deconstruction (as practiced

by Derrida) is poorly represented by McGrath's summarising slogans, by slogans of

any kind in fact. Even so, as I endeavour to characterize Derrida,[1098] and contend with

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[1093] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. 13.

[1094] Paul Strathern, *The Essential Derrida* (London: Virgin, 2001), p. 1.

[1095] An assumption confirmed by Strathern's following comment that 'it is therefore only fair to warn the reader that my attempt at clarity in the ensuing description of Derrida's life and work would be regarded by its author as both counter-productive and hopelessly biased'. Strathern, pp. 1-2. Contrary to Strathern's suggestion that Derrida would deem clarity 'counterproductive', in an interview with Maurizio Ferraris, Derrida in fact claims that he does try to be clear. Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. by Giacomo Donis, ed by Giacomo Donis and David Webb (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 31.

[1096] Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 114. I note, however, that the comment has been adjusted slightly in the most recent edition and now states that deconstruction claims that texts have 'no fixed meaning' rather than no meaning at all. Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* 3rd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p.113.

[1097] What does seem clear is that Derrida did not expect the term *deconstruction* to have such impact: 'When I chose this word [deconstruction], or when it imposed itself upon me—I think it was in *Of Grammatology*—I little thought it would be credited with such a central role'. Jacques Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', in *Derrida and Difference*, trans. by David Wood and Andrew Benjamin, ed. by David Wood and Robert Bernasconi (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 1-8 (p. 1).

[1098] If not against clarity, Derrida does make it clear that generalising about a thinker or writer, as I am about to do here, is un-deconstructive: 'Deconstruction mistrusts proper names: it will not say "Heidegger in general" says thus or so; it will deal, in the micrology of the Heideggerian text, with different moments, different applications, concurrent logics, while trusting no generality and no configuration that is solid and given'. p. 9. Over thirty years earlier he had written, 'The names of

his seemingly inexhaustible corpus of texts, I shall do so under the rubric

deconstruction, partly because it provides an angle or point of entry into his thinking,

but also because Derrida continued to make use of it for nearly forty years despite his

distaste for the term.[1099]

Summary need not be unhelpful, but summary is always abridgement—the

condensing of argument into kernels. In this much, summary ill-suits deconstruction:

'Deconstruction in a nutshell? Why, the very idea!' cries John D. Caputo (in

Deconstruction in a Nutshell), for 'nutshells enclose and encapsulate, shelter and

protect, reduce and simplify, while everything in deconstruction is turned toward

opening, exposure, expansion, and complexification'; it is 'cracking nutshells

wherever they appear'.[1100] It is 'cracking the binding' of books,[1101] writes Timothy K.

Beal, indicating that the 'meaning and mission' of deconstruction, as McGrath rightly

supposes, relates to the treatment of *texts*.[1102] Deconstruction is not, however,

destruction, and its practitioners, contrary to what McGrath seems to think (and Beal

might be thought to imply), are not budding Jehoiakims flamboyantly tearing up

pages in a gesture of disregard for the word. Cracking the binding is the release, not

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authors or of doctrines have here no substantial value. They indicate neither identities nor causes. [...]
The indicative value that I attribute to them is first the name of a problem.' Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, corrected edn. trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,(Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 99.

[1099] 'It is a word I have never liked and one whose fortune has disagreeably surprised me'. Jacques Derrida, 'The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations', trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin, in *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. by Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 34-50 (p. 44). Although as Nicholas Royle points out 'it would be perfectly possible to write a book about Derrida's work without making use of the word "deconstruction"', Derrida has clearly not chosen to do so, which suggests that the usefulness of the term is not yet exhausted'. Nicholas Royle, *Jacques Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 24.

[1100] John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. with a commentary by John D. Caputo (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 31.

[1101] Timothy K. Beal, 'Opening: Cracking the Binding', in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*, ed. by Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-12 (p. 2).

[1102] Yet while deconstruction might be primarily associated with the treatment of written texts, it is far from exclusively so: as Caputo writes, 'the very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy.' Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 31.

the ruination of writing: it is neither a declaration of the irrelevance of authors (although, in so far as authors are bindings, they may not remain whole),[1103] nor a assertion that texts are without meaning (although meaning may prove far from inked-in or final); rather, deconstruction observes, to cite the (admittedly slogan-like) title of the first chapter in *Of Grammatology*, 'The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing'. This paradox (a book that begins with a declaration of its end?) signals a re-orientation of terms:[1104] that *book* and *writing*, commonly treated as synonyms, seem here to denote different orders—different epochs, even, as an Age of the Book gives way to an Age of Writing—indicates that the scope of each has expanded beyond its usual, more mundane meaning. It is, however, a single epoch that is addressed, or rather, *diagnosed* since it is a pathology that is being uncovered: 'this crisis', writes Derrida of the so-called *linguistic turn*,[1105] 'is also a symptom. It indicates, as if in spite of itself, that a historico-metaphysical epoch *must* finally determine as language the totality of its problematic horizon'.[1106] Here Derrida seems to stray into what he has elsewhere dubbed *linguisticism* (the argument that all things are no more than language). But in fact it is the 'hegemony of linguistics' that Derrida claims to have

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[1103] David Wood makes the pertinent remark that 'the belief that Derrida has no concern with authorial intentions is itself a misreading of his typical concern to play off such intentions against structural constraints that both limit and subvert authorial meaning. [...] Deconstructions [...] are not critical overcomings of texts, not summary executions, not *destructive* as such. They may indeed kill off certain existing mortifying tendencies of reading. But deconstructive readings do not conquer from the sky, they do not bring to a text concerns alien to its production and its structuration.' David Wood, 'Reading Derrida: an Introduction', in *Derrida: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 1-4 (p. 2).
[1104] Of his own books Derrida comments, 'In what you call my books, what is first of all put in question is the unity of the book and the unity of "book" considered as a perfect totality, with all the implications of such a concept. [...] At the moment when such a closure demarcates itself, dare one maintain that one is the author of books, be they one, two, or three? Under these titles it is solely a question of a unique and differentiated textual "operation", if you will, whose unfinished movement assigns itself no absolute beginning, and which, although it is entirely consumed by the reading of other texts, in a certain fashion refers only to its own writing'. Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 3.
[1105] The term 'linguistic turn' refers to the tendency in twentieth-century philosophy towards the recognition that many problems encountered were fundamentally problems of language.
[1106] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 6. Original emphasis.

set out to deconstruct:[1107] his much cited aphorism that *'there is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]',[1108] does not propose that all experience is imprisoned in language, but that the boundaries thought to demarcate the text are in fact porous and given to overflow; that all structures—'institutions, sexuality, the worldwide web, the body'[1109]—also bear the traces of textuality. This is not a formalist gesture demanding that the critic exclude any reference to author, social setting, or historical placement; rather, it is an acknowledgement that these factors do not constitute points of security outside textuality, keys with which to unlock the writing at hand; rather, they themselves are further networks of meaning. His original statement has been so often misunderstood, however, that he later suggested the alternative, 'there is nothing outside context', with the gloss that 'this says exactly the same thing, [but] the formula would doubtless have been less shocking'.[1110]

It is a 'literary commonplace', writes Kevin Hart, 'that the book is a unified whole—that it is totalised by authorial intention or by the reader's consciousness.'[1111] Its parameters set by an interiority that may also be named thought, mind, reason, logic, *logos*—guarantors of meaning that escape exteriority and contingency—the book contains writing and so limits the 'play of language'.[1112] Whether it be admitted or not, the model writer and reader in the epoch of the book is God—guarantor of

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[1107] 'Deconstruction was inscribed in the "linguistic turn",' writes Derrida, 'when it was in fact a protest against it'. Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 76.

[1108] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 158.

[1109] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 104.

[1110] Derrida, 'Afterward: Towards an Ethic of Discussion', in Derrida, *Limited Inc*, pp. 111-154 (p. 136). Kevin Hart helpfully comments that 'the doctrine that there is nothing outside the text is neither esoteric nor difficult: it is merely that there is no knowledge, of which we can speak, which is unmediated'. Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology, and Philosophy*, 2nd edn. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), p. 26.

[1111] Hart, p. 24. Derrida writes, 'the idea of the book is the idea of a totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified preexists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs, and is independent of it in its ideality.' *Of Grammatology*, p. 18.

meaning *par excellence*; no coincidence, then, that 'the *topos* of the book is more intimately related to Christianity than to any other movement, religious or otherwise'.[1113] It is a recurring theological trope: the pilgrim Dante, to cite one example, sees within the Eternal Light, 'all things bound in a single book by love of which creation is the scattered leaves'[1114]—an image which is 'used to affirm that all apparent differences are ultimately unified in God'.[1115] God reads with omniscient eye and writes with omnipotent hand, his consciousness and intentions are all encompassing, and the divine tome, as Derrida imagines it, is an 'infinite manuscript read by a God who, in a more or less deferred way, is said to have given us use of his pen'.[1116] 'God's book (nature or law, indeed natural law)'[1117] can only be read and repeated by us in a partial and piecemeal fashion: the Book is rewritten as books; penned by his prophet, Yhwh's Word (singular) becomes words (plural) on a scroll (Jeremiah 1. 1; 36. 1-8). Every book represents a desire for the fullness, the completeness of The Book, just as for Walter Benjamin, every language contains an intention or desire for 'pure language'.[1118]

In keeping with the grandiose tenor of this *topos*, Glendinning compares the announcement of the *end of the book* to the claim *God is dead*, adding that 'the possibility of making sense of such a massive motif through the seemingly unremarkable and insignificant topic of writing can seem extraordinary'.[1119] Extraordinary if writing is characterized by a 'secondary and instrumental function' in

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[1112] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 6.
[1113] Hart, p. 30.
[1114] Paradise Canto XXXIII. 86-87. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy Vol. III: Paradise* trans. by Mark Musa (London: Penguin, 1984), p. 392.
[1115] Hart, p. 31. For Derrida on nature as God's book, see *Of Grammatology*, p. 15-16; *Writing and Difference*, pp. 3-30.
[1116] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, pp. 9-10.
[1117] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 16.
[1118] Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zoan, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1968), pp. 70-82 (p.74).
[1119] Glendinning, pp. 6-7.

relation to language, yes,[1120] but Derrida (and this is perhaps even more extraordinary) posits writing as the very precondition of language itself.[1121] As the sensible signifier to an ideal and intelligible signified (*'the signifier of a signifier'*, even, since it is regarded as little more than the notation of speech),[1122] writing seems to exemplify exteriority and derivativeness—dependence upon a system that precedes it. But the features that are most conspicuous about inscription, namely absence and iterability (as discussed earlier),[1123] are those features that make all language (indeed, all signification) possible. As Glendinning comments, 'that this structure of iterability is most evident in writing provides a *raison d'etre* for its generalization';[1124] by enlarging writing into something that is prior ('primordial', suggests Christopher Norris),[1125] Derrida also proposes that exteriority is to be found inscribed within. Dependent upon its signifier for identity,[1126] the signified is, in fact, no fixed (or self-contained) ideal; it, like the signifier (speech or writing) is constituted by (or within) the very signifying system it might be thought to escape: a single element in language, a word, for example, only makes sense (indeed, is only discernible) by dint of its phonetic *and conceptual* difference from other words in a scheme where, as Saussure

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[1120] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 8.

[1121] It is, Derrida writes, 'no longer a particular, derivative, auxiliary form of language in general [...] no longer designating the exterior surface, the insubstantial double of a major signifier, the signifier of the signifier', rather writing is a structure that *'comprehends* language.' Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 7.

[1122] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 7. Original emphasis.

[1123] See p. 225-229 above.

[1124] Glendinning, p. 12.

[1125] Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, rev. edn (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 31.

[1126] The signified, as an integral part of the sign, is not after all the referent, the thing being signified (a characteristic which already indicates where this argument is heading). Bennington makes this point helpfully clear: 'the function of the sign is to represent the thing during its absence. But for this description to be plausible, what is absent must be the referent, not the signified, as otherwise the sign would not function. Signifier and signified are in dissociable, detached from the referent to represent it at a distance. [...] The unity of the signifier and signified makes the sign.' Bennington, p. 25.

observed, there are 'only differences *without positive terms*'.[1127] Since differences are not really substantive (a difference is not a *thing*, not a substance in itself), yet are the defining feature of signs, this 'supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element will be present in and of itself, referring only to itself'.[1128] Thus each word bears the *trace* of many others from which it gains meaning by being distinct; the result is a textile-like text that is woven from elements in a system where 'there are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces'[1129]—traces, as if left by a pen.[1130] But this spectral chain is not the only network pertaining: like the signifier, the signified is only one link in a relay of meaning; 'the signified always already functions as a signifier',[1131] writes Derrida. To test this remark Bennington recommends a simple experiment: 'look up the signified of an unknown signifier in the dictionary and you find more signifiers, never any signifieds.'[1132] And so, argues Derrida, 'the secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects all signifieds in general, affects them always already, the moment they *enter the game*'.[1133]

This stain of ink in the structure of language suggests that more typical notions of the linguistic sign—that signifiers represent preformed and intelligible signifieds[1134]—must give way to a conception of iterable marks functioning within a general structure of writing, one that operates without the security of external

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[1127] Saussure, p. 120. *Of Grammatology* begins with a reading of Saussure's *Course*, admiring its insights while discerning the problematic distinction between signifier and signified. In this much deconstruction is both justified and discovered by its own practice.
[1128] Derrida, *Positions*, p. 26.
[1129] Derrida, *Positions*, p. 26.
[1130] Derrida uses the terms 'trace' and 'grammè' (from the Greek *gramma*—letter, or writing—hence, *grammatology*) interchangeably. See, for example, *Positions*, p. 26.
[1131] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 7.
[1132] Bennington, p. 33.
[1133] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 7. Original emphasis.
[1134] 'We would be wise to beware of the word "representation"', writes Bennington, asking 'what could a signified look like? and therefore, what could look like a signified?' pp. 25-26.

guarantees.[1135] In consequence, the model of the book as 'that writing which is totalised by a consciousness, human or divine', must recede to allow for 'a new kind of writing in which signs plainly cannot be totalised by concepts'.[1136] In turn, this implies that the cracking of bindings is less the (violent) work of the reader than an inescapable tendency of texts: that the potential of repeatable, graftable language to exceed all conscious intention means that it is liable, when watched, to break out of its own bindings. 'The writer', writes Derrida, 'writes in *a* language and in *a* logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely';[1137] it is this gap, between written language or logic and authorial control, that 'the deconstructive reading', notes Caputo (in terms that indicate that there is at least some active intervention on the part of the reader), 'must "produce"'.[1138] Such production therefore requires critical appreciation of the original language, time, and place of a given text;[1139] thus while Derrida's use of phrases such as the *play of language* and *the game* conveys particular aspects of textual *logic*, it has had the unfortunate effect of fuelling the idea that deconstructive readings are no more than a matter of 'Relax, play with some words, join the party'.[1140] This is not an approach Derrida seeks to license:[1141] without recognition and respect for the historical context of a given writer, he points out, 'critical production would risk developing in any

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[1135] 'Language itself is menaced in its very life, helpless, adrift in the threat of limitlessness, brought back to its own finitude at the very moment when its limits seem to disappear, when it ceases to be self-assured, contained, and *guaranteed* by the infinite signified which seemed to exceed it.' Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 6. Original emphasis.

[1136] Hart, p. 24.

[1137] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 158.

[1138] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 78.

[1139] Caputo continues, 'we cannot establish the relationship between what the author commands and does not command if we do not first get a command of what the author says or, better, what is being said in the text.' Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 78.

[1140] John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Methods in Biblical Study*, 2nd edn (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1996), p. 235.

[1141] Indeed, at times Derrida takes pains to remind his readers that 'we are not playing here, turning a little sentence around in order to make it dazzle from every angle.' Jacques Derrida, *The Gift Of Death* trans. by David Willis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 83.

direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything'.[1142] Thus while Derrida is 'written off in some quarters as no better than a nihilist, whose aim was to leave no philosophy at all standing', it seems reasonable to agree with John Sturrock that this critique is 'absurd'.[1143]

Recognition and respect for the 'classical exigencies' of a text, writes Derrida, provides an 'indispensable guardrail', but one that has 'always only *protected*, it has never opened a reading'.[1144] The implication is that research is itself a form of binding, and therefore, inevitably, a reassertion of the book. Yet, the business of biblical studies, which has for the most part been a scholarly endeavour concerned with the protection of texts, is at the same time, and as part of this remit, engaged in the dismantling of bindings. In both churches and courts of law the embossed leather cover of the Bible has served as an emblem of univocality and authority, often representing ideals only loosely allied to its content. Thus it appears to be more binding than book—a monolith of monotheism by which, observes Beal, 'its Author/Father founds a politics of religious, national, and sexual identity, and claims

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[1142] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 158.

[1143] Sturrock continues, '[Derrida's] commentaries on some of the great thinkers of the past—Plato, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger—are in effect hugely enlightening and invigorating in unpicking certain significant incoherences.' John Sturrock, *The Independent*, Monday, 11 October, 2004. In response to the announcement of Derrida's death, *The Guardian* that same week requested summaries and responses to Derrida's writing from various public figures; here are just a few. Alain de Botton: 'Derrida defies summary. He investigates the different ways in which attempts to simplify and summarise ideas are, in fact, a betrayal of the true complexity of things.' Roger Scruton: 'He's difficult to summarise because it's nonsense. [...] For Derrida, there is no such thing as meaning—it always eludes us and therefore anything goes.' A. S. Byatt: 'Derrida examines how we construct meaning, the provisional way in which our constructions depend upon other constructions. He was an exciting person to read but had a bad effect on British critical writing. He wrote with immense ad hoc wit and had no interest in creating a system, but his followers did create a system and sought to deconstruct everything.' David Lodge: 'According to Derrida, the foundations of traditional philosophy are illusory. [...] The very nature of language undermines the claim of any text or utterance to have a determined meaning, and licenses the reader to produce his/her own interpretation of it by an activity of "semantic freeplay"'. Michael Billington: 'What strikes me is, when applied to literature, how close this is to what I was brought up to call Practical Criticism of the I. A. Richards school—the assumption that understanding literature is enhanced by breaking it down into its constituent parts and analysing these with scientific thoroughness'. *The Guardian*, Tuesday, 12 October, 2004.

[1144] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 158. Original emphasis.

binding authority over all His subjects'.[1145] Signifying a singleness of intention

despite the multiplicity of writings within, the binding is both the indicator of a

totalizing interiority and the container of complexity: to cite Derrida, it is the

'protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing'.[1146]

Encountered exegetically the biblical material proves irreducible, however, and

overflows any unifying conception of its content, even causing 'many a reader to give

up in despair'; but this, John Bright suggests sagely, is the 'beginning of

understanding'.[1147] Though traditionally recommended as *the* book of books',[1148] the

Bible is also *a* book of books: a particularly complex collection with each book

displaying considerable internal intricacies, no more so perhaps than the prophets

which, Bright points out, 'are indeed not books (i.e. literary productions from the pen

of an author or authors)' but 'collections of prophetic sayings and other material

which have a long and complex history of transmission behind them'.[1149] Similarly,

Carroll has written that 'the term "book" is a misleading description of these

congeries and they might be described better as a miscellany of disparate writings—a

gallimaufry of writings suggests itself as an entirely adequate categorization of this

type of collection'.[1150]

The decomposition of the Bible into writings brings release from imposed

bindings: in an appraisal of so-called 'historical-critical approaches',[1151] John Barton

proposes that the classic tools of biblical criticism have indeed been sharpened for this

very purpose—to cut free the Bible from the external imposition of ties. 'The idea of

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[1145] Beal, p. 2.
[1146] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 18.
[1147] Bright, p. LVI.
[1148] Hart, p. 30. My emphasis.
[1149] Bright, pp. LVI-LVII.
[1150] Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, p. 38.
[1151] 'Rather than speak of "historical-critical method"', writes John Barton, 'we should simply speak of "biblical criticism", for the connection with history is […] at best partial and occasional.' John Barton,

reading the Bible critically,' he informs us, 'is not derived from an interest in history. [...] It is linked with the Reformation insistence on the authority of the Bible, read freely, over the Church'.[1152] Nevertheless, he observes, as they gain in authority and consensus, critical methods can themselves act as new bindings:

> In asking what a text really means or actually says, and being open to the
> possibility that this is not what the Church, or tradition, or the individual
> thinks or wishes it says or would like to make it say, biblical critics were
> trying to let the text speak through the stifling *wrappings* of interpretation
> with which it had been surrounded. [...] The proliferation of historical-
> critical writings has threatened, of course, to become simply a fresh set of
> *wrappings* with the same effect, and it is understandable that people should
> feel that it is time to begin again. But the underlying motivation of
> "historical" criticism is to free the text to speak. Where it has failed to do
> this, that is, in my judgement, because it has continued to be too *hidebound*
> by tradition and by the expectations of the wider religious community; and
> the cure is *more criticism, not less.*[1153]

Barton, however, is not keen to prescribe 'postmodern'[1154] approaches as part of the panacea 'more criticism': responding to his own characterization of postmodernism as 'an attack on the pursuit of objective truth', he writes, 'I do not by any means believe that the case has been made'.[1155] Instead, he reaffirms the potential of historical

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'Historical-Critical Approaches', in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 9-20 (p. 16).

[1152] Barton, 'Historical-Critical Approaches', p. 16.

[1153] Barton, 'Historical-Critical Approaches', p. 17. My emphasis.

[1154] Barton describes the writing of, and inspired by, Derrida as *postmodern*, which is perhaps not the best term to use as a descriptor for Derrida's approach to the texts. See Yvonne Sherwood, 'Derrida' in *The Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. by A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), pp. 69-75 (p. 72). Nevertheless, whilst representing his arguments, I shall retain the terms 'historical-criticism' and 'postmodern criticism'—albeit advisedly in both cases—to maintain his distinction.

[1155] Barton, 'Historical-Critical Approaches', p. 13.

criticism (not equated with any one method) to be 'an enormously iconoclastic movement, because it refuses to allow people to mean anything they like by their sacred texts'; the approach, he affirms, has not yet had its day in the churches—'it has scarcely even arrived there.'[1156]

As an antidote to both tradition and the postmodern, Barton recommends that biblical criticism be concerned with the '"plain sense" or "natural sense" of the text' defined in terms of what it 'can or cannot mean'.[1157] On one hand this resists the dictates of church dogma; on the other it restrains the (presumed) free hand of deconstruction. But, just as Derrida, on the evidence cited, cannot simply be accused of playing fast and loose with the text, neither should Barton be thought methodologically blinkered. Barton's concern is 'not to defend this or that method as ideologically pure', but 'to revive a true spirit of criticism' which, he states, requires only 'open-mindedness and honesty'.[1158] Opposing the canonization of any one critical practice, he argues that 'no-one may legislate as to what questions the reader of Scripture is allowed to ask'.[1159] And so, although he is unconvinced by postmodern approaches, he is unwilling to censor the questions they bring to the text, taking on board their findings when their insights seem valid. In a later publication, Barton in fact recants ('at least partially')[1160] his dismissal of 'Derridean readings', admitting that they 'draw attention to features which an honest "historical" critic must acknowledge once pointed out, but which that critic would never have noticed unaided'.[1161] Thus, although he had once allowed postmodern interpretation no room

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[1156] Barton, 'Historical-Critical Approaches', p. 18.
[1157] Barton, 'Historical-Critical Approaches', p. 17.
[1158] Barton, 'Historical-Critical Approaches', p. 19.
[1159] Barton, 'Historical-Critical Approaches', p 19.
[1160] John Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', in *Derrida's Bible: Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida* ed by Yvonne Sherwood (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2004), pp. 301-303 (p. 301).
[1161] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 302.

at the inn,[1162] he is now prepared 'to annex it to traditional biblical criticism and to declare that it is not so alien to that world as it seems'.[1163]

Not so alien, but not fully integrated either. Barton wonders whether annexation is 'perhaps more irritating[...]' than an outright dismissal of deconstruction.[1164] Perhaps. But if annexation is an irritant, it is possibly less so to 'Derrida and those who follow him' (who must be fairly resilient by now),[1165] than it is to Barton's own scheme. Barton evaluates postmodern interpretation in terms of its service to biblical criticism *proper*, that is, insofar as it helps establish what is 'really there'[1166] which he elsewhere defines as the plain or natural sense, a present meaning secured by modes of criticism working within the constraints of the text.[1167] Whilst allowing that postmodern interpretation is able to see something of 'the length and breadth and depth and height of the text',[1168] Barton still expresses some concern that it produces readings that are *beliebig*, 'to your liking, at your pleasure [...] arbitrary'.[1169] The implication is that in contrast to traditional biblical criticism, postmodern interpretation tends towards the un-plain and un-natural; that it is careless of constraints; and, 'unwilling to look the text straight in the eye', not entirely honest in its approach.[1170] And so, annexed to 'traditional biblical criticism', it constitutes a kind of *dangerous supplement*[1171] both enriching and threatening scholarship; in so

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[1162] Barton had previously found postmodern interpretation 'absurd. [...] Despicable in its delight in debunking all serious beliefs', and 'a game, a set of *jeux d'esprit*, a way of having fun with words'. Barton, *Reading the Old Testament*, p. 235. Barton now allows that 'a *jeu d'esprit* can be the bearer of serious ideas'. Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 301.

[1163] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 303.

[1164] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 303.

[1165] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 303.

[1166] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 303.

[1167] To free biblical criticism from the charge of being locked in the past, Barton provides a revised account of the task of historical criticism: that it is not the recovery of past meanings, but 'present ones are what is needed'. Barton, 'Historical-Critical Approaches', p. 17.

[1168] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 302.

[1169] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 303.

[1170] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 301.

[1171] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 141. An extended meaning of 'annex' is, of course, 'a supplementary building'. *The Chambers Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1998).

doing, it poses a question about the task of biblical criticism by interrogating the

concept of the *really there*.[1172]

Derrida is fully aware of the challenge posed by the supplement. In one way or

another it pervades all his work, but is dealt with overtly in *Of Grammatology*,[1173]

where he observes that the notion 'harbours within itself two significations whose

cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary':[1174]

> The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another
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> plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence. It cumulates and accumulates
>
> presence. It is thus that art, *technè*, image, representation, convention, etc.,
>
> come as supplements to nature and are rich with this entire cumulating
>
> function. [...] But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It
>
> intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills, it is as if one fills a
>
> void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a
>
> presence. Compensatory [*suppléant*] and vicarious, the supplement is an
>
> adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As
>
> substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces
>
> no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an
>
> emptiness.[1175]

[1172] Deconstruction is not unconcerned with the *really there*, but then takes this concept to task by investigating what is required for the *really there* to be manifested as such: it is 'always passing *through* the classical discipline', Caputo writes, 'and never having abandoned or jettisoned it, to explore what it omits, forgets, excludes, expels, marginalizes, dismisses, ignores, scorns, slights, takes too lightly, waves off, is just not serious enough about!' Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 78. Original emphasis.

[1173] Derrida, Of Grammatology, pp. 141- 164. Also, Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. by David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 88-104.

[1174] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 144.

[1175] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 144-145. Original emphasis.

Both significations are operative in Barton's annexation of postmodern interpretation: an addition to 'traditional biblical criticism'[1176] it is a *surplus* ('a plenitude enriching another plenitude'); but awarded its status as supplement on the basis of its ability to make up for a lack, 'alert[ing] us to aspects of the biblical text we would otherwise overlook', it is *compensatory* ('it adds only to replace').[1177] Barton is conscious of this lack in historical criticism, which manifests not only in the overlooked (a certain blindness), but also in the infelicitous (a certain *beliebig*);[1178] thus while postmodern interpretation is condemned for its arbitrary readings, it is possibly taking the role of a scapegoat for a tendency in all criticism; one that Barton is anxious to control. To address this lack, Barton calls for more criticism, supposing the fault to be a shortfall in methodological rigour: historical criticism has simply not been critical enough. That the primary text requires such intervention at all, however, suggests that the fault is more profound: the *really there*, it seems, is in need of critical reading to be stabilized, indeed, to be made known at all, which not only implies that there is already a lack in the primary text, but that the sense in which this text may be called *primary* is less certain. The demand for more criticism demonstrates that the biblical text, supposedly the locus of natural and present sense, is unable to secure its own meaning, and is in need of secondary literature to do so. At this point it becomes clear that the *really there* really belongs to the secondary literature (where it is determined) rather than the primary (where, clearly, it is not). Thus, while the secondary literature is unthinkable without the primary text, the *really there* (supposedly the essence of the primary text), is unimaginable without the secondary literature. In this sense, the *really there* belongs to 'an infinite chain, ineluctably multiplying the supplementary

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[1176] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 303.
[1177] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 303

mediations that produce the sense of the very thing they defer: the mirage of the thing itself, of immediate presence'.[1179]

The supplement thus produces what it supplements, and exposes immediacy (here, the immediate—the plain, the natural—and present meaning) as something that is derived.[1180] Following this logic, interpretation is both an external account of the sense of a text, and a external condition that makes meaning possible—it is always exterior, yet at the same time does not represent something entirely different, just as annexed, postmodern interpretation 'is not so alien', Barton points out.[1181] Thus, as Derrida describes it, the supplement occupies the paradoxical position of being 'neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence'.[1182] It is never the thing in itself, it is always the extra instead of the essence; its own 'strange essence', Derrida notes, is 'not to have essentiality: it may always not have taken place. Moreover, literally, it has never taken place: it is never present, here and now.'[1183] Representation cannot then be an accident of presence, an overspill of fullness, rather it arises from—is 'born from', writes Derrida—an *abyss*.[1184] The plea for more criticism gives voice not only to Barton's desire for the securing of a stable, present meaning, which Derrida terms the *transcendental signified*—the meaning outside language, 'which, at one time or another, would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign'[1185]—but also to the insatiable appetite of the text which is constituted in an abyss and feeds off the supplement of criticism to become manifest at all. Thus in place of full text, there is

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[1178] Barton is aware, not only that there are aspects of the text that would not be detected by traditional approaches, but he also admits that 'historical criticism constantly produces perfectly (and dangerously) *beliebig* interpretations itself'. Barton, '*Beliebigkeit*', p. 301.

[1179] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 157.

[1180] Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, p. 89.

[1181] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 303.

[1182] Derrida, *Positions*, p. 43.

[1183] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 314.

[1184] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 163.

text-yet-to-come: a text, or rather, a book, which will be bound eschatologically and opened apocalyptically—when all traces, supplements, and systems of difference are no longer required—an era perhaps brought in by a true criticism (which is by definition self-negating: bringing an end to all criticisms), but which, at this time, has 'scarcely even arrived'.[1186] For the moment, reading must deal in deferred meanings born of difference rather than self-presence;[1187] not, however, *any* meaning—since reading must be 'scrupulous, gravely in earnest, deadly serious'[1188]—or *no* meaning, since interpretation and criticism, the articulations of sense and intelligibility, proliferate out of necessity.

The 'two determinate possibilities' in the notion of the supplement (complement and completion, 'accretion and substitution')[1189] make it a *double bind*, an *undecidable*—terms indicating that a logical impasse has been reached. Thus it can be argued—indeed, it has been, and with reason—that Derrida recommends hesitation. A function of undecidables such as the supplement (surplus or completion?) the *pharmakon* (cure or poison?) the ghost (absence or presence?) is their resistance to binary thinking: 'We will not chose', he once wrote, 'between the opening and totality'.[1190] But while Derrida's writing on deferred meanings and logical deadlocks might seem set to promote little more than vacillation and stasis, undecidability is not, in fact, the antonym of 'decisiveness', argues Caputo, 'but programmability, calculability, computerizability, or formalizability'.[1191] Thus undecidability constitutes the condition and possibility of decision, which Derrida

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[1185] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 49.
[1186] Barton, 'Historical-Critical Approaches', p. 18.
[1187] The characteristics of difference and deferral that mark general writing are combined in Derrida's neologism *différance* that privileges the written word where the difference between *différance* and *difference* is alone patent.
[1188] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 79.
[1189] Jack Reynolds, 'Decision', in Reynolds and Roffe, pp. 46-53 (p. 47).
[1190] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 84.
[1191] Caputo, *Deconstruction in Nutshell*, p. 137.

(drawing on Kierkegaard) presents as a leap of faith which outdistances all planning, for if a decision were the result of weighing up pros and cons, it would be a programmable product, not a decision at all.[1192] Even if a course of action were chosen after considerable calculation, the moment of decision itself cannot be an inevitable result of this process, it must still be chosen, and so requires a movement into uncertainty that 'evokes that which is outside of the subject's control'[1193]—it is in this sense a form of madness.[1194] In so doing, Derrida does not play down the urgency of decision-making, but emphasises the experience of undecidability through which any decision must pass.[1195]

Derrida uses the term experience in a 'dusted off and reactivated' sense,[1196] less to denote the perception of things present than 'something that *traverses* and travels toward a destination for which it finds the appropriate passage.'[1197] Experience, he proposes, 'finds its way. [...] It is possible'.[1198] In this sense, he continues, 'it is impossible to have a full experience of aporia, that is, of something that does not allow passage'.[1199] Aporia, from the Greek meaning *without path*, is a non-road, which far from marking the end of the road, impels, even compels,

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[1192] Drawing also from Jan Patocka's *Heretical Essays*, Derrida writes, 'if decision-making is relegated to a knowledge that it is content to follow or to develop, then it is no more a responsible decision, it is the technical deployment of a cognitive apparatus, the simple mechanistic deployment of a theorem'. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Willis (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 24.

[1193] Reynolds, p. 48.

[1194] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 65.

[1195] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, p. 116.

[1196] Jacques Derrida, *Points... Interview, 1974-1994*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf and others, ed. by Elisabeth Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 207. 'Experience can be understood in different ways in philosophy and in literature. Experience obviously supposes a meeting, reception, perception, but in a stricter sense, it indicates the movement of traversing. [...] And by traversing consequently a limit or a border.' Derrida, *Points...*, p. 373.

[1197] Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundation of Authority"', in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, trans. by Mary Quaintance, ed. by Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-67 (p. 16). Original emphasis.

[1198] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 16.

[1199] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 16.

deconstruction.[1200] With the audacious claim that 'deconstruction is justice',[1201] for example, Derrida argues that 'there is no justice without this experience, however impossible it may be, of aporia'.[1202] From this we may already surmise that justice is not here simply *law*. The law (*droit*), the judicial *system*, argues Derrida, 'is the element of calculation', the application of rules to a particular case to effect a determinate judgement; 'but justice', on the other hand, 'is incalculable [...] is never insured by a rule'.[1203] While providing the impetus for both the application and modification of the law, justice is not equal to either: 'no exercise of justice as law can be just unless there is a "fresh judgement"', Derrida argues, 'it must conserve the law and also destroy or suspend it enough to have to reinvent it in each case, rejustify it'.[1204] Faced with the possible and calculable—that is, the legal—justice, if it is to be more mechanical, must be the moment of madness that gives itself up to 'the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules'.[1205] For this reason it can be no ideal, goal or *telos*—a paradigm or model that the law works towards—since this would be no more than law writ large. Yet justice is that which the law means to bring about, its '"drive," its ec-centric ec-stasy';[1206] it is the name in which the law is revised and rewritten—justice is not deconstructible (only *things* are deconstructible), it *is* deconstruction.

[1200] Derrida's own explanation for his choice of the term aporia is helpful: 'I knew what was going to be at stake in this word was the "not knowing where to go." It had to be a matter of [*il devait y aller du*] the nonpassage, or rather from the experience of the nonpassage, the experience of what happens [*se passe*] and is fascinating [*passionne*] in this nonpassage, paralysing us in this separation in a way that is not necessarily negative: before a door, a threshold, a border, a line, or simply the edge or the approach of the other as such. It should be a matter of [*devrait y aller du*] what, in sum, appears to block our way or to separate us in the very place where *it would no longer be possible to constitute a problem*, a project, a projection [...].' Jacques Derrida, *Aporias* trans. by Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 12. Original emphasis.
[1201] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 15.
[1202] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 16.
[1203] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 16.
[1204] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 23.
[1205] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 24.
[1206] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 131.

Justice (the just decision) opens the present and possible to the unforeseeable and impossible. Rather than expanding the *horizon of expectation*—an expansion of the present and possible—justice traverses or transgresses it so that 'it *may* have an *avenir*, a "to-come"' distinguishable from 'the future that can always reproduce the present'.[1207] Derrida's diction prepares the way for the coming of the *messianic* to his subsequent writings. Delayed for a time because it seemed to him simply to reinstate another, albeit more distant, horizon *'of the same type'*,[1208] when *messianicity* did arrive (if a term denoting infinite expectation can be said to arrive), it did so in a weaker, indeterminate form influenced by Walter Benjamin's *Thesis on the Philosophy of History*.[1209] The strong, historical messianisms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam calculate and project a future based on the present, based on the *book*; the messianic or structure of messianicity in Derrida's writing does not belong to a future -present, but to an absolute future, a future always to-come: this messianic 'would be urgency, imminence but, irreducible paradox, a waiting without horizon of expectation'.[1210] Thus the coming of the messianic to deconstruction, to the deconstructive structures of decision and justice, makes explicit the welcome extended to the un-represented, indeed un-representable *other*—the *tout autre*. Far from being nihilistic,

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[1207] Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 27. Original emphasis.

[1208] 'I would hesitate to assimilate too quickly this "idea of justice" to a regulative idea (in the Kantian sense), to a messianic promise or to other horizons *of the same type.*' Derrida, 'Force of Law', p. 25. Original emphasis.

[1209] In his theses on historical materialism, Benjamin proposes that 'our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim'. Each generation is given the task of redeeming past sufferings—the present moment is messianic time. Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), p. 246. See Derrida's footnote in Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: the State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 180-181.

[1210] Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p. 168.

> Deconstruction is deeply and profoundly 'affirmative.' *Oui, oui.* To be
> sure, deconstruction does not affirm what it *is*, does not fall down
> adoringly before what is present, for the present is precisely what demands
> endless analysis, criticism, and deconstruction. [...] On the contrary,
> deconstruction affirms what is to come *à venir*, which is what its
> deconstruction of the present, and of the values of presence, is all about. So
> radical is this deconstructive impulse that the *à venir* itself is not to be
> construed in term of presence. [...] Deconstructive analysis deprives the
> present of its prestige and exposes it to something *tout autre*, 'wholly
> other,' beyond what is foreseeable from the present, beyond the horizons
> of the 'same.'[1211]

It is in this sense that 'deconstruction is produced in the space where the prophets'—the seers—'are not far away'.[1212] It reopens texts and institutions, that is, institutions-as-texts (made meaningful by the same structures of difference and deferral as writing) with a cut that opens the same to the other—'not', suggests Caputo, 'unlike the circumcised ear or heart of Jeremiah'.[1213] And so it seems reasonable to agree with Caputo that the religion of the atheist Derrida[1214] is 'more prophetic than apophatic, more in touch with the Jewish prophets than with Christian Neoplatonists, more messianic and more eschatological than mystical'.[1215] Although God-as-guarantor—the God of the transcendental signified—might have been dispatched along with the book, the breaking of such bindings is an opening up to the call of the wholly other.

[1211] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, pp. 41-42.

[1212] In a footnote, Caputo cites the transcription of an interview in which Derrida states, 'it is possible to see deconstruction as being produced in a space where the prophets are not far away....I am still looking for something...[in a] search without hope for hope....Perhaps my search is a twentieth-century brand of prophecy? But it is difficult for me to believe it.' John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 341.

[1213] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 198.

[1214] 'I quite rightly pass for an atheist', confesses Derrida in his autobiographical *Circumfessions* in Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, p. 154.

Thus Hart can argue that deconstruction—and presumably Derrida's own religion, 'about which nobody understands anything'[1216]—makes 'no significant case for atheism'.[1217] While Derrida provides a critique of the founding concepts of western theological discourse—presence, origin, and self-identity, for example—new theological discourses have emerged out of the encounter with his work. The elusive notion of *différance* and such key words as the *secret*—which 'belongs to the very essence of *venir* and *à venir* that what is coming be unknown, not merely factually unknown but structurally unknowable'[1218]—seem to offer themselves as a starting point for dialogue between deconstruction and negative theology, but Derrida himself calls the suitability of this into question.[1219] Explorations of the possibility of a religion without religion (without priesthood and dogma)—marked by a 'radical openness to the future and endless calling for justice'[1220]—seem to resonate more fully with Derrida's own insights, but as Hart admits, the revisions to the notion of religion that this would entail are 'unlikely to satisfy any but the most liberal of believers'.[1221]

If nothing else (though there seems to be plenty else to interest theologians and biblical critics) Derrida's writings are filled with references and allusions to scripture: the beginning of a far from exhaustive list compiled by Yvonne Sherwood, cites 'creation and the "fall," Cain and Abel, the flood, the tower of Babel, Abraham's hospitality to the angels, the "sacrifice" of Isaac, the burial of Sarah, the rejection of

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[1215] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. xxiv.

[1216] Derrida, *Circumfessions*, p. 154.

[1217] Hart continues: 'If we take "God is Dead" to be a statement about the impossibility of locating a transcendent point which can serve as a ground for discourse, then deconstruction is indeed a discourse on God's death. But if we take "God is Dead" to be a formula for unbelief or disbelief, then there is no reason at all to link it with deconstruction.' Hart, p. 39.

[1218] Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida*, p. 101.

[1219] For example, Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', in Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena*, pp. 129-160 (p. 134). Both Caputo and Hart discuss in some detail the (dis)similarities between negative theology and Derrida's neologism *différance*.

[1220] Kevin Hart, 'Religion', in Reynolds and Roffe, pp. 54-62 (p. 61).

Esau, the deception of blind Isaac, scenes of circumcision, the burning bush [...].'[1222]

And just as Bible (and even biblical criticism) has made its way into the writings of

Derrida, so too has Derrida's writing made its way into biblical studies. It has not,

however, taken biblical scholarship by storm: in 1996 Sherwood wrote that the impact

of deconstruction in biblical studies had been 'endlessly deferred'.[1223] Following a

1982 edition of *Semeia* entitled *Derrida and Biblical Studies*, a volume devoted to

theory rather than exegesis,[1224] deconstructive readings of the Bible did not begin

appearing in print with any regularity until the mid-1990s—the *The Postmodern*

Bible, which devotes a chapter to poststructuralism/deconstruction, lists them as

'close readings'[1225]—at which time deconstruction was being recommended, or at

least discussed, as an available mode of interpretation.[1226] Since then, Derridean

readings of the Bible have demonstrated a quality of engagement with the text, which

rather than proving to be unnecessarily sceptical, cynical, ludic to the point of being

lunatic, atheistic or even a-theological, have in fact stimulated considerable dialogue

with the interests and concerns of theology and religious studies. For example, at the

2002 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American

Academy of Religion in Toronto—at which Jacques Derrida was interviewed in a

plenary session—a number of papers were presented by biblical critics, theologians,

and philosophers of religion jointly.[1227] Reading the Bible with (a little help from)

Derrida can result in readings that are neither 'thin'—as Barton claims historical

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[1221] Hart, 'Religion', p. 61.
[1222] Yvonne Sherwood, 'Introduction: Derrida's Bible' in Sherwood, *Derrida's Bible*, p. 1.
[1223] Sherwood, *The Prostitute and the Prophet*, p. 187.
[1224] *Derrida and Biblical Studies* ed. by R. Detweiler, Semeia 23 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982)
[1225] The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 130.
[1226] John Barton, though dismissive, discusses deconstruction in reasonable detail in *Reading The Old Testament*, and a chapter titled 'Deconstructive Criticism', by Dana Nolan Fewell appears in *Judges and Method: New Approaches to Biblical Studies*, ed by Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 119-145.

criticism can be—nor 'trivial'; even scholars who find them 'wilful and perverse',

must admit that they can be 'the bearer[s] of serious ideas'.[1228]

The appearance of deconstruction as an exegetical *method* in primers on

reading the Bible clashes somewhat with Derrida's own assertion that it is no such

thing.

> Deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one. [...]
>
> Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not await deliberation,
>
> consciousness or organisation of a subject, or even a modernity. *It*
>
> *deconstructs itself.*[1229]

And so the primers exchange the term *method* for strategy, theory, or practice, and

often give the reader the implausibly passive role of being no more than a spectator as

the text performs a spontaneous striptease that need only be captured in print. Beal,

for example, proposes that when practising '*deconstruction in exegesis* [...] one may

watch and document meaning undoing itself'.[1230] Caputo, however—and as we have

already seen—sets deconstructive reading the task of *producing* the gap between

author(ial intention) and text, which implies that at least some critical intervention is

necessary.[1231] Turned verb, *to deconstruct* would perhaps occupy the middle voice

and 'hover', as Norris suggests (though not prescriptively), between non-intervention

and the more active alternative.[1232] All options have a propensity to re-instate the text

as an *object*: as something with an inherent tendency towards deconstruction; as

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[1227] The joint papers (and the interview with Jacques Derrida) have been published in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments* ed. by Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart (New York: Routledge, 2005).
[1228] Barton, 'Beliebigkeit', p. 302.
[1229] Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend', p. 5. Original emphasis.
[1230] Beal, 'Cracking the Binding', p. 2. Original emphasis.
[1231] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 78.
[1232] As Norris notes, none of these options resemble 'the popular idea of deconstruction as a species of out-and-out hermeneutic licence'. Norris, p. 136.

something to be acted upon with deconstructive intent; or as an element distinct from deconstruction now acting under its own volition. Reading—producing a reading—is a reiteration or supplementation of the text and, given over to a logic that troubles the text-reader opposition, deconstruction recommends itself as the condition or context of both, based on the non-present-to-self of either. Disrupting binaries such as presence-absence, deconstruction can hardly be expected to suit formulations of *is* and *is not*—and yet predication is unavoidable. In Derrida's own diction it becomes a tectonics of (generalized) text that combines seism (event) and seismology (investigation): 'it is a sort of great earthquake, a general tremor, which nothing can calm';[1233] a 'de-sedimentation';[1234] a 'force of dislocation';[1235] 'a secret to make you tremble';[1236] it 'is *what happens [ce qui arrive]*';[1237] an event 'disorganising the entire inherited order and invading the entire field'.[1238] Thus deconstruction shakes (as much as breaks) the bindings of books; indeed, it is the disruption of systems, economies, and enclosures of all kinds—'in each of these cases, the limits, the borders, and the distinctions have been shaken by an earthquake.'[1239]

In the next and final section of this chapter I return to Jeremiah 36. Not, however, with intent to deconstruct—to trouble its binaries and prise open its fissures, or simply to observe its own undoing. Rather, I shall attend to what appears to be an allegory of deconstruction-in-action: the disruption of an inherited order by the incoming word of God. To do so I shall draw an analogy between the journey of the scroll and the experience of an aporia, perhaps the quintessential aporia—the aporia

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[1233] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 9.
[1234] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 10.
[1235] Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p. 20.
[1236] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 53.
[1237] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 64. Original emphasis.
[1238] Derrida, *Positions*, p. 42.
[1239] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 5.

of the gift. 'Gifts are given in a context of public drama', writes Mary Douglas, 'with nothing secret about them'[1240]—it is the peculiarly visible rituals of gift economies with their systems of honour negotiated in continuing cycles of exchange that the anthropologist Marcel Mauss cites in positive contrast to 'icy, utilitarian calculation'.[1241] Derrida's interest, however, is with the contradictory concept of a gift economy.[1242] 'For there to be a gift', he observes, 'there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt';[1243] thus the presence of economy negates the possibility of gift,[1244] and yet, by his reckoning, the gift is unable to escape reciprocity. Reaching an impasse, Derrida declares the gift to be an experience the impossible, of 'that which one does not have'.[1245] Thus the gift is presented as the un-presentable, that is, as a sign without referent. With Derrida's insight, the public drama of the gift becomes a performance of the secret in 'the theatre of the impossible'.[1246]

[1240] Mary Douglas, 'Foreword: No Free Gifts', in Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by W. D. Halls (London, Routledge: 1990), pp. ix-xxiii (p. xviii).
[1241] Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 98. 'Nothing has been the same since' the publication of Mauss's book, Douglas comments. Prior to this, economies were studied as separate aspects of society; after Mauss, anthropologists began writing of 'total symbolic systems'. Douglas, p. xix. Mauss's research was first published in 1924. But despite its impact in the field of anthropology, the wider humanities did not become interested in gifts and gifting for another half century. Derrida's fullest exposition of the gift is to be found in *Given Time* first published in French in 1991 (in English, a year later). Derrida makes clear that the book follows closely 'a trajectory that corresponds faithfully to the one I followed in the first five sessions of a seminar given under the same title in 1977-78 at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris and the next year in Yale University'. He then adds that the problematic of the gift is at work in a number of earlier texts, even if not explicitly so. Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money* trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. ix. For an overview of the academic discourse on gifts and gifting, see Alan D. Schrift, 'Introduction: Why Gift?' in *The Logic of the Gift: Towards an Ethic of Generosity* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-21.
[1242] Mauss neatly outlines the inherent contradiction of a *gift economy* in his opening volley: 'We intend in this book to isolate one important set of phenomena: namely, prestations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested.' Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 1.
[1243] Derrida, *Given Time*, p. 12.
[1244] Derrida concludes 'that a work as monumental as Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* speaks of everything but the gift' Derrida, *Given Time*, p. 24.
[1245] Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p. 27.

5. *Of Secretaries, Scrolls, and the Secret: Jeremiah 36 and the Irritating Word of God*

> The social intervention of a text (not necessarily achieved at the time the
>
> text appears) is measured not by the popularity of its audience or by the
>
> fidelity of the socio-economic reflection it contains or projects to a few
>
> eager sociologists, but rather by the violence that enables it to exceed the
>
> laws that a society, an ideology, a philosophy establish for themselves in
>
> order to agree among themselves to agree among themselves in a fine
>
> surge of historical intelligibility. This excess is called: writing.[1247]

In this final section I turn my attention to *writers* and *writings*, to *secretaries* and

scrolls, which themselves turn on the Hebrew סֹפְרִים and סְפָרִים. Derived from the

same root, סְפַר (to count, to recount, to relate), the former is a participle serving as

both job title and job description for one who recounts, relates and so gives account

and writes; the latter, a noun, denotes the product of these endeavours, namely a

writing, an account given. More specifically, this section is an account of the סֹפְרִים

(scribes, secretaries), in Jeremiah 36, and the appearance in that narrative of a סֵפֶר־

מגלת, a (roll of writing), for which they can give no account. And finally, it is about

the opening image in *A Taste For the Secret* of a secretary who conceals—'like

Phaedrus himself, who conceals Lysias' speech under his cloak'[1248]—and makes the

unexpected association of the 'secretary' with the 'catalogue', 'in which one collects,

writes or describes *traces*, which are, at bottom, *secrets*'.[1249] Is not the secretary as

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[1246] Jacques Derrida, 'Aphorism Countertime', in *Acts of Literature*, trans. by Nicholas Royle (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 414-433 (p. 422). Derrida is in fact writing about Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

[1247] Roland Barthes, *Sade Fourier Loyola*, trans. by Richard Miller (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 10.

[1248] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret* p. vii.

[1249] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. vii. Original emphasis.

one who recounts and writes, one who accounts *for* rather than conceals? And what has a scroll—a portfolio of prophetic proclamations, oracles and declarations (Jeremiah 36. 3, 6–7)—to do with secrets?

5.1. *Of Economy*

The picture, however patchy, of the courtly personnel among whom the scroll of Jeremiah passes, suggests something of the system of שׂרים (officials) and ספרים (scribes) set up in Jerusalem's Upper Precincts, the site of temple and royal palace. The narrative, like a formicarium in which one observes worker ants in the service of their queen, provides a glimpse of these specialists and trained organisers—the functionaries of state and state religion—as they form a similarly complex network around about their monarch. It is they, constituting a bureaucracy, a civil service if you like, who protect and provide passage to his royal personage, and so make possible the journey of the scroll.

The scroll is first read 'to all the people' (36. 9) by the secretary Baruch in Gemariah's chamber, 'in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the Lord's house' (36. 10). Micaiah son of Gemariah then reports 'all the words he had heard' (36. 13) to the officials sitting in the 'secretary's chamber' in the palace: 'Elishama the secretary, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Achbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the officials' (36. 12)—a meeting of 'cabinet ministers', suggests Bright.[1250] They in turn send Jehudi[1251] to bring both secretary and scroll, Baruch and the written words of Jeremiah, to them. After hearing the scroll recited they are 'alarmed' and declare in one voice, 'we certainly must report all these words to the king' (36. 16). Jehudi is again sent to fetch the scroll, this

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[1250] Bright, p. 180.
[1251] Seemingly a junior minister, probably a secretary. J. M. Berridge, 'Jehudi', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1992), p. 674.

time by King Jehoiakim himself, who, whilst sitting by his fire, listens to the words as Jehudi reads them.[1252] The scroll's journey—beginning among 'the people thronging the temple at a fast', and continuing 'as it moves through the various echelons of Judean society on its way to the king[1253]—thus reads like an ascent through the Jerusalem hierarchy.

The hierarchy can be described as an *economy*—from the Greek *oikos* denoting 'house' and its 'system of orderly subordination'[1254]—a suitable appropriation of a word to describe, as it does in this context, the disposition of the בית־יהוה (house of Yhwh) and the בית־מלך (house of the king). Appropriate too because this civil service is identified by lists of names and an abundance of patronymics suggesting orderly subordinations that are based around kinship ties and dynastic houses. And appropriate again because at the centre of these οικια (households)—these interconnected temple- and palace-based systems and hierarchies of secretaries and officials—is the traditional focal point of the house and home: the *hearth*, אח (brazier) of King Jehoiakim (36. 22), which also becomes the final resting place of the first scroll.

5.2. *Beyond Exchange*

The first reading of the scroll takes place on a fast day (36. 9). Whether the fast would have been a fixed, calendrical occasion, which scholarly consensus seems to doubt, or the response to a national emergency—famine maybe, or the approach of Babylon—cannot be gleaned from the narrative alone.[1255] Furthermore, whether it was popularly

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[1252] At this point we may presume that Baruch has gone into hiding with the prophet (36. 19).

[1253] Carroll, *A Commentary*, p. 663.

[1254] Kenneth Minogue, *Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 12.

[1255] Although Jeremiah 36. 5 implies a date shortly after the fall of Ashkelon, not all scholars consider the fast-day to be a response to the approach of Babylon. McKane, for example, notes the 'insouciance attributed to Jehoiakim', and argues that 'we have no impression that he was aware of the presence of a sword of Damocles'. McKane, p. 917.

initiated, which consensus once again doubts (despite the statement in 36. 9 that 'the people proclaimed a fast'),[1256] or cultically instigated, again cannot be ascertained simply from the narrative. It is, nevertheless, quite clearly not an unusual event. Fasts are to be expected—'you go yourself, and on a fast day', Jeremiah had told Baruch with the presumption that one would come along soon enough (36. 6). The fast belongs to the economic world, the world of order and season, succinctly described by Caputo as the sphere of 'reasonable rules, the lawful and customary exchanges, the plans and projects, the rites and rituals, the ordinary life and time'.[1257] Alongside the economies of temple and palace—those of the conventional ministrations of secretaries, officials, and king occurring on the horizontal, earthly plane—we must now acknowledge the presence of another economy. Indicated by the fast—though already implied by the existence of a temple and its systems—and working as a vertical exchange, it is a transaction based on propitiation between the people and their God. It may be understood generously, as an expression of popular devotion, or more cynically (or reflecting greater urgency), as an exercise in expiation for protection (suggesting that there is a popular belief that Yhwh is poised with a bag stuffed full of evils to unleash—a not unreasonable assumption, in the light of that deity's words in 36. 7). This is the second, then, of two systems of custom and transaction, of give and take, which together witness to a sphere of reciprocity, circle and so closure.

Preceding this description of reasonable practice and popular devotion are two rationales for the production and proclamation of the scroll: '"It may be that when the house of Judah hears of all the disasters that I intend to do to them, all of them may turn from their evil ways, so that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin"' (36. 3),

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[1256] Holladay laments that 'there is no information in the OT with regard to regular fast-days in the pre-

and "'you shall read the words of Yhwh from the scroll [...] in the hearing of all the people of Judah. [...] It may be that their plea will come before Yhwh'" (36. 6–7). The implication is that the people's 'evil ways', later described as a wholesale 'not heeding' (36. 31), will rightfully result in disaster. It is ironic, then, that the day chosen for this plea for a popular response to Yhwh is a day when the temple is thronging with people already making a popular response to Yhwh. The scroll, which is to be read in order that the people turn to Yhwh and so avert disaster, is read on a day when, quite possibly, the people come and fast in order that they might avert disaster. Translated formally, 36. 9 reads:

> And they called (קָרְאוּ) a fast before Yhwh
>
> all the people in Jerusalem.
> And he called (קָרָא) Baruch on the scroll
>
> the words of Jeremiah
>
> [in] the house of Yhwh.

The people call a fast and Baruch calls from a scroll; they call before Yhwh, and Baruch calls in the house of Yhwh. Baruch's calling is a singular event which stands in relief against the mass response of all the people, and which sets off a surprising chain of reactions running right through the temple and palace, as secretary reports to officials who report to the king. Like a piece of grit in an otherwise smooth-running machine, the scroll, when introduced in the temple, irritates the system, causing it to shudder and creak.

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exilic period'. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, p. 255.
[1257] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 145.

5.3. *A Gift In Due Season*

In *A Taste for the Secret*, Derrida admits to an interest in things that 'irritate the system' but which, he notes, represent 'the place where the system constitutes itself'.[1258] Explaining this a little further, he adds that this 'place' is that 'subterranean region in which the system constitutes itself by repressing what makes it possible, which is not systematic'.[1259] Thus, while already and integrally part of a system—whether this be a text, an identity, or an economy (in the broadest sense)—the irritant remains that 'whose absolute heterogeneity resists all integration, participation and system'.[1260] This irritant, being constitutive whilst at the same time resisting constitution itself, is thus caught up in both participation and non-participation. It is by definition then, contradictory: an unsystematic moment within a system; a contradiction within the very thing set up to exclude contradiction.

What is it that irritates an economy? It is that which cannot be accounted for, which exceeds accounts, plans, ledgers, and balances—a gift. That which makes possible the gift, however, an existing economy against which it is marked as *an excess*, 'designate[s] simultaneously the conditions of the impossibility of the gift'.[1261] For as Caputo succinctly puts it in his commentary on Derrida's discussion of this paradox, 'gifts tend to form a circular economy [...] a ring of generosity and gratitude, which links or binds the donee to the donor by means of a donatum',[1262] the result being that, as Derrida concludes, 'the simple identification of the passage of a gift as such [...] would be nothing other than the process of the destruction of the gift'.[1263] Recognition of a gift, as gift, inevitably results in an immediate return to

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[1258] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 4.
[1259] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 4-5.
[1260] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 5.
[1261] Derrida, *Given Time*, p. 12.
[1262] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 142.
[1263] Derrida, *Given Time*, p. 14. Derrida's most detailed exposition of the aporia of the gift is given in the first two chapters of *Given Time*. Succinctly put, there are two defining aspects of gift giving:

economy. The gift, defined as that which does not participate in economy, nevertheless is constitutive of economy—economy as the circle of reciprocity and exchange.[1264]

The gift, which cannot be present, *a present*, in the ordinary life and time of the economic sphere, is therefore also the *impossible*—exceeding, but always immediately being caught up within, and constituting an economy—and so may be suitably appended (and wrapped?), as Derrida and his commentators tend to, with the comment *if there is any* or *if such a thing exists*. But while being 'an impossible fix, an aporia, a paralysing [*sic*] bind',[1265] the gift, *if there is any*, is also, and so contradictorily, that which sets the economy in motion, 'the first mover of the

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freedom (that the gift is made and received without compulsion) and presence (that it is identifiable as a gift). As soon as it is recognised as a gift, however, it elicits gratitude or obligation and can no longer be thought free. Thus the conditions of its possibility are also the conditions of its *im*possibility. Even the possibility of a gift being given or received unconsciously allows no escape from this bind: 'such a displacement does not affect the paradox with which we are struggling, namely, the impossibility or the double bind of the gift: For there to be a gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not be perceived or received as gift. [...] For there to be gift, not only must the donor or donee not perceive or receive the gift as such, have no consciousness of it, no memory, recognition; he or she must also forget it right away and moreover this forgetting must be so radical that it exceeds even the psychoanalytic categoriality of forgetting. This forgetting of the gift must even no longer be forgetting in the sense of repression.' Derrida, *Given Time*, p. 16. Or as Caputo puts it: 'This is no less true if everything happens unconsciously, for one may certainly contract unconscious debts or unconsciously congratulate oneself for one's being wonderful and generous'. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 141.

[1264] Derrida does not argue that there is no gift, but that it can only be thought of, not known. Derrida complains that it 'is a misunderstanding that happens all the time in France—I never said that there is no gift. No. I said exactly the opposite'. Jacques Derrida, 'On the Gift: A Discussion between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion, Moderated by Richard Kearney' in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* ed. by John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 54-78 (p 60). Derrida takes an 'extreme line', writes John Milbank who understands Derrida to be arguing that 'there is no gift and not even a *meaning* for gift'. Milbank argues that it is not the gift that must be cleansed of economy, but the economic system which must be redeemed: 'is it possible to defend exchange, and so the reality of the gift? [...] I venture to suggest that this possibility or actuality—purified gift-exchange—and *not* "pure" gift" is what Christian *agape* claims to be.' John Milbank, 'Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic', in *Modern Theology* (11) January 1995, pp. 119-161 (p. 130-131). Prompted by Derrida's suggestion that it is time alone that can be given because it is a non-identical repetition that can never in fact occur, Milbank argues that the gift returned by delay or difference escapes reciprocity: that the believer beholden by God's gift to respond is unable to do so in kind affirms the cycle in terms of right relations. Milbank, p. 150. Milbank does not, however, escape the problematic: the gift, defined as that which is freely given, is still made in response to a prior gift, albeit different in kind. Milbank has sought a no nonsense retort to Derrida's *extreme line*; in so doing he has, by definition, compromised the terms of the argument.

[1265] Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, p. 144.

circle'[1266]—ever preceding, inevitably procuring, exchange. Thus impossible whilst being at the same time integral, the gift fulfils that role of participation and non-participation that both irritates and instigates the system, the economy. As such, the gift is that which irritates, or better interrupts, the circle and so prevents closure.[1267]

The scroll, which on entry into the economies of temple and palace irritates their systems, is, as word of Yhwh, also that heterogeneous element that sets the circle of reciprocity and exchange in motion to begin with. A system, set up in response to the word of Yhwh, is then, by nature of its being worked out in time and place—in exchange (fasting for divine protection), and even in discourse—the very system of economy that cannot accommodate an excess such as the coming of the word of Yhwh. The prophet and his word, it seems, are unacceptable in their own hometown and their own home-system.

5.4. *A Self-De(con)structing Scroll*

The narrative of Jeremiah 36 leads us eventually to the centre of the house, to the fireside: 'Now the king was sitting by in his winter apartment (it was the ninth month), and there was a fire burning in the brazier before him' (36. 22). The destruction of the scroll forms a kind of chiastic inclusio with its formation: it is written by the secretary Baruch, and, if we take the Hebrew of 36. 23 literally, it is Jehudi rather than the king who actively destroys it: 'And as Jehudi recited three columns and four, the scribe tore it with a knife and he threw it into the fire which was in the brazier' (36. 23). However, it is ultimately the king, Jehoiakim, who is held

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[1266] Derrida, *Given Time*, p. 31.
[1267] Here the gift could be said to *wound* the circle (Caputo, after Derrida, uses the image of circumcision, as we shall see later). Though violent, a wound of this kind has an affirmative and deconstructive effect, as rupture caused by the deconstructive seism, for example. Of course, the ability of the gift to wound has a different and negative aspect. Mauss writes that 'charity is wounding for him who has to accept it, and the whole tendency of our morality is to strive to do away with the unconscious and injurious patronage of the rich almsgiver'. Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 83-84. Whilst discussing this darker aspect of the gift, Derrida takes note of the tension within the word itself. In

responsible for the destruction of the scroll—'Now, after the king had burned the scroll [...]' (36. 27). The allusion encourages us to think, as I suspect the narrators of Jeremiah 36 would like us to, of another scroll found in the temple, as narrated in II Kings 22.

In that narrative, set a few years earlier, a disturbing new scroll is found in the temple, which causes general consternation epitomized by the reaction of the king: 'When the king heard the words of the book of law, he tore his clothes' (II Kings 22. 11). The same verb, קָרַע (to tear), used of Josiah's pious reaction, is here, in Jeremiah 36. 24 found with the prefix לֹא (not), 'they did not...tear their garments.' But the same verb has already been used in the previous verse, as if to drive the point home, 'as Jehudi recited three or four columns, he tore them off with his knife and threw them on the fire' (36. 23).

We readers of the Old Testament/Tanakh are used to this device: the paradigmatic comparison of good king, bad king. Josiah as good king heeds the scroll and makes an appropriately penitent response. Jehoiakim, as bad king, destroys it. Jehoiakim, here epitomizing a wilful refusal to hear/heed the word of Yhwh, gives a final and theatrical confirmation of that fact. But is Jehoiakim the only one who silences the word?

Josiah tears his garments, then the temple, then the whole national religious infrastructure to make room for this new word of Yhwh (II Kings 23). In response to the scroll, he sets in motion a whole new system, a new economy. But as a new word, another word, an other, the Other, it is annulled: it becomes *another law*, a *deutero-nomos*. The contours of the already existing system may be altered, re-calibrated to embrace a new word, but this will inevitably, unavoidably, destroy the scroll as other

German, for example, 'gift' means 'poison'. *Given Time*, p. 12, 36. And 'gift' is the usual translation of

or excess. The singular word finds itself answered and so gathered back into the economy of discourse. Nothing, it seems, will silence the excessive event of the coming of the word of Yhwh so effectively as the economy of the house of Yhwh. As irritant, as gift, the scroll is, by its very nature, impossible and so self-sacrificial, kenotic even, giving itself to an extreme, giving itself impossibly—gone in an instant. Thus its journey through the temple, the place of sacrifice, reads like stages in a passion. Its final destination, on the mount of sacrifice, becomes the cul-de-sac of an aporia where the impossibility of its own existence is confronted. The hearth (not the temple) is the place where it meets its end by 'knife and fire, the tools of sacrifice'.[1268]

What we might call the scroll's passion dramatizes the idea of covenant. Based on the unilateral grace of Yhwh, the divine self-giving, it inevitably leads to reciprocation and so exchange, to contract and so system. Thus the scroll also bespeaks the impossibility of grace: grace that beyond the instant (the impossible moment preceding the immediate and inevitable recognition and so annulment of a gift) is lost in contract and expectation. It speaks not only of the impossibility of grace, but also of the dissymmetry of grace. The excess of self-giving, always already beyond any system and outside the economies of exchange and discourse, renders it ungraspable, inaccessible to those unavoidably caught within the economic sphere. It must, and indeed can only, remain a *secret*.

In the sphere of the ordinary life and time, of exchange and reciprocity, the arrival of the scroll transgresses stable borders: it transgresses the possible, the horizons of expectation. As that which is always already beyond the system, it is 'a provocation of something calling from afar that calls beyond itself, outside itself'[1269] and to that extent, profoundly fulfils its role as prophecy. By interrupting, disrupting

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the Latin *dosis* (also in Greek) which also conveys the sense *a dose of poison*. Given Time, p. 36.

even, the complacency of the life and time of the present, it acts 'against the pleasure the present takes in itself, to prevent it from closing in on itself'.[1270] Although initiated by, and formed reciprocally with, a moment of excess, a covenant will inevitably domesticate and so destroy that excess. A covenant initiated by a moment of excess, formed reciprocally with that excess, inevitably domesticates and so destroys the excess. But this moment of excess, annulled by the closed circuit of reciprocation and exchange, is also that moment which can interrupt or cut into the circle in a kind of prophetic re-opening. Caputo writes of this irruptive aspect of deconstruction as *circumcision*, referring to the point at which 'circumcision cuts open the same to the event of the other, thus constituting a breach that opens the way to the other'.[1271] The image—following Derrida—creatively gathers and disrupts the concepts of prophecy, circumcision, covenant and grace in a way that resonates with much of the material in the book of Jeremiah.

5.5. *An Open Book*

To suggest that the scroll, described in this chapter as a מגלת־ספר, a roll of writing, is the locus of secrecy seems unreasonable, a nonsense even. The narrative quite clearly states that it contains words—*the word* no less, since these are the utterances of Yhwh—and so represents the very opposite of secrecy: disclosure. The divine command, 'Take a scroll (literally: a 'roll of writing') and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah and concerning all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah and until this day' (36. 2), suggests a divine commitment to make available a comprehensive communication, requiring that nothing be left out, that not a single utterance given in

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[1268] Brummitt and Sherwood, p. 23.
[1269] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. xix.
[1270] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. xx.

the designated time period be allowed to slip away. Nothing is to be lost, forgotten or hidden. Furthermore, this narrative, prolix in its anxieties about the transition of spoken word to written word, obsessively watches the progress of speech into writing, ensuring that nothing can go astray, no single utterance go AWOL: 'and Baruch wrote from the dictation of Jeremiah, all the words of Yhwh which he spoke to him, upon the scroll' (36. 4). This claim about the seal-tight transmission of speech into writing is re-iterated in painful detail, again confirming that absolutely nothing could have slipped away in the gap between mouth and pen: 'and Baruch said to them, "He dictated to me all these words from his mouth, and I wrote them upon the scroll in ink"' (36. 17–18). There is, then, no claim to secrecy or hiddenness, no suggestion of lost words or forgotten oracles. All is made available.

Though the words are inked-in, need we assume that the ink is indelible? The narrative suggests not. The divine command, 'Take a roll of scroll and write on it,' (36. 2) is supported by the divine justification: 'perhaps (אולי) the house of Judah will hear of all the evil (הרעה) I am planning to do to them, in order that they will each turn away from their evil (הרעה) ways so that I may forgive them for their iniquity and their sin' (36. 3). Yhwh's *perhaps* indicates, if not indecisiveness, a future that remains *undecidable*, open. Thus, for the present, the list of evils remains just that, a list, and one that can still be erased. Yhwh is something of a Bartleby here: the *perhaps* evokes the *I would prefer not to* of which Derrida makes this comment: 'It evokes a future without either predicting or promising; it utters nothing fixed, determinable, positive, or negative. [...] The modality of this singularly insignificant statement reminds one of a nonlanguage or a secret language'.[1272] Paradoxically, the

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[1271] Caputo, *Prayers and Tears*, p. xx.
[1272] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 75.

success of the scroll will effectively erase its content: the people's return from their evil ways will render its plans unfulfilled. There will be no need to justify events, no need to give account, nothing to account, and no need for theodicy at all. Conversely, the writing will hold only if its plans come to pass. Thus the writing on the scroll, the fixing of the marks, begins only on its journey towards the king. Those who hear, handle, and reject the scroll, at the same time confirm its charge of evil, and ink it in indelibly. And, as they unwittingly *write* the scroll, they are themselves unwittingly *written*: marked down for the disasters listed within it. The scroll, now monstrous messenger or angel of death, leaves a trail of ink through temple and palace, writing the wrongs it encounters, writing sentences of death. A roll of writing, writing as it rolls towards the king: a rolling corpus, rolling out corpses in its wake.

5.6. *Other Writing*

Taking this further still, is not *otherness* always, potentially, present in writing itself? Derrida speaks of a 'paradoxical desire not to be understood [...] If such a transparency of intelligibility were insured it would destroy the text, it would show that the text has no future [*avenir*], that it does not overflow the present, that it is consumed immediately'.[1273] He states that, although he really does try to be clear, there remains 'a demand in my writing for this excess even with respect to what I myself can understand of what I say—the demand that a sort of opening, play, indetermination be left, signifying hospitality for what is to come [*l'avenir*] [...] of a place left vacant for who is to come [*pour qui va venir*], for the *arrivant*'.[1274] Writing can thus have a future inscribed in it—an opening to and for the other. The future for Derrida '*is not present*, but *there* is an opening onto it'.[1275] As that which is

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[1273] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 30.
[1274] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 31.
[1275] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 20. Original emphasis.

indeterminate, profoundly so, the future is negated by teleology—teleology understood as a present economy, a preparation for and projection of the future. To grasp at the future in such a way is to omit, to exclude the other, the radically other, and such closure to the future, to the incoming of the other, has a totalizing effect. It is in this sense, of an openness to the future and to the one 'who is to come', that Derrida speaks of the messianic and the future as a force of disruption[1276]—another irritant.

The secretaries do not share the content of the scroll with us, the readers. We read of readings (36. 10, 15–16, 21) and reports of these (36. 13, 20), but we are never allowed a glimpse of the scroll, as if the secretaries turn their backs to the audience whilst reciting its contents. The one glimpse that is given, occurring after this first scroll has been destroyed, lies several citations down (36. 29–30); the reader must plod through *the word of the narrator,* **the word of Yhwh,** the word of Jeremiah, *the word of Jehoiakim*, before finally reaching *words from the first scroll.*

'*The word of Yhwh came to Jeremiah* […] **And concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah you shall say:** Thus says Yhwh, You have dared to burn this scroll saying, *Why have you written in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will cut off from it human beings and animals?*' (36. 29–30). These words are to be found nowhere, in fact, within the book of Jeremiah as it has rolled down to us, and their assertion that 'the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy' jars somewhat with the 'perhaps' that served as justification for the writing of the first scroll. The remaining judgement, 'concerning King Jehoiakim of Judah: he shall have no one to sit upon the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night' (36. 30), collides with what we

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[1276] Derrida, *A Taste for the Secret*, p. 25.

know of Jehoiakim's peaceful death, and of his son's successful, though short lived, reign (II Kings 24. 6, 8). We are not privy to the content of the scroll and the words that so disturb their recipients; what we have is not so much a content as 'the silhouette of a content', as Derrida describes Bartleby's 'I would prefer not to'.[1277]

The secretaries, then, are rather like Kierkegaard's Abraham, the Abraham discussed by Derrida in *The Gift of Death*, to whom 'God keeps silent about his reasons'[1278]—the Abraham who cannot share what he does not know and who is caught in a double secret, between God and Abraham, and between Abraham and his servants and family. Troubled by what they read, mulling over its implications, transferring its possibility and potency between themselves, knowing and not-knowing, the secretaries transmit and bequeath to us, the readers of this much later scroll, nothing but a secret.

But in fact it is the scroll itself that is more like Abraham, as it incorporates both words and silence, and guards its secret, its *zone of emptiness*. The scroll, as word of Yhwh, contains the words of the other and, in witnessing to the other, must remain silent. 'God himself is absent', suggests Derrida in reference to the story of Abraham, 'hidden and silent, separate, secret, at the moment he has to be obeyed', adding, 'if he were to speak to us all the time without any secrets, he wouldn't be the other, we would share a type of homogeneity. Discourse also partakes of that sameness'.[1279] Should we not then in some way expect this of the other, the absolute other, a silence, a secret which is quite simply a witness to absolute otherness, the only possible witness to absolute otherness, as in apophasis or negative theology? Those who witness to the absolute other, as Abraham did, expand our concept of witness, taking us beyond the sense 'that to witness means to show, teach, illustrate,

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[1277] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 74.

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manifest to others the truth that one can precisely attest to'.[1280] Derrida terms

Abraham 'a witness of the absolute faith that cannot and must not witness before

men'.[1281] The witness of the scroll, then, is a witness of silence.

5.7. *The Future in Writing*

Jehoiakim, who clearly has not read his Derrida, does not recognise the *other* in this

writing. Rather, he consumes it in a moment and considers its function complete.

True, the scroll does have a contemporary purpose—cursing kings, nations and so

on—that is all spent in a moment. It is Bible, and so has its original, intention-filled

historical context: the situation of its first reading. But it is Bible and the

contemporary does not exhaust it; it has a future beyond the crisis of the moment. It is

a roll of writing, full of turning words that form the kernel of a rolling corpus and

which, unlike the proverbial stone that gathers no moss, continues to gather more and

more words.

What happened when the scroll was burned? Was the prophetic voice

silenced? No, for although in hiding, the prophet was at this point still alive.

Nevertheless, the burning jeopardised the continuation of that prophetic voice after

the speaker would finally disappear. The destruction of the scroll, ironically

confirming/releasing the destruction of Jerusalem, marks the end of one story of

presence: the story of prophets and kings, of temples and palaces and the systems

therein. But Jehoiakim's burning brazier sparks off a new scroll—'"*Take another

scroll and write* [...]"' (36. 28). Lighting up again, the irrepressible word of Yhwh

sets rolling a new writing; full of cinders from the old, the new scroll adds 'many

similar words' (36. 32). The spoken word now survives only as written word and,

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[1278] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 58.
[1279] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 57.
[1280] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 73.
[1281] Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 73.

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with its zone of emptiness, holds itself open to an incoming, indeterminate, future. This scroll, if it is indeed to be understood as that kernel which set the book of Jeremiah rolling, is there to be opened and read, interpreted and re-read; always giving, but ever holding back, never given to be consumed in a moment.

Conclusion

RECOVERING JEREMIAH

Recover *vt* to get or find again; to regain; to reclaim; to extract (a valuable

substance) from an ore etc, or (usable material) from waste; to bring back;

to retrieve; to cure (*archaic*); to revive; to restore; to rescue; to succeed in

reaching [...]

Re-cover or **recover** *vt* to cover again.

Gerald L. Bruns says of midrash that 'what matters [...] is not only what lies behind

the text in the form of an originating intention but what is in front of the text where

the text is put into play'.[1282] I have argued that this orientation towards application,

towards the ongoing and practical reception of biblical literature, is the orientation of

Bible itself. The interest of Jeremiah—the biblical book now in hand—is neither

psychological nor biographical; its account of the collapse of the state of Judah, not

constructed for antiquarian interest; rather it places both characters and events on a

textual stage to be observed, not dispassionately (indeed, *passion*, in all senses, is its

motivation), but to provoke engagement: to solicit interpretation. Juxtaposing

Jeremiah with the theatrical and theoretical writings of Bertolt Brecht, I have

attempted to make this tactic explicit. In the plays of Brecht, narrative and event are

used to engender *readings* rather than to determine *a reading*: the techniques of

montage (interruption) and cross-reference (scene titles and onstage commentary) are

employed to prevent the audience's unquestioning acceptance of the inevitability of

the events under scrutiny, and to encourage a continuing critique of the proceedings.

Similarly, the disjointed progression of Jeremiah, with its editorial headings,

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comments, and allusions to other parts of the book—other parts of the Bible even—

elicit a response of engagement and critique, of complex seeing, rather than

submission to a determinable '*ideological offer*'.[1283] Interpretation of prophetic

events—seen in the dramatic actions such as Jeremiah 13—begins within the book

itself, and hints at a complex textual growth, but continues beyond the boundaries of a

final form, in the continuing legends of the prophet, and then in later commentary.

But that commentary continues at all suggests that the book of Jeremiah, as it

is received, bears reiteration outside its original context or contexts. While this

phenomenon finds imaginative explanation in relation to performance theory and

Brechtian theatre, it is given theoretical or logical explication in the writings of

Jacques Derrida; firstly through Derrida's discussion on the *iterable* mark, and

secondly through his writings on the *supplement*. Every reading, we could say, is a

reiteration of an original which then allows the original to survive. Interpretation,

rather than representing something secondary or derived—something over and above

the inherent meaning of a given text—is the very condition of its continued existence.

In this respect, every reading represents a new act or performance and as such is as

much something new as it is a repetition.

It is on these terms that biblical prophecy overtakes its predictions, and rolling

beyond them, gathers new readings, new interpretations, on route. Thus, while in one

sense retrospective, Jeremiah does not, however, attempt to redeem the past, nor even

simply to learn lessons from history: it is not an account of event now receding in

time, but a reiteration that 'blasts a specific era out of the homogeneous course of

history'.[1284] History—can we separate this concept from historiography?—is exposed

in its heterogeneity, and the book of Jeremiah, like midrash, 'presupposes that

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[1282] Gerald L. Bruns, 'The Hermeneutics of Midrash', Schwartz, pp. 189-213 (p. 191).

interpretation cannot mean simply giving uniform representations of a text that is sealed off from the heterogeneity of human situations'.[1285]

Like legal texts, to use Bruns's own example, which 'cannot simply be constructed in relation to itself but must be understood in relation to the situations in which it is applied if it is to be understood at all',[1286] the production of Jeremiah is not an end in itself. It neither closes a chapter in the history of Israel, nor looks back at the life of a particular man; rather it ostends and so exploits these just as the prophet himself is said once to have raised and then broken a jug, worn and then buried a loincloth, dictated and then sent out a document (two documents, even). Past event and historical man provide the stuff out of which text can be made, as the text then become an ingredient out of which midrash (indeed, all interpretation) can manufacture more text. And so, although Jeremiah is frequently self-referential— recurring themes, words, and phrases punctuating the whole—and maintaining a dialogue with the other prophets (both Former and Latter), it is not (as no text can be) self-interpreting (limiting its own interpretation, that is). It does not determine (by either suggestion or instruction) how it is to be read, and as with legal texts, each recitation and application is fresh in its new context—a context which then rebounds upon the text (either as the 'many words' that were added to the scroll of Jeremiah 36, or as the many readings that come after in the form of the supplement of commentary). No reading of Jeremiah is equivalent to the first, whether this *first* be in oracular form in the mouth of an historical prophet, or in textual form, as the Jerusalem establishment encountered it (again, Jeremiah 36). And so, while the goal of scholarship may have often been to *recover* an historical prophet; an historical

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[1283] Brueggemann, *A Commentary*, p. x. Original emphasis.
[1284] Walter Benjamin, 'Thesis on the Philosophy of History', p. 263.
[1285] Bruns, p. 192.
[1286] Bruns, p. 192.

circumstance; an Urtext; an original, final form; an authorial or textual intention; an economy—all, as if a *true* text, a more *real* Jeremiah is being sought—the result of such endeavours would not only be tautological (and improbable, since no repetition can, by definition, be identical to a first instance—it has always, already departed from this), but contrary to the (often contradictory) jostling of accusation and image that the book as a whole combines but does not settle.

This is not to say that no text-as-such exists: a reading of Jeremiah would be different from that of Amos, let's say, since different raw materials (accusations and images) are being handled. Nor is it to say that Jeremiah is not full of historical specifics: it contains language and references that linguistic and historical research elucidates. So much can be said also of the plays of Shakespeare and other Jacobean writers. But as each new production of these is a new reading or interpretation—and we are used to the convention of dressing these in a period other than that from which they originate; we even celebrate such measures for making something new out of now ancient language—so each new reading or interpretation of Jeremiah is a performance that makes something new out of what is possibly two and half thousand year old material. Interpretation, even in its most minimalist sense, sets about making a text readable in a context other than that in which the text was produced. But interpretation does not end with the explication of now long forgotten language. Rather interpretation can only be a cover version (to use modern jargon): a new rendition of a previous performance. Thus what might seem to be *recovery*, is, in truth, a *recovering* in the other senses of the word: verb: of covering (the same ground again—which then suggests a new journey); or re-covering with more text(ile). For all our uncoverings amount to a generation of more words, more text, in which and with which we cover other texts.

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