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Weak Prophecy: Recasting Prophetic Power in the Classical Hebrew Prophets and in Their Modern
Reception

by

Yosefa Raz

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Joint Doctor of Philosophy

with the Graduate Theological Union

in

Jewish Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Fall 2013

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Abstract

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Professor Ronald S. Hendel, Chair

This dissertation is concerned with moments of prophetic failing, weakness, and undoing both in the biblical text and in its reception in modernity. Rather than a monolithic testimony to the manifestation of divine will in history, or a grand and unified moral vision, the prophetic corpus is riddled with failure. At the same time, the destabilizing elements of prophecy can function as creative, generative forces, fashioning both literary richness and political significance and influence. My primary theoretical model for the generative power of weakness is derived from Walter Benjamin's articulation of the power of weak messianism as a way to radically reformulate the categories of weakness and strength, success and failure. The redaction of the prophetic text is often a record of anxiety, an attempt to impose a coherent, strong vision on an incoherent, difficult oracle. This secret struggle between strong and weak prophecy is replicated at key moments in biblical reception. Thus, specific moments in the reception of a prophetic text can flare up and help explain the political stakes of a biblical text both in the past and in the present.

In Chapter One, I take in the figure of the ideal prophet from a distance by considering the phantasmagoric construction of Moses in the Deuteronomistic redactions of the Book of Jeremiah. I show how the idea of a strong prophet, or a strong prophetic lineage, has been imposed by late, melancholic redactions that read and write the golden age of prophecy from the distance of national catastrophe and exile. In Chapter Two, I discuss Isaiah's call narrative, the site of both great prophetic strength and prophetic weakness. The Book of Isaiah assumes key significance for Lowth, the eighteenth century scholar, exegete, cleric, and politician. Through Isaiah's mastery of poetic forms, the Book of Isaiah becomes representative of a biblical sublime that sets the stage for the yoking of prophecy to poetry and the Romantic figure of the poet-prophet. Yet Lowth's imposition of the genius of authorship on the multi-layered biblical text comes at the expense of repressing unruly English outbreaks of prophetic enthusiasm as well as the troubling theological questions posed by the text.

Chapter Three examines nineteenth century biblical scholarship's valorization of the original oral prophets over a later written prophecy, degraded by a priestly scribalism. Oral prophecy has been characterized by a situation of social authenticity, a face-to-face conversation, whether with God, or with an audience. For scholars following Wellhausen, the prophet Ezekiel marks the moment of transformation from oral to written prophecy. I examine and critique this teleological view of prophecy by returning to Ezekiel's apostrophes. As opposed to a deadening scribal effect I show Ezekiel's apostrophe to the mountains of Israel is a text in the process of unraveling, and paradoxically, in its weakness, creating a generative "line of flight" marked by the prophet's averted face.

Chapter Four takes up the reinscription of prophecy in the literature of Hebrew Revival, at the turn of the twentieth century and its reception in Hebrew modernism. While public intellectuals tried to create a cultural Bible that would help guide the Jews to national revival, the practice of the prophetic mode in Hebrew was an encounter in precariousness. The fragmented modern selves of the poets, assailed by secular doubt and ambivalence about aspects of Zionist nation-building, activated the destabilizing elements of the prophetic texts themselves. Rather than presenting the heroic face-to-face prophecy of Moses, the Hebrew prophet-poets, through a complex intertextuality, illuminated a biblical prophecy that stutters, fails, averts its face, addresses the disintegration of the nation rather than its formation. Seizing up this moment of prophetic weakness in the decades before Israeli statehood is a form of remembrance and a way to enable a transformation of the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Prophecy Makes Nothing Happen

How can prophecy make things happen? What is the power of prophetic speech? Can we speak of prophecy or prophetic speech as succeeding or failing? These questions are at the root of classical Hebrew prophecy, but also continue to echo and reverberate in the later reception of these biblical texts and modes in exegesis, literature, philosophy, and political thought. Especially since the Enlightenment, the prophetic texts have become a meaningful and fraught site to consider the relation of speech to political action. The prophetic mode touches a diversity of modern movements and preoccupations including Romanticism, aesthetic theory, nationalism, and Zionism. The exploration of questions relating to prophetic power can become a way to consider more broad questions about the power of speech, especially seemingly flawed or diminished speech, and its place in the world beyond the text.

In fact, the two primary criteria for prophetic success in the biblical text are at odds with each other. On the one hand, as a divine mouthpiece, the prophet must speak words of truth and make successful prognostications of the future. Whether speaking punishment or consolation, even the most skillfully composed prophecies must be more than pleasant or sublime songs – they must accurately reflect the future. The Book of Deuteronomy, for example, devises a way to distinguish true and false prophecy through a system of verifying the prophetic utterance.¹ At the same time, as the prophet is to function as a mediating figure between Yahweh and the nation, his words are intended for communication and transformation.² In the case of intercession, the prophet must change Yahweh's mind; in the case of rebuke, the prophet is meant to bring about communal change and repentance. From this perspective, the prophetic is less a mantic, skilled at divination through oracles, and more of a teacher of morality, who hopes to exhort and inspire his audience to change. In his discussion of the Book of Jonah, a late narrative parody of the texts of classical prophecy, Terry Eagleton points to this basic clash in prophetic functions: "the only successful prophet, is an ineffectual one, one whose warnings fail to materialize. All good prophets are false prophets, undoing their own utterances in the very act of producing them."³ Eagleton's formulation begins to sketch the way in which the predictive and moral function of prophecy do not always have the same goal. Moreover, the prophetic utterance has a tendency to "undo" itself, even at its most "successful" moments.

The attempt to create a coherent model of prophecy out of these two contradictory roles leads to a complex understanding of the content of the prophetic announcement, or message. Maurice Blanchot, for example, fuses prophecy's power of prognostication and its call for utopian transformation:

¹ See my discussion of Deuteronomistic criteria for prophecy in Chapter 1.

² According to Robert Carroll, "Because there is a complex relation between prediction and its fulfillment, the prophet should be seen as attempting to create certain responses in the community. When that attempt failed, as often it did for all of the prophets, it was more of a failure to persuade the community to change rather than the failure of prediction." Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*, New edition (XPRESS Reprints, 1996), 33.

³ Terry Eagleton, "J. L. Austin and the Book of Jonah," in *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 233.

Prophecy is not just a future language. It is a dimension of language that engages it in relationships with time that are much more important than the simple discovery of certain events to come...prophetic speech announces an impossible future, or makes the future it announces, because it announces it, something impossible, a future one would not know how to live and that must upset all the sure givens of existence.⁴

This dissertation is concerned with moments of prophetic failing, weakness, and undoing – arguing for a prophetic power that is not based on effective utterances, whether these are prognostic or pedagogical. As I will show, rather than a monolithic testimony to the manifestation of divine will in history, or a grand and unified moral vision, the prophetic corpus is riddled with failure. Moreover, its moments of seeming strength are often constructed in response to failure. Perhaps the greatest failure of prediction and religious theology is the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. The Jerusalem cult, and seventh century prophets such as Isaiah of Jerusalem believed that Jerusalem, Yahweh's dwelling place, was inviolable, and that the house of David was under divine protection.⁵ In addition, as Robert Carroll points out, the prophets after 587 generally failed when they imagined the new political forms of post-exilic existence. Moreover, though the corpus contains many instances of *vaticinium ex eventu*, whereby the prophetic texts are changed to reflect a new historical reality, the text also preserves prophecies that never came true, such as Ezekiel's oracles over Tyre.⁶

In addition to these failures of prognostication, the prophetic texts also present many examples of explicit failures in mediation that I will discuss in detail in the following chapters. Isaiah 6:9-10, for example, contains a commission to the prophet to harden his audience's heart and obscure the communication to the nation, thereby preventing it from repenting. In reference to this passage, Ibn Ezra remarks that "we know that the prophet does not have the power to harden the heart, only in speech,"⁷ thus posing a further failure of the effectiveness of this strange prophetic oracle. Many of the later texts in the Isaiah corpus become increasingly cryptic, which makes drawing moral guidance from them difficult. In addition, a number of key passages from Jeremiah forbid prophetic intercession, which would allow the prophet to pray on behalf of the people and thereby reverse or mitigate their intended punishment.⁸ Furthermore, if the prophetic oracle is intended for transformation, it follows that it must be uttered to an audience; as prophecy shifts from oral speech to written texts, the vocative quality of prophetic oracles becomes more unstable. In the oracles of Ezekiel,

⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *The Book to Come*, trans. Charlotte Mandell, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 2002), 79.

⁵ At the same time, the destruction of Jerusalem also confirmed prophecies of national destruction, many of which are preserved in the Book of Jeremiah. Thus, the Deuteronomistic investment in the book of Jeremiah was due to its predictive success. For a sociological model of the prophetic tradition's reactions to predictive failure based on mitigation of cognitive dissonance, see Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*.

⁶ Ezekiel's oracle against Tyre (chapters 26-28) predicts it will become a bare rock, though Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre is said by Josephus to be unsuccessful, and "the island city's defenses were not in fact decisively breached until 332 B.C. when Alexander the Great constructed an enormous mole from the mainland to the midland." Carol A. Newsom, "A Maker of Metaphors: Ezekiel's Oracles Against Tyre," in *Interpreting the Prophets*, ed. James Luther Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 191.

⁷ Menachem Cohen, *Mikraot gedolot ha-Keter*, vol. 4 (Ramat-Gan: Universitat Bar Ilan, 1992), 49. See my discussion of Isaiah 6 and of Ibn Ezra's commentary in Chapter 2.

⁸ Perhaps in a similar vein, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are also forbidden public mourning, cutting off their function as representative of the nation. See discussion in Chapter 1.

prophetic speech is unmoored from its dramatic situation as great distance is introduced between the speaker and audience.

Because of the complex compositional history of the prophetic texts, the message of the prophets is often scrambled, fragmented or contradictory. Prophetic corpora are composed of layers and fragments with different and sometimes opposing ideologies and programs. The forms of prophetic speech are often transformations of other genres, as Herman Gunkel first pointed out.⁹ These formal translations, though, can be incomplete, creating a landscape of truncated shapes. Herbert Mark's articulation of the ordering principle of the Twelve Prophets seems equally apt for Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel:

The received texts are cluttered and chaotic, and the signs of literary shaping have studiously to be recovered from under a welter of vestiges and interpolations. Even where deliberate patterns may be confidently traced, they frequently overlie one another, like the superimposed figures of paleolithic cave art—the successive tradents, authors, and editors having valued polyphony and suggestive density more than formal decorum.¹⁰

Even as my reading of the prophetic texts is cognizant of their many failures, both in content and in form, I wish to put forth a model of the destabilizing elements of prophecy as creative, generative forces, fashioning both literary richness and political significance and influence. In "Is Writerliness Conservative?" Barbara Johnson theorizes about the possibility of poetry's power outside, or *through* the literary, but we could speak equally about prophecy's power "only in speech." Johnson claims, paraphrasing Auden, that the trace of poetry is not "a trace of clarity but of darkness...poetry makes nothing happen. Poetry makes *nothing* happen."¹¹ Poetry's power outside the world of the text is in its negative capability – its ability to make present a tentative, unsettling undecidability. Johnson's essay opens up the possibility of a political power outside the certainties of faith and of ideological speech, outside "strong prophecy."

My primary theoretical model for the generative power of weakness is derived from Walter Benjamin's moving articulation of the power of weak messianism as a way to radically reformulate the categories of weakness and strength, success and failure. My understanding of prophecy's generativity in the face of failure also emerges from the recent discussion of the paradoxical creativity of the work of mourning. In the theoretical work of Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben, and others, Benjamin's critique of conventional notions of strength has been fused with Sigmund Freud's formulation of the powers of the melancholic imagination. In this vein, David Eng and David Kazanjian suggest a way of reframing loss by arguing that the "pervasive losses of the 20th century are laden with active, political potential."¹² The collection of essays they edited presents a tension between the unspeakable aspect of

⁹ Hermann Gunkel, *Water for a Thirsty Land: Israelite Literature and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 99–100.

¹⁰ Herbert Marks, "The Twelve Prophets," in *The Literary Guide to the Bible* (Cambridge Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 212.

¹¹ Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (JHU Press, 1988), 30.

¹² David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, eds., *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2002), ix.

catastrophe and an attempt to extend its domain into speech and even action – signified by the authors as prophetic speech.¹³

As I will show, readings of prophetic weakness have often been linked to notions of authenticity, to a sense that the utterances of the historical prophet are more significant or more rhetorically powerful than the redactions and glosses preserved in the extant prophetic text. The scholarly search for a prophetic core or kernel has been articulated as a quest for the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet, originally a term used to refer to the actual words of Jesus embedded in the gospels. I will trace the genealogy of this idea in the prophetic text itself, while at the same time pointing to the imprint of the Protestant and later the Romantic privileging of authenticity and originality on the reception of the prophetic texts. Thus in my articulation of the generative power of weak prophecy I have relied on Derrida's critique of the inherited dichotomies of Romanticism and his deconstruction of the relation of original to copy, the biblical text and its reception, fathers and sons, speech and the written text in Western thought. A final model I use for the generative possibilities outside of "strong prophecy," imagined as an idealized, unmediated face-to-face communication with God, is the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who read the averted face of the prophet as a productive, exilic "line of flight" from a despotic regime of signs.¹⁴

In my final chapter, I show how the Romantic categories through which prophecy has been viewed continue to reverberate in the symbolism and modernism of the prophetic mode in Hebrew literature. The distinction between strength and weakness, original and copy were recast in the work and reception of the Hebrew poet-prophets. We can speak of a replication of these familiar dichotomies in the construction of the relation between religion and secularity, the biblical text and modernity in Hebrew language and culture. In Hebrew literature's particular inflection, a dichotomy between the strength of the New Jews of the Zionist revival and the weak victim-like Jews of the Diaspora was also generated and imposed on prophetic literary texts.

Late Prophets, Early Prophets

As I will show, the redaction of the prophetic text is often a record of anxiety, an attempt to impose a coherent, strong vision on an incoherent, difficult oracle. This secret struggle between strong and weak prophecy is replicated at key moments in biblical reception. For example, as I show in Chapter 2, Lowth's eighteenth century aesthetization of the text of Isaiah replicates the shaping of the text for liturgical, institutional use, repressing its troubling theological and moral questions. Thus we could say, after Benjamin, that "the past," or in the case of biblical-historical scholarship, the text, "can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability."¹⁵ In other words, specific moments in the reception of a

¹³ According to Eng and Kazanjian, their collection suggests a way in which "ruptures of experience, witnessing, history, and truth are indeed a starting point for political activism and transformation. In this sense *Loss* moves from *trauma* to *prophecy*." Ibid., 10.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 111–148.

¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, annotated edition (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 390.

prophetic text can flare up and help explain the political stakes of a biblical text both in the past and in the present.

Before turning to a more detailed description of Benjamin's weak messianism, and how it can guide my reading of the prophetic texts, I want provide an example of the way in which biblical reception in what Benjamin calls the now-time (*Jetztzeit*) can be combined with close philological attention to its historical composition. Specifically, I want to discuss the appearance of a fragment from Jeremiah's prophecy of consolation as an object in the embattled urban landscape of contemporary Jerusalem. In the following pages I wish to begin with a moment when the prophetic text made itself present in my own experience in the city in which I was raised. In the spirit of Benjaminian hermeneutics, I will begin with this contemporary prophetic citation in order to provide a leap back into the ancient text.

The neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem has been one of the sites of intense legal and political dispute in recent years between Palestinian residents and Jewish settlers. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century Jews settled in a section of neighborhood, gathering around the tomb believed to be that of the fourth century BCE priest, Simon the Just. Palestinian families were settled in the western section of the neighborhood by the Jordanian Ministry of Development in 1956 as part of a relief project which was to substitute for their UNRWA refugee benefits, though their ownership of the land was never formalized. Their property has been in legal dispute since 1972, when the Sephardic Community Committee and the Knesset Israel Committee filed for ownership of the land based on a convoluted paper trail going back to contested Ottoman Empire documents. Since then the status of the ownership, protected tenancy, and back rent of the houses has been in legal dispute. In 2003, *Nabalat Shimon International* gained ownership of a number of homes and began pursuing its long term goal to demolish the Palestinian homes and build a new Jewish neighborhood in their stead, to be called Shimon HaTzadik. Among a number of other homes, the group evicted the extended families of El-G'awi and Hanun from their multi-storied home on Othman Ben Affan Street (see figure 1) in 2009.¹⁶

The newly judaized building was permanently draped in blue and white flags, and topped by a prominent *hanukiyah*, which can be seen throughout the neighborhood. In addition to the *hanukiyah*, a Hebrew caption was installed in giant orange letters at the top of the building, quoting Jeremiah 31:16, which promises the inconsolable figure of the matriarch Rachel an end to exile: **ושבו בנים לגבולם**, "and sons shall return to their borders." The bright orange letters are clearly associated with the settler movement, specifically with the campaign against the removal of Jewish settlers from Gaza in 2005 by Ariel Sharon. The exile to Babylon and the hope for its end,¹⁷ marked by the quote from Jeremiah, the violent struggle of the

¹⁶ See Yitzhak Reiter and Lior Lehrs, *The Sheikh Jarrah Affair: The Strategic Implications of Jewish Settlement in an Arab Neighborhood in East Jerusalem*, The JIIS Studies Series (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2010).; *Evictions and Settlement Plans in Sheikh Jarrah: The Case of Shimon HaTzadik* (Jerusalem: Ir Amim, June 25, 2009). See also the Nir Hasson's series of articles on the controversy: "East Jerusalem Eviction Orders Threaten New Embarrassment for Netanyahu," *Haaretz.com*, May 29, 2010.; "The Orthodox Jews Fighting the the Judaization of East Jerusalem," *Haaretz.com*, June 24, 2010., June 24, 2010. Nir Hasson, "Leftists Urge Israel to Repossess Settlers' Homes in East Jerusalem," *Haaretz.com*, December 11, 2010.;

Hasson's series of articles on the controversy:

¹⁷ As we will see, the oracle, which predicts a return from exile, was probably redacted in the Persian period.

Hasmoneans against the Hellenists and the subsequent re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty, marked by the *hanukiyah*, together with the politics of contemporary Jerusalem are merged on one rooftop.



Figure 1: Nasser El-G'awi stands in front of the home he and his family were evicted from in 2009. (Photo: Shimi Nachtyler)

The fragment from Jeremiah is the final line of a consolation prophecy that imagines a dramatic encounter between the matriarch Rachel and Yahweh, part of a set of hopeful, redemptive oracles dubbed Jeremiah's "Book of Consolation" (30-31). These oracles radically depart from the bulk of pessimistic, dark Jeremianic prophecies, and also contain an ideology of miraculous redemption by divine reversal, at odds with other Deuteronomistic passages in Jeremiah that call for human repentance as a necessary condition to divine forgiveness. Jeremiah is not mentioned in the oracles, apart from a prose heading of the redacted collection in 30:1-4. If the prophecies are attributed to Jeremiah, they are supposed to be composed much earlier or later than the bulk of the book; Carroll convincingly dates chapters 30-31 to the post-exilic Persian period, long after the life of the historical Jeremiah.

כה אמר יהוה קול ברמה נשמע נהי בכי תמרורים רחל מבכה על־בניה¹⁸ מאנה להנחם על־בניה כי איננו¹⁹: כה אמר יהוה מנעי קולך מבכי ועיניך מדמעה כי יש שכר לפעלתך נאם־יהוה²⁰ ושבו מארץ אויב: ויש־תקוה לאחריתך נאם־יהוה²¹ ושבו בנים לגבולם²²:

¹⁸ This first usage is absent in the shorter LXX edition. Generally, I plan to adjudicate between variants. I present the longer syllabic MT version here as I am discussing reception history. The shorter LXX version, retroverted into Hebrew, would probably read as follows, though the last verse seems truncated:

Thus said Yahweh:
 A voice is heard in Ramah,
 Of wailing, bitter weeping
 Rachel crying over her children
 Refusing to be comforted for her sons
 For they are naught
 Thus said Yahweh:
 Stop your voice from crying
 the tear from your eyes
 for there is recompense for your deed
 The speech of Yahweh:
 they will return from enemy land
 and there is hope for your posterity
 The speech of Yahweh:
 sons will return to their borders (Jer 31:15-17).

The reference to Rachel and her grandson Ephraim (31:18-20) suggest an origin for the prophecy as an address to the Northern Kingdom, though if the oracle is from the Persian period, the distinction between Israel and Judah is no longer relevant, making this use more of a literary flourish than a historical reference.²³ In the oracle, the war victims of either Assyrian or Babylonian aggression become the metaphorical lost children of the figure of the woman-as-land.

The description of Rachel starts with the introduction to an oracle, "thus said Yahweh," but is in fact *not* an oracle of Yahweh but the voice of Rachel. Verse 16 repeats the formula, this time with a prophetic oracle. These repetitions may indicate a later redaction which attempted to tie together v. 15 to vv. 16-17; we can see how in the MT even more oracular formulas were added. While Rachel's inconsolable weeping is met with a promise of consolation, there seems to be a gap between Rachel's sorrow and her supposed compensation. On the basis of this gap, Carroll concludes that verse 15 was originally an independent poem, later stitched and recast into a vision of redemption. Though Carroll does

כה אמר יהוה קול ברמה נשמע נהי בכי תמרורים רחל מבכה מאנה להנחם על־ בניה כי אינם: כה אמר יהוה מנעי קולך מבכי ועיניך
 מדמעה כי יש שכר לפעלתך ושבו מארץ אויב: יש תקוה לאהריתך:

¹⁹ LXX has ὅτι οὐκ εἶσιν, probably translating from a Hebrew Vorlage כִּי אֵינֶם. The plural form would be more common here, though the singular form could emphasize the utter disappearance of the sons, cf Gen 5:24.

²⁰ The two appearances of נְאֻם־יְהוָה, "the word of Yahweh," are missing in the LXX. The MT version attests to the development of the oracle in liturgical usage, as the two asides add a punctuating rhythm.

²¹ Added in MT. See above.

²² This final phrase ושבו בנים לגבולם is missing in LXX, which ends with μόνιμον τοῖς σοῖς τέχναις, יֵשׁ תְּקוּהָה, assuming that תְּקוּהָה can be read in the sense of the Greek μόνιμον, permanence/stability.

²³ McKane takes an intermediate position: "'Rachel' and 'Ephraim' are most naturally explained in these verses as an address to the former northern kingdom, but even if this is so and they are attributable to Jeremiah (as Duhm supposes), this does not modify the judgment that they are set in the context of a post-exilic composition (chapter 31) whose concern is with Israel and Judah and whose centre is Zion, both for Israel and Judah." William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah: Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI-LII* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1996), 802.

not have conclusive linguistic evidence for this hypothesis, it seems to accurately point to the disjunctive nature of the oracle.

In fact, the notion of Rachel's weeping is probably not originally a prophetic image relating to the destiny of the nation, but rather echoes a set of folk traditions about the ghosts of mothers dying in childbirth, or reflects a local saga, "a popular belief that Rachel appeared regularly at her grave, as a ghostly apparition, weeping for her children."²⁴ In the prophecy, Yahweh promises a *שכר לפעולתך*, a reward, or a recompense for Rachel's labors. Yet there is something strange in the suggestion that dead children can be compensated for. Also, is the labor Rachel's tender mothering, which finally gets rewarded, or does the oracle refer to the suffering, or the work of mourning itself, which is to pay off, so to speak? It seems that the vision of return could refer to the return from Babylonian exile, similar to Second Isaiah's announcement that Jerusalem has paid the price of her suffering, and is now ready to return to Yahweh's good graces (Isa 40:2).²⁵ This gap between grief and the return from exile creates a kind of metaphorical fissure, the possibility of an apocalyptic compensation beyond history.

This narrative of composition says something about the paradox of consolation, the way in which there is no real recompense for the death of children, or for national exile. In other words, while the notion of *שכר*, "recompense" sets up an economy meant to balance exile and redemption, from the melancholic point of view, there is no restitution or balance. In the framework of the narrative, Yahweh's promise could be read as a repression of Rachel's sorrow. From this perspective, the stopping of her tears is also a kind of foreclosure; redemption "cures" lamentation, gives it a meaningful framework, but it also suppresses it. We could say that the settlers' reading of the text pushes it in a direction that it has already been going in. In citing only the second part of the oracle, the Jewish settlers of the neighborhood of "Simeon the Just" continue the repressive tendency of the prophetic redaction, which replaces the voice of the female melancholic mourner with the return of triumphant sons.²⁶

The ghost of mother Rachel, haunting her grave, inconsolable, is one of the most powerfully resonant figures in prophetic literature. She is cited in Matthew 2:17, mourning Herod's slaughter of innocents. In *aggadic* literature Rachel is transformed into a more active intercessor, who pleads for compassion on behalf of her children, a manifestation of the *Shekbinah*, a female aspect of the divine.²⁷ The rich reception history of the text, and its emphasis on Rachel's sorrow, attests that power of the text lies in the tension between Rachel's melancholic mourning and Yahweh's miraculous intervention, which restores hope and "cures" Rachel.

²⁴ Ibid., 798.

²⁵ See also Chapter 4 discussion of Isa 57:18 and H.N. Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter" where the victims of the Kishinev pogrom are not "compensated" for their suffering since God's coffers are empty.

²⁶ The evocation of Jeremiah's Rachel is actually a prominent part of the rhetoric of the religious right. Cf Michael Feige, "Do Not Weep Rachel: Fundamentalism, Commemoration and Gender in a West-Bank Settlement," in *Gender and Israeli Society: Women's Time*, ed. Hannah Naveh (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 19–138. At Sheikh Jarrah perhaps the erasure can also be explained by the interference by the myth of the high priest's grave.

²⁷ Cf Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 124–126.

Besides citing the biblical text, the caption on the top of the building in Sheikh Jarrah cites what by now is almost a cliché of nineteenth century Zionism and subsequent Israeli culture. The image of the weeping Rachel, who Michael Feige has dubbed the Jewish *mater dolarosa* is already an important figure in the sentimental poetry of *Hibat Zion* ("Love of Zion") written at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁸ More broadly, as Ilana Pardes describes, the prominence of Jeremiah's Rachel, sometimes merged with images of the Pietà, was an important element in the nineteenth century "feminization of biblical exegesis."²⁹ Holy Land travel literature often mentioned Jeremiah's figure of the weeping Rachel in visits to Rachel's tomb, while two major American nineteenth century novels – *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Moby-Dick* used the figure of Rachel to reflect on both sorrow and consolation.

In the first years of Israel's statehood, Rachel's sons were read metaphorically as the Jewish people returning from the hostile "enemy land." Jeremiah's prophecy was a slogan for the ingathering of Jewish immigrants, including Holocaust survivors, which reflected both the triumph of the Zionist vision and at the same time perhaps contained an echo of the impossibilities of certain kinds of return. The prophecy was used as a caption to newsreels and was minted on a coin celebrating Israel's Independence Day in 1959.

While at one point the phrase was used to refer to the destiny of the entire Jewish people, its meaning has become specific to certain groups or places in recent decades. On the one hand, the return of Rachel's children to their land was recast in the *Gush Emunim* movement as the action of settling the "Greater Land of Israel," especially the emblematic re-settlement of Kfar Etzion and Hebron, conceived as a triumphant redemption of the Jewish victims of the 1929 and 1936 riots.³⁰ At the same time, Jeremiah's prophecy was literalized to refer not only to the Jewish people, but to actual young male soldiers – national "sons" – trapped in enemy territory. The campaign to free the IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, held captive from 2006-2011, utilized the familiar phrase to pressure the Israeli government into negotiating for the return of the abducted Shalit. During the years before his return, the Israeli public space was plastered billboards, stickers and flyers of a silk-screened child-like photograph of Shalit's face, captioned by the biblical quote.

While the prophetic text is enlisted to add authority and resonance to the actions of the settlers, the multivalent nature of the text also exposes some of their repressed ambivalences. The orange letters on the roof of the settlers' compound seem to declare continuity between the biblical promise and its contemporary fulfillment. Yet, the temporality of the prophecy is tricky: in this oracle of consolation, return is promised, but its fulfillment is cast in a distant, perhaps eschatological future. Hope is granted for Rachel's אחרית, "her posterity," – which could refer to her children, but also to an end time.³¹ The return of the sons, from the root שׁוּב, is conjugated in the consecutive preterite, with a sense of a future

²⁸ See, for example, the poems "בשדמות בית לחם" ("In the Fields of Bethlehem") and "קבר רחל" (Rachel's Tomb) in Abba Constantin Shapiro, *Shirim nivharim* [Selected Poems], ed. Fichman Yaakov (Warsaw: Tushiyah, 1911).

²⁹ Ilana Pardes, *Melville's Bibles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 129.

³⁰ Michael Feige, *Shete mapot le-gadah: gush emunim, shalom 'akhsbay ye-'itsuv ha-merhav be-yisra'el* [One space, two places: Gush Emunim, Peace Now and the construction of Israeli space], Sifriyat Eshkolot (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2002).

³¹ Cf Isa 41:22.

action. The pathos of the prophecy is achieved through its expression of an unfulfilled hope and longing. In a sense, in the present time, Rachel is still weeping.

The settlers' use of the prophecy seems to close, or foreclose the gap between the prediction and its fulfillment. In Modern Hebrew the consecutive preterite is not used, and consequently the verb can also be read in the past tense: "and sons *have returned* to their borders." These "sons" are the Jewish men and families now living in the compound. The "borders" can be read literally, as the actual borders between East and West Jerusalem. The *hanukiyah* reinforces this message – the Maccabees did not live in longing for Jerusalem, but re-occupied it by force, driving out the invaders. The prophecy is extracted, concertized, and propelled into coming fulfillment by human action. The settlers' legal action attests to the truth of the prophetic oracles, and by extension to all biblical texts. Yet the ambiguity in the reading of the verb casts a certain doubt on the enterprise of prophecy-fulfillment. Have Rachel's sons really returned to their borders, or is the act of the settlers meant to bring about the messianic return? What power does a prophecy have once it is fulfilled – does it continue to be effective, or is it somehow emptied out by its fulfillment? In other words, if the sons have indeed returned, then the phrase is no longer "prophetic" in a predictive sense and it loses its pathos.



Figure 2: The back of a protest T-shirt. The Arabic reads: "no occupation." The Hebrew: "there is no holiness in an occupied city!" (Photo: ActiveStills)

The eviction of the Palestinian tenants of Sheikh Jarrah mobilized a group of primarily Jewish-Israeli activists, who coordinated weekly demonstrations with local residents

and international activists, from 2009-2011. In contrast to the markedly secular universalist tenor of the Jewish-Israeli left, these activists attempted to counter the religious language of the Jewish settlers with their own religious language, articulating their struggle in a sometimes prophetic language. For example, one of the leaders of the protestors, Assaf Sharon, cast the power struggle between the settlers and the activists as a prophetic evolution: "Roughly speaking, [the settlers] are still with the early prophets, at the stage of the conquest of the land, and I am in the era of the late prophets, building society...the question that remains is what type of society we will have."³² Another leader, Hillel Ben Sasson, felt that "being in Sheikh Jarrah [was] the full and supreme realization of [his] religious experience."³³ In an interview from 2010, he supported his position through an appeal to the prophets, specifically Ezekiel 33:24-25, who counters the nation's appeal to Abraham's promise of the land with a rebuke proving that the nation can only live in the land if they behave morally. To build on Sharon's distinction, we could say that the settlers actually appealed to a late prophecy of consolation that smoothes out inconsolable mourning, while the activists appealed to a prophecy based on a destabilizing, negative critique. While the settlers called upon the predictive power of prophecy, the activists invoked the moral urgency of Hebrew prophecy.



Figure 3: "An occupying state is ashamed before G-d." Graffiti in downtown West Jerusalem, 2008. (Photo courtesy of Shira Wilkoff)

³² Nir Hasson, "The Orthodox Jews Fighting the Judaization of East Jerusalem," *Haaretz.com*, June 24, 2010. Sharon's distinction echoes the famous debate between Ahad Ha'am and Berdichevsky. Ahad Ha'am wanted to institute a Jewish culture based on the values of the classical prophets, while Berdichevsky's Nietzschean-inflected Zionism drew on the courage, heroism and militarism recounted in the "Early Prophets." See Jacob Golomb, *Nietzsche and Zion* (Cornell University Press, 2004), 122-124.

³³ Hasson, "The Orthodox Jews Fighting the the Judaization of East Jerusalem."

The primary slogan for the nascent solidarity movement in Sheikh Jarrah was אין קדושה בעיר כבושה, "There is no holiness in an occupied city."³⁴ The slogan attempts to redefine the holiness of Jerusalem as a moral holiness, based on universal human rights, rather than the cultic holiness alluded to by the *hanukiyah*, and by the proximity to the grave of the High Priest "Simon the Just." More broadly, the holiness of the slogan stands against the holiness of land, of the stones and bones, of the messianic religious right.

Though the leftist slogan does not cite the prophetic texts, its condemnation of empty religious pietism is fully within the prophetic tradition. Isaiah 1, for example, condemns the people for their מנחת שווא, "futile oblations" (1:13) while their "hands are stained with blood," ידיכם דמים מלאו. Rather than animal sacrifices expiating the sins of the nation, Isaiah recommends a moral purification. The book of Jeremiah also contains condemnation of sacrifices: עלותיכם לא לרצון וזבחיכם לא-ערבו לי, "your burnt offerings are not desirable/and your sacrifices are not sweet to me" (Jer 6:20). These prophetic texts add a resonance to the leftist chant which condemns the settlers' actions through the prophetic tradition of what William Blake calls "the voice of honest indignation." While evoking religious language, the leftist slogan does not cite an authoritative prophetic text, but rather taps into a tradition of moral reform from the biblical prophets, through Blake, to Marx.

As opposed to the settlers, who claim unbroken continuity between the biblical text, Jewish tradition, and their own actions, the leftists' use of the language of holiness is fraught with discontinuities. Besides a core group of observant, or formerly observant Jews, the weekly demonstrations also attracted many secular Jews, as well as non-Jewish international activists, and local Palestinian residents. As events unfolded in the neighborhood, the activists' black and white message was complicated by tensions between the universalist message of human rights and the particularistic message inherent in the concept of holiness. How was a group of Jews and Palestinians, seemingly united by a commitment to secular human rights, to speak in the name of holiness, or non-holiness, especially in Hebrew?

The heterogeneous protestors would probably have a hard time agreeing on the meaning of their slogan: does it call for abolishing holiness or transforming it? The language of holiness could be considered only a *façon de parler*, a way of mobilizing against the religious right. Yet as I will show in more detail in Chapter 4, the use of prophetic language in secular Israeli culture is doubly explosive. It can undermine the authoritative status of religious beliefs and institutions, but at the same time, religious language, even in a secular context, has a tendency to destabilize, or in Gershom Scholem's words, "take revenge," on the possibility of the secular.

Both the settlers and the activists frame their actions as a rescue. The settlers want to rescue what they consider to be Jewish buildings and land from desecration by Palestinians. A tour led by their spokesman, Yonatan Yosef, describes the Jewish holy sites being used as a

³⁴ The slogan was chanted at weekly demonstrations and printed on distinctive black and white T-shirts that evoked both the anarchist movement, as well as the protest of Women in Black (Figure 2). It seems to be a version of an older graffiti that appeared on a wall in West Jerusalem around 2008 (figure 3).

pen for goats, and shows tourists evidence of a thrown away mezuzah.³⁵ The leftist intervention is also formulated as a rescue, albeit a more abstract one. Rabbi Arik Asherman, the director of Rabbis for Human Rights claims that "all of [the activists at Sheikh Jarrah] share feeling that our future is in danger."³⁶ In addition, the leftists felt a need to "save" Jewish traditions and even the prophetic voice from the rightists' claims to exclusively represent Judaism. In that sense my project is aligned with the leftist project – the attempt to "rescue" prophetic texts from their fundamentalist readings. However, the prophetic voice that the activist called upon is still a voice of "strong prophecy," a voice of moral censure, of certainty. It seems that the leftist slogan at Sheikh Jarrah was a version of an earlier graffiti slogan in West Jerusalem: מדינה כובשת מאלוקים מתביישת, "an occupying state is ashamed before G-d."³⁷ The earlier version preserves an affect that is not only turned outward in rebuke, but takes the "ugly feelings" of occupation into account. The resistance to the settler's logic becomes a kind of battle, or what Ben Sasson imagines as "a medieval disputation."³⁸

These seemingly opposite instances of prophetic reception in contemporary Jerusalem point to a basic similarity in the invocation of prophecy as a rhetoric of strength and success. However, upon further examination, they exhibit what Benjamin calls "fissures." The settlers attempt to reify prophetic redemption by separating it from its context and displaying it on a building. However, their use of prophecy inadvertently reveals a temporal ambiguity in the reception of the text which may reveal a greater ambiguity between action and expectation. The leftist slogan seems to speak in the voice of unambiguous moral condemnation, but as I have shown, its use of the term קדושה, "holiness" is both a strength and a weakness in mobilizing authority.

In my dissertation I want to suggest an act of rescue based on displaying the fissures of the prophetic text, the seam line between a prophecy of hope and the repression of Rachel's melancholic tears. The redemptive or messianic action Benjamin proposes, which I will explain in more detail in the following pages, is formulated in kernel form in a note on "rescue" in his storehouse of notes and citations, *The Arcades Project*:

What are phenomena rescued from? Not only, and not in the main, from the discredit and neglect into which they have fallen, but from the catastrophe represented very often by a certain strain in their dissemination, their 'enshrinement as heritage.' – They are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them. – There is a tradition that is catastrophe.³⁹

The fundamentalist rescue of land and of bones is a misdirection in Benjaminian terms. The rescue that must occur, rather, is a rescue of phenomena from reification, in other words, a rescue of the prophetic text from its plastic orange enshrinement in the landscape. Saving the prophetic texts, then, according to Benjamin's note, can occur through the

³⁵ *Siyur Mudrakh Be-shekhunat Shimo`n Ha-tsadik* [A guided tour in the Simon the Just neighborhood], accessed August 14, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMEefzV9Lbg>.

³⁶ Hasson, "The Orthodox Jews Fighting the the Judaization of East Jerusalem."

³⁷ Figure 3.

³⁸ Hasson, "The Orthodox Jews Fighting the the Judaization of East Jerusalem."

³⁹ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 473 [N9,4].

"exhibition of the fissure within them" ("*Aufweisung des Sprungs in ihnen*"). In the following pages I would like to suggest some different ways of exhibiting, or reading, the fissure in prophecy. Though I will be considering ways in which prophecy fails, I will also try and preserve the rich chain of associations Benjamin's use of *der Sprung* takes part in – while it can mean crack, or flaw, it can also mean a jump, or a leap, as the tiger's leap into the past, "*der Tigersprung ins Vergangene*" – an image for revolution.⁴⁰ My discussion of prophetic failure and weakness will be informed by the generative possibilities of *der Sprung*.

Prophets Turned Backwards

Thesis II, in Benjamin's 1940 essay "On the Concept of History," claims that "like every generation before us, we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim," ("eine *schwache* messianische Kraft").⁴¹ For Benjamin, messianism points to the possibility of a rupture in time, an interruption in the homogenous, empty time of modernity and its notion of linear social progress. In Benjamin's formulation of the revolutionary moment, "the messianic arrest of happening," the traditional Jewish messianic hope of redemption from exile and the suffering of history is brought together with the Marxist idea of the final triumph of the classless society. Benjamin's use of religious language reveals and refigures the religious roots of secular communism, though the theological status of his own essay remains ambiguous.

Benjamin's messianism is defined through a contrast to mantic prophecy, i.e., "soothsaying," which leads an enchantment with the future. The contrast between soothsaying and messianism is made more significant by an underlying metonymic relation in the genealogy of the concepts of "prophet" and "messiah" in Jewish and Christian tradition. Prophets and messiahs are concepts in the same family: Samuel, the model prophet of Deuteronomistic history anoints Saul, and then anoints David, the paradigmatic "messiah" – literally, מָשִׁיחַ, the passive participle of the root מָשַׁח. In later texts prophets announce the messiah or the messianic era.⁴² Thus, the destiny of the prophet and of the messiah, of prophetic speech and messianic action are bound up from the first articulations of the concepts.⁴³

At a first glance, we could speak of a marked contrast between the functions of prophecy and of messianism. Agamben, for example, reads Benjamin through an

⁴⁰ *Walter Benjamin*, 2003, 395.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 390. The essay is replete with theological-messianic language, though the first thesis points to its problematic status in modernity: theology "which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight."

⁴² In a sense, the messiah who is to come is a reaction to the destruction of the House of David, and the promise it would endure forever. This literal promise to continuous Jewish sovereignty is "spiritualized" or transferred to the distant future in texts like Isaiah 11.

⁴³ "If Jewish prophecy is both a reminder of a promise and a call for radical transformation, in Benjamin the violence of the prophetic tradition and the radicalism of Marxist critique meet in the demand for a salvation that is not a mere restitution of the past, but also active transformation of the present." Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History,"* trans. Chris Turner (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 34.; See also Jeanne-Marie Gagnebin, *Histoire et Narration Chez Walter Benjamin (Philosophie En Commun)*, HARMATTAN (L'Harmattan, 1994), 157.

intertextuality with Pauline language mediated through Luther's Bible and Hegel,⁴⁴ and makes a firm distinction between the prophet and the apostle, narrating a teleology from prophecy to messianism. "The word passes on to the apostle, the emissary of the Messiah, whose time is no longer the future, but the present."⁴⁵ The prophet must be defined through his relation to the future and is thus distinct from the messianic *kairos* of the apostle, aimed toward the present. The prophet is characterized by the speaking of a word which ultimately does not belong to him; the apostle speaks the message in his own words. Prophetic time turns toward anticipation, while messianic time is the time of fulfillment. However, Benjamin's notion of the value of citation undercuts the privilege that Agamben implicitly attributes to the original words of the apostle. As I will argue in the following pages, it is more difficult to cut Benjamin's text loose from an idea of prophecy than Agamben would have us believe.

Benjamin's work implies that there is a *non-mantic* prophecy that does not only predict the future, but aims to transform it. In his 1940 essay, rather than "soothsaying," which seems to be only predicting the future, the turn toward remembrance has the potential to save, rescue, and transform the future. Prophecizing through an indirect gaze is a classic technique: consider the mystic vision of כבוד יהוה, "Yahweh's Glory," that Ezekiel sees when he gazes into the Chebar canal,⁴⁶ or the more humble soothsaying methods such as looking into crystal balls and coffee grounds. Why not look directly? In the biblical text there is mortal danger in the direct gaze at Yahweh. For the historian-seer, the direct gaze at the future can lead to a dangerous enchantment with the idea of the future as progress. The indirect gaze, the dialectical gaze, allows one to become disentangled from this enchantment.⁴⁷

The turn away from the future to the past has been made most famous through Benjamin's image of "the angel of history." As I will show below, this turn is a reoccurring image or gesture in Benjamin's oeuvre and especially in the variant texts of Benjamin's notes. This backward turn can figure a kind of passivity in the face of catastrophe, like Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt, or Orpheus, whose backwards turn leads to the death of his beloved.⁴⁸ It is impossible to reverse catastrophe; the angel of history cannot "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed."⁴⁹ However, this is also dialectic backwards-turning;

⁴⁴ Agamben traces a surprising etymology for Hegelian dialectics, from Paul's *katargein* to Luther's translation of Paul, in which the Greek is sometimes translated as *aufheben*, and picked up later by Hegel to mean sublation. As opposed to the usual translations of verb *katargein*, which is translated as annihilate, destroy, or make perish, Agamben reads it as a de-activation that "does not merely abolish; it preserves and brings to fulfillment." Thus, "Hegel's dialectic is nothing more than a secularization of Christian theology." Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 2005), 99. Or in a more positive formulation, "this is how a genuinely messianic term expressing the transformation of the law impacted by faith and announcement becomes a key term for dialectic." Ibid.

⁴⁵ Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 61.

⁴⁶ Moshe Greenberg suggests that this is a prophetic/mystical technique. Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 40–41.

⁴⁷ On the dialectic gaze, see Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Reprint (The MIT Press, 1991).

⁴⁸ In a 1919 fragment titled "The Currently Effective Messianic Elements," Benjamin refers to the messianic elements in the work of art, which have a passive, retarding element: "Content makes its way toward us. Form holds back, permits us to approach." Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 213.

⁴⁹ Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin*, 2003, 392.

it seems to promise a second turn back to present and future, back to political action. Benjamin's essay seems to suggest that turning backward, or turning away, has at least the potential to lead back into the political transformation of the present and the future.

In variant notes, this backwards turn is attributed to a historian-seer, based on Benjamin's interpretation of fragment 80 from Schlegel, "the historian is a prophet turned backwards."⁵⁰

"The historian turns his back on his own time, and his seer's gaze is kindled by the peaks of earlier generations as they sink further and further into the past."⁵¹

The process of inspiration is here imagined as an ignition.⁵² This fiery inspiration is reminiscent of prophetic call narratives that use fire imagery, such as Moses' revelation at the burning bush, or Isaiah's vision of the seraphim, who could be imagined as fire-creatures, and his subsequent initiation by fiery coal.⁵³

Benjamin's messianism, then, has a metonymic relation to prophetic language and to the Romantic figure of the prophet-poet who gazes into the distance at the edges of his metaphorical system. In an early version of the backwards-turned figure, Benjamin describes the obscure Latvian-German intellectual C.G. Jochmann as a "visionary" and an "isolated spirit."

He turns his back on the future (which he speaks of in prophetic tones), while his seer's gaze is kindled by the vanishing peaks of earlier heroic generations and their poetry, as they sink further and further into the past.⁵⁴

Jochmann is portrayed as a Romantic poet-prophet figure, gazing out at the mountain top like the lone figure of David Casper Friedrich's 1818 "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog." Despite this rather Romantic image, Jochmann's essay is essentially a critique of the Romantic longing for past glories. Thus, paradoxically, Benjamin's version of the Romantic poet-prophet is actually a critic of Romanticism.

In reading Benjamin we can trace relations between prophecy and messianism mediated through Jewish and Christian theology, but also through the nineteenth century figure of the poet-prophet. The Romantic poet-prophet makes an appearance in the Benjaminian texts, but is transformed by the twentieth century gaze.⁵⁵ The inspired,

⁵⁰ Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 170.

⁵¹ Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin*, 2003, 405.

⁵² Again, the seer's gaze is "kindled" by the past or in the Arcades version, it "*catches fire* from the summits of the past" (my emphasis).

⁵³ I am indebted to Daniel Weidner for sharing his unpublished work with me regarding the prophet-seer's link to prophetic fire.

⁵⁴ Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin*, 2003, 360.

⁵⁵ In the theses, the darkening sublime landscape of the mountain top takes a new, more terrifying shape. The landscape of the past turns from a scene of natural beauty which encourages detachment and contemplation, to a landscape devastated by modern warfare, populated by wreckage, debris, dead bodies and smashed buildings. The landscape, called "the catastrophe" turns actively malevolent. It "piles wreckage upon wreckage [at the angel of history] and hurls it at his feet."

"enflamed" gaze of the seer is also the traumatic gaze of the angel of history. The gaze of the witness who takes in the horrors of twentieth century war is a new and terrible version of the Romantic poet-prophet, but it is also a return to the landscape of horror and catastrophe of the biblical prophetic texts, which are stamped with the imprint of national devastation. While Benjamin's comments on messianism are a late form of reflection and translation of religious language, they can also provide a hermeneutic strategy for reading backwards into the prophetic texts. In a sense, only this twentieth century gaze can allow us to see the gritty, traumatic texts of the prophets without the softening mediation of the Romantic gaze.

In the most basic sense, weak messianism is messianism without the messiah. As a Marxist, Benjamin poses a collective messianic power, indicating an understanding of history based on cooperative action, rather than motivated by a single, charismatic figure such as a prophet, king, or messiah. This messianic possibility re-occurs in every generation, or in every age, as opposed to the Marxist vision of the classless society at the end of history.⁵⁶ The injunction to every generation is a citation without quotation marks to the text of the *haggadah*, which commands a ritual remembrance of the Exodus, in an "as if" leap – as if the seder participants were now themselves leaving Egypt.⁵⁷

Following Benjamin, I would like to consider prophetic texts without the quest for the grand figure of the historical prophet. The books of the classical prophets, which seem to record the words and narratives of the major and minor prophets, are the products of multiple authors and redactors; thus I want to emphasize the collective prophetic tradition expressed through the prophetic text, rather than the individual words and charismatic actions of the prophets. In this sense weak prophecy can be defined as a reading of the prophetic texts which looks with an equally "disenchanted" eye at both early and late layers of the text. The anonymous tridents, scribes and glossalators who preserved the text up until its early medieval standardization are part of the dialectic of prophecy and its interpretation, and cannot be ignored in favor of the first authors of prophetic oracles.

A second way Benjamin considers weakness is in the historical arena. The reoccurrence of the messianic moment is based on the failures of political revolutions. Benjamin's essay is full of references to unsuccessful revolutions and revolutionaries including the "erased" name of Louis-Auguste Blanqui and the Spartacus League, not to speak of his more general interest in failed and forgotten minor authors and phenomena. Benjamin posits a tradition, a "secret index," or what we might call an underground history of the struggles of the oppressed, which are "not present as a vision of spoils that fall to the victor."⁵⁸ In the same way, prophecies often fail to predict or transform history. In fact, Hebrew prophecy from the eighth to the fifth century BCE can be read as the works of small, colonized or subjugated

⁵⁶ "Benjamin is here explicitly taking a stand against a certain evolutionary conception of Marxism – already present in certain passages in Marx's writings (among others, the Communist Manifesto and the articles on India of the 1850s) – that justifies the victories of the bourgeoisie in the past by the laws of history, the need to develop the productive forces or the unripe character of the conditions for social emancipation." Löwy, *Fire Alarm*, 39.

⁵⁷ See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (University of Washington Press, 1982).

⁵⁸ Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin*, 2003, 390.

nations in the shadow of more powerful empires. Their devastating end is almost predetermined.

In the religious system, messianism is guaranteed by divine promise. The announcement of the messiah may be reinterpreted, but ultimately an unsuccessful messiah is deemed a false messiah. In the secularized post-Enlightenment worldview, though, there is no divine guarantee backing up the messianic pronouncement. As Michael Löwy puts it, "God is absent, and the messianic task falls wholly to the generations of human beings."⁵⁹ The weakness of the messianic power can be a way to describe the ineffectiveness of theological language in a disenchanted world. Benjamin never refers to a "strong messianism" that might exist in contrast to weak messianism. In the post-Enlightenment imagination, we could say that there is no such thing as "strong messianism"; weakness in the form of doubt and instability has permeated all use of religious language.

While it would be anachronistic to consider any kind of secularity in the biblical prophetic texts, it is still productive to consider the particular gaps and doubts to which prophetic ideology is prone. As Carroll points out, even the ancient world contained alternatives to prophetic ideology such as parts of the Wisdom tradition, which considered the divine plan essentially impenetrable and thus emphasized individual moral behavior. We could add also the traumatic disavowals of prophecy in Lamentations and Jeremiah⁶⁰ as well as the growing struggle to adjudicate between true and false prophecies in the seventh and sixth centuries. Though prophecy claims to be backed by divine guarantee, it is often characterized by doubt and problems in interpretation. Despite the Deuteronomistic attempts, prophecy is essentially missing a method of assuring its divine certainty. There is a basic flaw in prophetic ideology, which interpreted history according to a discernible divine plan, and considered the behaviors of great Empires as legible tools for divine wrath and mercy toward Yahweh's chosen people. Prophetic predictive failures exposed what Carroll calls the "serious [defect] in the prophetic conviction about history and politics as the stage of divine operations."⁶¹ This "defect" is activated in the aestheticization and secularization of prophetic language post-Enlightenment. In Chapter 4, for example, I discuss Baruch Kurzweil's notion of the modern prophet-poet as "a messenger without a sender."

Françoise Meltzer's reevaluation of weakness in the reception of Benjamin's work and biography points to a need to read Benjamin's use of "weakness" carefully. Meltzer discusses the ways in which the generation after Benjamin often conflated his work and his life, both of which were read as failed or weak. For example, Adorno's essays on Benjamin imply that "personal paralysis (which includes the inability to hold a steady job) is mirrored in a kind of nonprogression or quicksand in the thought."⁶² For Arendt and Adorno, "Benjamin's very project was as much nonwork and nonutilitarian as was his life."⁶³ "Weak" and "strong" can function as gendered categories: "In conflating Benjamin's life with his wandering texts,

⁵⁹ Löwy, *Fire Alarm*, 33.

⁶⁰ For example, Lam 2:14; Jer 14:18. See discussion in Chapter 1.

⁶¹ Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 13.

⁶² Françoise Meltzer, "Acedia and Melancholia," in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, ed. Michael P. Steinberg (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 145.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 146.

Adorno and Arendt subtly feminize both him and his writing, a gendering, that, given the dominant masculinist culture, cannot fail to have its (negative) effects"⁶⁴

Though Meltzer refers to a critical discourse regarding Benjamin's "acedia" after his death, she also discusses various ways he complicates the discourse of gender such as "plac[ing] himself in a willfully complex situation vis-à-vis originality itself, thus occluding the masculinist insistence on author as creator, as innovator."⁶⁵ Thus, rather than reversing the categories of weak versus strong, weak messianism asks us to reexamine the very structures which allow for the creation of weakness and strength relating to theology, economy and gender.⁶⁶ Meltzer finally makes the point that Benjamin's weakness, expressed as a desire to create a book made completely of citation,⁶⁷ "would have...erased the voice of the author...by its very patchwork structure...it would have eliminated linearity, clock time, origins as beginnings, the privileged status of the author to originality."⁶⁸

A final way to consider weak messianism is as a formal weakness. According to Benjamin's 1916 theory of language in "On Language as Such" the form rather than the content of language is site of its true meaning.⁶⁹ The fragments of his 1940 essay contain striking images or display allegorical emblems,⁷⁰ but do not develop a straightforward argument. Rather than a progression, each thesis is its own constellation of images and citations. The theses seem to jump in "tiger's leaps" between different historical periods and subjects. The fragment as literary form goes back to Romanticism; Schlegel's *Athenium Fragments*, for example, suggest a wholeness that must be pieced together by the reader.⁷¹ However, for Benjamin, the sense of wholeness promised by the collection of fragments becomes more and more elusive; perhaps the redemption paradoxically comes through fragments and not the whole. The use of fragments, citations, montage was often Benjamin's method. Weak messianism, in this sense, could also refer to the multivalent "weak reading" that the loose structure of the text encourages, as well as the redemptive value of this method.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 141.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁶⁶ For Agamben, weak messianism carries the germ of its own reversal. He claims that Pauline concepts of Messianism were a direct influence on Benjamin's idea of weak messianism, specifically 2 Corinthians 12:9-10: "my strength is made perfect in weakness (*mein Kraft ist in den schwachen mechtig*) therefore...I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for the sake of the Messiah: for when I am weak, then I am strong." Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, 144.[K]V and Luther biblical translations.]

⁶⁷ "Method of this project: literary montage. I have nothing to say. I have only to show. I will neither misappropriate anything worthwhile nor annex myself to any brilliant formulations." Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, pt. N 1a.8.

⁶⁸ Meltzer, "Acedia and Melancholia," 163.

⁶⁹ "Hence it is no longer conceivable, as the bourgeois view of language maintains, that the word has an accidental relation to its object, that it is a sign for things (or knowledge of them) agreed by some convention. Language never gives *mere* signs." Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin*, 2004, 69.

⁷⁰ Bhati discusses the images of the theses as versions of the allegories written by the baroque poets of Benjamin's Trauerspiel. Timothy Bahti, *Allegories of History: Literary Historiography After Hegel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 183–203.

⁷¹ Schlegel "wants us to intuit what might have been but never was, wants us to take the fragment and make of it a whole, take the ruin and reconstruct the edifice." Peter Firchow, "Introduction," in *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 3–39.

We have already started to observe the formal weakness of the prophetic text, which is based on a paradox. Though the texts of the prophets, as divine messengers, are meant to convey the authoritative, often wrathful, voice of God, formally they are full of stops and starts, vacillations, contradictions and moments of sheer opacity. The power of these formal disunities is a disruptive, arresting power. Rather than divine authority, perhaps we could speak about the subversive powers inherent in the fragmentation and chaotic, multivalent sense of history that emerges from these texts and exerts its force on later interpretations.

So, weak prophecy, as I define it, considers the prophetic genre as created by the collective tradition. Its authority is precarious, fragile; the insistence on its validity or authenticity is often a reflection of anxiety rather than of strength and assurance. Because of its complicated compositional history, it is formally disjunctive. It is essentially a text made of citations without quotation marks, leaps in images and historical references, and contradictory messages and affects. These qualities encourage a particular, open-ended aesthetic, but they can also help shape an attitude to political action, which both recognizes the precarious human life in history and the trauma of war and devastation, but does not abandon a preoccupation with history and the desire to transform it.

For Benjamin, the task of the historical materialist (or the historian-seer) is to rescue the past, but this rescue ultimately transforms the possibilities of the present and future. Thus, the historian's task is inextricable from political action, from the politics of struggle and social change. Benjamin notes to himself: "Should criticism and prophecies be categories that come together in the 'redemption' of the past?"⁷² Prophecy, or what I have called weak prophecy, then, is the force that comes together with political analysis, what Benjamin calls "criticism," to redeem the past. Benjamin's note suggests that criticism is not enough for the revolutionary action he calls weak messianism. Prophecy becomes a way to induce the kind of temporal flexibility necessary for the revolutionary imagination.

Romanticism and Prophecy

To make a sweeping generalization, the project of biblical scholarship has often been conceived of as an attempt to present the biblical texts in their message and artistry without the overlaying debris of biblical reception: to defamiliarize the familiar text which has been taken for granted, to face its otherness. The prevalent assumption of biblical scholarship is that we thoughtlessly tend to read the biblical texts anachronistically, reading our own values and assumptions about such themes as monotheism, justice, family and social relations, nation-building, and reading and writing back into it. Perhaps we could say that the first "rescue" of scholarship is the rescue of the text from the collective dream about the text. Consider, for example, Gunkel's attempt to imagine the Oriental past of the prophets, their *Sitz im Leben*. Almost a century later, reinventing a literary reading that challenges the historicism of nineteenth century scholarship, Robert Alter imagines the work of the scholar as a kind of restoration, which cleans the text off revealing it in its original, bright colors.⁷³

⁷² Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin*, 2003, 407.

⁷³ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 204.

In this first sense of rescue, reading the prophetic texts involves leaving behind the complex endorsement and disavowal of prophecy in the centuries after its composition.⁷⁴ For example, rabbinic Judaism valorized the biblical prophets and embroidered on their words even as it negated or cancelled prophecy as an ongoing channel to the divine.⁷⁵ Medieval Jewish thinkers from Rambam to Abulafia created prophets in their ideal image as an elite group of mystics or philosophers. The complex citations of the prophets in the Gospels contributed to the medieval Christian understanding of prophecy as a synonym for Christian typology – the "prophetic Bible" is the Bible in which the Old Testament prophesizes the New Testament.⁷⁶

Finally, it is very difficult to read the biblical prophetic texts without being influenced by the potent relation between poetry and prophecy since the mid-eighteenth century. Perhaps one of the stickiest parts of prophetic reception history for the modern reader is the Romantic appropriation of the prophetic texts, as well as the reoccurring figure of the poet-prophet, sometimes characterized as the prophetic voice or mode in lyric poetry.

As I will argue in Chapter 2, Lowth's discovery of the device of parallelism in biblical poetry allowed him to claim prophetic texts such as Isaiah and Jeremiah for poetry. His formal insight opened the door to the Romantic fusion of poet and prophet in literary, exegetical and philosophical texts. In nineteenth century European and American poetry and letters, prophetic calling became equated with literary genius. The prophets' isolation from society, the profound burden and struggle with the tasks they were called to, and the sense that they were channels of some great force beyond their own psyche – these were the elements emphasized in the Romantic reinscription of the prophetic texts. The poet-prophet's ability to turn away from his times, "the world that is too much with us," to the wider vistas of the past and future gave him or her⁷⁷ a special power.

The study of the visionary or prophetic elements of the Romantic poets is almost overdetermined. In Romantic literature, "the prophetic, says Ian Balfour, "is at one marginal and pervasive."⁷⁸ M.H. Abrams, Harold Bloom, and Balfour have written significant studies in the field.⁷⁹ On the other hand, there has been less attention to the way in which Romantic

⁷⁴ Apocalyptic and allegorical readings are the "spiritualization" of prophecy, and prophecy can also be applied to other biblical books. See Ronald Hendel, *The Book of "Genesis": A Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁷⁵ See Chapter 4.

⁷⁶ See Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 152–155.

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the tradition and countertradition of female prophet-poets see Beth Maclay Doriani, *Emily Dickinson: Daughter of Prophecy* (Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1996).; Beth Maclay Doriani, "Emily Dickinson, Homiletics, and Prophetic Power," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 1, no. 2 (1992): 54–75.; Ilana Pardes, "Yocheved Bat-Miriam: The Poetic Strength of a Matronym," *Gender and Text: Feminist Criticism and Modern Jewish Literature* (The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 39–63. For an ambitious gendered transformation of the prophetic voice see Anne Carson, "The Book of Isaiah," in *Glass, Irony, and God* (New Directions Publishing, 1995).

⁷⁸ Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), 19.

⁷⁹ M. H Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism; Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971).; Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company; a Reading of English Romantic Poetry*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).; Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*.

ideas have influenced the readings of prophets. A notable exception is Yvonne Sherwood's "Prophetic Scatology," where she demonstrates that the thematic choice of texts to study and the lens through which they are read is heavily influenced by notions of the Romantic sublime.⁸⁰ Besides anachronistically over-emphasizing the sublime subject matter of prophecies, privileging descriptions of mountain-tops and divine revelations over drunken orgies and prostitution, Sherwood points to a basic structural distinction between primary and secondary inherited from the Romantics, and an over-valuing of what is original, past, authentic. This emphasis on origins works in two ways: thematically, in the imagination of a golden age of prophecy, and methodologically, as scholarship wants to discover the "kernel" or the A layer of the prophetic oracle, currently embedded in less authentic redactions and glosses.

In fact, many scholarly models, from those of biblical exegetes to literary critics who are concerned with the Bible's literary reception, still evoke a golden age of prophecy that is followed by a diminished or weakened prophetic practice or "voice." Though these models appear to be describing a historical phenomenon, they are often implicitly based on a Romantic teleology of origins, which values the authentic, original and primary text over the redacted and secondary copy. Thus, a kind of scholarly melancholia is introduced into our reading of the prophetic texts. Classical historical-critical scholarship has put a special emphasis on origins, authenticity, kernels and primary texts. Critical discourse about prophets and prophetic texts has often been organized around a dichotomy between primary and secondary figures, original material and inauthentic additions. Similarly, the task of redaction criticism is often formulated as an attempt to retrieve an authentic prophetic kernel from within the additions made by prophetic schools and traditions, and the obscurations of scribal mistakes and glosses.

Furthermore, the composition of the prophetic texts cannot always be disentangled from their reception. Redaction, then, is only a particular and limited case of the text's afterlife. We can try and reconstitute the changes the text went through, but we cannot reach a pure "original." A succinct expression of the critique of originality and the embrace of biblical reception, via deconstruction theory, is given by Sherwood in her book on Jonah, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives*:

In this study, interpretation comes first, indeed interpretation overwhelms my text, as if to demonstrate how it overwhelms, eclipses, *and always precedes* the biblical 'original'. My premise is that biblical texts are literally sustained by interpretation, and the volume, ubiquity, and tenacity of interpretation makes it impossible to dream that we can take the text back, through some kind of seductive academic striptease, to a pure and naked original state...though the biblical text can always be re-deflected, it can never be recovered."⁸¹

A final Romantic influence on prophecy is the modern translation of the address to the nation. With the development of secular readings of the biblical text, the prophet is

⁸⁰ Yvonne Sherwood, "Prophetic Scatology: Prophecy and the Art of Sensation," *Semeia Studies* 82 (2000): 183–224.

⁸¹ Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and Its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

reinterpreted from a messenger of Yahweh, and becomes a messenger from "the spirit of the nation" to the nation.⁸² The nationalist readings of the prophetic texts we saw at the beginning of this chapter, though claiming religious continuity with Jewish tradition, are also influenced by Romantic-national ideas of the "spirit of the nation." The settlers' citation of Jeremiah 31:17, discussed earlier, equates the ancient nation of Israel and the modern Israeli state. The hope of divine redemption has become translated into the power of the modern, nominally secular, nation-state. The possibility of using the biblical words of Jeremiah in a modern political struggle is made possible by Zionism's roots in Romantic European culture.

If the task of biblical scholarship is to read without the obscuration of later prophetic reception, we could say that weak prophecy attempts to cleanse the prophetic texts from its vulgar Romantic residue. Weak prophecy reads behind the scenes, as it were, of the grandiose presentation of angry, inspired, and determined prophets inherited from the Romantics. The more fissures, gaps, inconsistencies, and predictive failures are named, the more it is possible to chip away at the notion of a golden age of prophecy. Weak prophecy also challenges the inherited notions of authentic prophecy, or authentic prophets, with its interest in prophetic traditions, rather than heroic figures. Philology becomes a tool to brush the hagiographies of the prophets against the grain. Recent decades of biblical scholarship have witnessed a turn away from the exclusive valuations of origins, such as William McKane's attempt to describe the composition of a prophetic "rolling corpus", Emanuel Tov's close readings of the Septuagint versions and editions of the biblical text which do not privilege the MT, Ronald Clement's analysis of the shaping of the text by prophetic tradition, Robert Carroll's careful philological deconstruction of the historical Jeremiah, and even Brevard Child's attention on the canonical texts, rather than their historical-critical composition.⁸³

At the same time, extracting ourselves from the Romantic tradition which forms our own epoch is almost impossible. According to Benjamin, his *Passagenwerk* is an attempt to wake up from the dream of the nineteenth century.⁸⁴ Susan Buck-Morss points out that *The Arcades Project* was originally conceived of as "A Dialectical Fairy Scene," a Marxist version of Sleeping Beauty, for it aimed to wake up the slumbering masses through the "trick" of analyzing the "discarded dream images" of the nineteenth century.⁸⁵ Paul de Man provides a later formulation of the problem: "As a nearer and particularly more active moment in the history of consciousness, romanticism necessarily appears to us in a Titanic light which no amount of demythologizing can entirely dissolve."⁸⁶ Because biblical scholarship is deeply implicated in Romanticism, especially with regard to the prophetic texts, I have turned to

⁸² See J.G. Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, trans. James Franks, 2 vols. (Burlington: Edward Smith, 1833). In poetry consider Friedrich Hölderlin's "To the Germans," or Walt Whitman's meditations on the spirit of America. See also discussion of Ahad Ha'am and Bialik in Chapter 4.

⁸³ William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1986), esp. lxxxiii.; Emanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999).; R. E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition*, Growing Points in Theology (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1975).; R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996).; Robert Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).; Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (T&T Clark Int'l, 2004).; Brevard Childs, *Isaiah*, 1st ed. (Louisville Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

⁸⁴ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*.

⁸⁵ Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 273.

⁸⁶ Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 65.

Benjamin. Even as Benjamin tries to wake up from the nineteenth century, he owes it an immeasurable debt, especially in the genealogy of his notion of weakness. The notion of the power of the fragment, the ruin, the abyss, the incomplete citation, is essentially Romantic.

In my own project, both strong and weak prophecy are only legible through a Romantic valorization. The possibility that we could awaken into an objective scholarship, leaving biblical reception behind, is an illusion. At the same time, in the following chapters, I wish to be self-conscious about my use of Romantic terms and structures. As I will show, the history of biblical scholarship, especially in regard to the prophetic texts, is entangled with the reception of prophecy in literary texts, especially in lyric poetry. Biblical scholarship cannot stand objectively outside the mix – so I will be reading biblical scholarship, symptomatically, as a fraught moment of reception that includes repressions and unconscious revelations.

Perhaps in order to disentangle ourselves, we could speak of two Romanticisms. The first kind of Romanticism is associated with nationalism. It tries to jump over the gaps of the past and resurrect it, imbuing the present with the aura of the past.⁸⁷ It faces the fragments with a desire to recreate and reconstruct, both healing and gluing over. On the other hand, another strand in Romanticism values the fragment, the fissure, the gap itself. Weak messianism, and by extension, weak prophecy, are part of a general Romantic ideal of the generative power of the negative. Compare, for example, a stop, arrests, creates dialectics at a standstill to Wordsworth's "wise passivity" and Keats' "negative capability."

My concept of weak prophecy is indebted to Benjamin, and it is indebted to Romantic understandings of the power of the negative. This negative power is extended, amplified and sublated in Derrida's deconstruction of such categories as the primary and secondary, oral and written, tradition, inheritance, the coherent self. As Sherwood puts it, the binding of Derrida's Bible "or rather the lack of it, seems to be Catholic or Jewish in that it strategically unravels the protestant reification of "Bible" and the "Word."⁸⁸ In Derrida's writing on the Bible, Sherwood discerns "a new kind of slow motion biblical interpretation, foregrounding the acts of choice and negotiation by which we sift the spirits."⁸⁹

My movement from the biblical text to moments in reception history which have built my own scholarly episteme, and back to the redacted, fractured biblical text is an attempt to do a similar "slow motion biblical interpretation," which sifts through the literary and political spirits that haunt the prophetic texts. In Chapter 1, I take in the figure of the ideal prophet from a distance, by considering the phantasmagoric construction of Moses in the Deuteronomistic redactions of the Book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's Moses both builds and destabilizes the relation between the origin and the copy when it comes to prophetic effectiveness and temporality. The prophetic "sons" presented by these texts never "return to their borders." I show how the idea of a strong prophet, or a strong prophetic lineage, has

⁸⁷ Jochmann emphasizes the way in which Romanticism glorifies the past over the present. In this context, Benjamin quotes Hulsén's writings on the Schlegel brothers' valuation of chivalry: "May heaven preserve us from seeing the old castles rebuilt!...the memory of those tyrants seem indestructible among the ruins." Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin*, 2003, 362.

⁸⁸ Yvonne Sherwood, "Introduction: Derrida's Bible," in *Derrida's Bible: Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

been imposed by late, melancholic redactions that read and write the golden age of prophecy from the distance of national catastrophe and exile.

In Chapter 2, I begin with Isaiah's call narrative, the site of both great prophetic strength and prophetic weakness. The Book of Isaiah assumes key significance for Lowth, the eighteenth century scholar, exegete, cleric, and politician. The ravages of modern scholarship on the prophetic text, especially its destabilization of the "prophetic sinew" tying together the Old and New Testament, become transformed in Lowth's lectures and exegesis into a prophetic aesthetic. Through Isaiah's mastery of poetic forms, the Book of Isaiah becomes representative of a biblical sublime that sets the stage for the yoking of prophecy to poetry and the Romantic figure of the poet-prophet. Lowth's imposition of the genius of authorship on the multi-layered biblical text – a key moment for the invention of a literary Bible – comes at the expense of repressing unruly English outbreaks of prophetic enthusiasm, as well as the troubling theological questions posed by the text.

Chapter 3 examines nineteenth century biblical scholarship's valorization of the original oral prophets over a later written prophecy, degraded by a priestly scribalism. Oral prophecy is characterized by a situation of social authenticity, a face-to-face conversation, whether with God, or with an audience. The prophet Ezekiel marks the moment of transformation from oral to written prophecy, from poetry to prose, and thus incurs Wellhausen's ire. I examine and critique this teleological view of prophecy by returning to Ezekiel's apostrophes, his sermons-from-a-distance. As opposed to a formalizing, deadening scribal effect I show Ezekiel's apostrophe to the Mountains of Israel to be a text in the process of unraveling, and paradoxically, in its weakness, creating a generative "line of flight" marked by the prophet's averted face.

Chapter 4 takes up the reinscription of prophecy in the literature of Hebrew Revival, at the turn of the twentieth century and its reception in Hebrew modernism. While public intellectuals tried to create a cultural Bible that would help guide the Jews to national revival, the practice of the prophetic mode in Hebrew was an encounter in precariousness. The fragmented modern selves of the poets, assailed by secular doubt and ambivalence about aspects of Zionist nation-building, activated the destabilizing elements of the prophetic texts themselves. Rather than the heroic face-to-face prophecy of Moses, through a complex intertextuality, the Hebrew prophet-poets illuminated a biblical prophecy that stutters, fails, averts its face, addresses the disintegration of the nation rather than its formation. Seizing up this moment of prophetic weakness in the decades before Israeli statehood is a form of remembrance and perhaps a way to enable a transformation of the future.

Methodology & Text Criticism

This dissertation straddles several scholarly fields, each with their own set of conventions that may seem unfamiliar upon first encounter. Apart from when I indicated a translator, the translations from Hebrew are mine. In transcribing Modern Hebrew, especially in Chapter 4, I use the Library of Congress conventions of transliteration, apart from already conventional spellings for place names and people. I quote the Masoretic Text including vowels and accents, the text read by Hebrew poets and thinkers, and I refer to the biblical divinity as "God."

In contrast, in chapters 1-3, which focus on the biblical text and biblical scholarship, I employ the academic transliteration conventions of the Society of Biblical Literature. I refer to the biblical divinity as "Yahweh," the probable historical pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. Besides fidelity to the biblical text, the use of "Yahweh" helps defamiliarize the ancient text, especially when it comes to theology. The Western "God" is actually quite a different character than "Yahweh." The Hebrew text appears without vowels and accents; though the vocalization of the Tiberian Masoretes often reflects Second Temple or even First Temple readings, the consonantal text reflects the older form of the text.

Finally, my readings of biblical texts in these chapters are based on a critical text I construct through adjudicating between the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint translation and its hypothetical retroversion of the Greek to a Hebrew *Vorlage*, and the biblical texts and fragments found at Qumran. Other versions are consulted on occasion, such as the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Vulgate translation into Latin, and fragments found in the Cairo Geniza. My creation of a critical text is not intended to create a privileged, original version of the biblical text, though at times this has been the primary motivation of historical-biblical criticism. Rather, I have found that creating a critical text with generous philological footnotes helps illuminate the complex redactional history of the text. In fact, it is essential to analyzing the text diachronically, and in recognizing the sometimes meaningful, beautiful, and anxious interruptions of the text by its redactors. Though much of the compositional history of the biblical text is based on conjecture, on documentary hypotheses and imaginary letters, the comparison of textual versions creates a vivid, documented example of what we could call the dynamics of redaction.

Ron Hendel formulates the distinction between the original and the archetype of a text as both historical and epistemological. Historically, there may be hundreds of years between the original text and the archetype. Though the original is the earliest hypothetical ancestor to all the variant texts we have, which is generally irrecoverable, the archetype is the earliest *inferable* state of the text.⁹⁰ It is a hypothetical reconstruction, and thus subject to scholarly debate and to corrections if further material is discovered. After Hendel's method, I have also suggested corrections for the scribal mistakes discovered in the text, producing an approximation of a corrected archetype, though I have generally been conservative in correcting mistakes not attested to by known versions. The distinction between the original and the archetype is useful in maintaining neutral language about text criticism. In the case of Jeremiah and to a certain extent Ezekiel, Tov's careful comparisons of variants lead him to treat the variants as two different editions of the text. This seems especially convincing in the case of Jeremiah, where the work of the Deuteronomist redactor(s) blurs with the work of later the scribe(s) responsible for the MT edition. It would be best to imagine my critical texts as a series of side-by-side comparisons that for pragmatic reasons have been compressed to a single consonantal text with notes.

⁹⁰ Ronald Hendel, "The Oxford Hebrew Bible: Its Aims and a Response to Criticisms," *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 2, no. 1 (2013): 66.

CHAPTER ONE

Strong Prophecy as a Melancholic Ideal: Jeremiah Writes Moses

Soothsaying and Prophetic Success

In his theses "On the Concept of History," Walter Benjamin suggests that the predictive turn is not native to the Hebrew prophetic tradition.¹ Though we may be tempted to dismiss the explicit turn toward the future as simplistic magical thinking, or interference from Greek tradition, the Book of Deuteronomy does establish prognostication as one of the primary indicators of prophetic success and authenticity, (Deut 18:22) while at the same time forbidding divination methods such as augury, casting spells, and consulting ghosts (18:9-14). Even as the accuracy of a prophet's predictions help determine whether he is a true prophet, the passage suggests correct prediction is a necessary but not sufficient condition for prophecy; in addition, a prophet has a mediating role between Yahweh and his sometimes terrified people: ונתתי דברי בפיו, "and I will place my words in his mouth" (18:18).

For the Deuteronomists, and at the same time, in part *because* of a Deuteronomistic redaction process that I will discuss in detail below, the Book of Jeremiah is a document of great prophetic authenticity. In contrast to prophets who promised the safety of Jerusalem in the face of the machinations of the Babylonian Empire, Jeremiah's dark vision of punishment and ruin anticipates the destruction of Jerusalem and provides a compelling witness to national catastrophe. Perhaps it is partially due to Jeremiah's devastatingly accurate predictions that the Book of Jeremiah, even more than Isaiah or Ezekiel, became an important text to the Deuteronomistic authors.² The seventh century oracles attributed to the prophet Jeremiah were significantly expanded and redacted by Deuteronomistic editors in the next century and reflect their ideology regarding prophetic power, history, and theology, as well as sharing many linguistic and stylistic affinities with the Book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History.³

¹ "We know that the Jews were prohibited from inquiring into the future: the Torah and the prayers instructed them in remembrance." Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938-1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, annotated edition (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 397. While the Benjaminian landscape is populated with figures who turn their back on the future, popular understanding of prophecy is still linked to what Benjamin calls "soothsaying," or prediction. As Ian Balfour puts it, "it is unfortunately not enough of a commonplace that prophecy cannot be reduced to prediction." Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), 5. On an anecdotal note, the two freshman seminars on prophecy I taught at Berkeley reinforced this notion. Yet at the same time, my students' lingering attachment to the idea of prediction taught me that it is impossible to leave prediction out of the description of even the classical Hebrew prophets.

² Carroll formulates his reservations about the criterion of prediction in Deuteronomy 18 succinctly: "It is a strangely narrow view of prophecy and one which fits the deuteronomistic movement toward producing canonic forms of torah governing the community, to which has been added (hastily?) a brief, but inadequate, guideline for determining authentic prophecy." Robert Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 187.

³ For dating the different Deuteronomistic documents, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 7.

Yet while Jeremiah accurately predicts the catastrophe to come, the text also portrays him as frustrated, or unsuccessful in his attempts to function as the mouthpiece of Yahweh and transform the Judeans of Jerusalem. Many of the first person laments of chapters 11-20, sometimes dubbed Jeremiah's "confessions,"⁴ as well as the narratives in the book present Jeremiah as the epitome of the maligned, misunderstood prophet (see also 6:10; 17:23; 18:11-12). The mirror image of Jeremiah's inability to bring about repentance is his inability to sway Yahweh's anger and change his malevolent intentions toward his nation. While earlier layers of the Jeremiah text acknowledge intercession as one of the main prophetic functions (see for example 18:20), Jeremiah is also commanded against praying on behalf of the nation (7:16, 11:14, 14:11).⁵ Thus, Jeremiah's pathos-filled role as witness to catastrophe also marks his inability to function as an agent in history.⁶

Jeremiah's inability to intercede on behalf of the nation and change its terrible fate can be contrasted with the successful intercessions of great figures like Abraham, who petitioned Yahweh to spare the righteous of Sodom (Gen 18:23-33),⁷ Moses, who prevented Yahweh from destroying his nation in the desert (Exod 32:7-14; Num 14:13-19; Deut 9:25-29), and Samuel who prays for victory over the Philistines and Yahweh's forgiveness (1 Sam 7:8; 12:19-23). The comparison between the era of Jeremiah and a golden age of prophetic intercession is made explicit in Jeremiah 15:1b.

אם-יעמד משה ושמואל לפני אין נפשי אל-העם הזה שלח מעל-פני ויצאו

"Even if Moses and Samuel stood before me, my heart is not inclined to this people. Send them out from upon me and let them go."

As I will show, the Deuteronomistic redactions of the Book of Jeremiah cast the figure of Jeremiah in the shadows of idealized prophetic figures, such as Moses and Samuel. While Jeremiah is established as a "true" prophet according to Deuteronomistic standards because his predictions come true, there is also a sense, especially in the later redactions of the text, that Jeremiah is a diminished version of a prophet for diminished times. To cast the relation as a family romance, if Moses is founding father of a prophetic tradition, Jeremiah becomes the son struggling in his father's shadow.

The textual relationship between Moses and Jeremiah is of great significance to the formation and understanding of the figure of Jeremiah. More so than other classical prophetic texts, the Book of Jeremiah alludes to Moses and Mosaic convention.⁸ The text of Jeremiah vacillates between using the link to Moses to establish authority and a lineage for

⁴ See especially 20:7-17 for a striking lament of personal failure. See also Kathleen M O'Connor, *The Confessions of Jeremiah: Their Interpretation and Role in Chapters 1-25* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1988).

⁵ Perhaps these later interdictions are triggered by a malevolent A layer oracle in which the prophet intercedes *against* the nation (18:19-23).

⁶ In the long reception history of Jeremiah as the prophet of the Jewish exile, Jeremiah's diminished agency anticipates or echoes the diminished agency of the nation in Diaspora, often perceived as no longer part of history. See my discussion of Ahad Ha'am and Jewish history in chapter 4.

⁷ Cf Jeremiah 5:1 which describes the inability to find a just man in the streets of Jerusalem.

⁸ There are three other direct references to the Moses in the prophetic texts, which are more formulaic than the explicit and implicit references in Jeremiah (Isa 63:12; Mic 6:4; Mal 3:22).

Jeremiah, thus bolstering his prophetic position, and creating a negative comparison, reading Jeremiah as a diminished or weak prophet in relation to a strong predecessor. In the following pages, my analysis of Jeremiah's weakness will focus on Jeremiah 15:1, which names Moses and Samuel as prophetic predecessors to Jeremiah, and on Jeremiah 1, the prophetic call narrative, which fashions Jeremiah as a prophet in relation to former Mosaic and Deuteronomistic leaders.

My point of departure is the intertextual relationship between Moses and Jeremiah; at the same time, the discussion of the relation between these figures can shed light on broader questions of composition and redaction, especially in considering what is "primary" in what is "secondary" in the Book of Jeremiah.⁹ In other words, I propose to map both the content of the Book of Jeremiah, and the theories of its historical composition process through the inter-related metaphorical systems of primary and secondary, father and son, origin and copy. Through a close reading of Jeremiah's position as a secondary prophetic figure, I wish to point to the fictionality of the notion of prophetic lineage and the idealization of the figure of Moses, who I read as a melancholic object of loss and desire in the extant text of Jeremiah. At the same time, this chapter will critique the way in which authenticity and origin have been read and valued in prophetic texts. Notions of authenticity are especially fraught in the prophets because of the illusion of accessibility; redaction criticism seems to be able to reconstruct the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet himself, allowing the readers to "hear" the prophet's words. The scholarly work on Jeremiah in the past century has made great progress in revealing the archeological layers of the text, each with different ideologies and literary styles, which I will rely upon in my analysis of the Jeremiah text. At the same time, in contrast to over-valuing the authentic, early oracles, I will focus on a late, "secondary" redaction of Jeremiah as a site of meaningful content and pathos.

Since the groundbreaking work of Bernhard Duhm and Sigmund Mowinckel in the early part of the twentieth century, biblical scholars have posited a complex compositional process for the Book of Jeremiah.¹⁰ Duhm and his followers posited three main sources for the Jeremiah MT text. "Source A" preserved the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet Jeremiah. Besides the letter to the exiles in chapter 29, these were all poetic oracles which demonstrated Jeremiah's literary-poetic genius. In Mowinckel's formulation, Jeremiah adapted many literary genres to his own ends, including accounts of visions in prose, and thus was able to include more text. Source B was comprised of prose narrative about the life of Jeremiah, which Duhm believed was written by Baruch Ben Neriah. The C source consists primarily of prose sermons that share the didactic vocabulary, style, and ideology of the Book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history, and so Duhm conjectured it to be a redaction and expansion by generations of Deuteronomistic editors. Moshe Weinfeld suggests that this layer can be more precisely dated to the second half of the sixth century, after the composition of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history.¹¹

⁹ See my discussion of Romanticism and biblical studies in the introduction as well as my discussion of Derrida later in this chapter.

¹⁰ See Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Tübingen; Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr (P. Siebeck), 1901), ix–xxii. Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur komposition des Buches Jeremia* (Kristiania: J. Dybwad, 1914).and *The Spirit and the Word: Prophecy and Tradition in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002). For a useful summary, see also Alexander Rofé, "yunim beshelat hiburo shel sefer yirmiyahu (Studies in the Compositional History of the Book of Jeremiah)," *Tarbits* 42 (1975): 1–29.

¹¹ Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 7.

While for Duhm, literary redaction history was able to retrieve the original words of Jeremiah, Mowinckel posited a compositional process that also took a dynamic oral tradition into account. "Oral and written tradition have flowed side by side and finally also influenced each other."¹² For example, in order to retrieve the original words of the prophet "we must try to discover what constituted the original Jeremian nucleus in the deuteronomistic prose tales"¹³ as these preserved an older oral tradition. In recent decades William McKane's masterful commentary on Jeremiah presents a convincing methodology for this process of recovery. Rather than considering A, B, and C¹⁴ as separate written sources, assembled together with an over-arching plan, McKane convincingly argues that the Jeremiah text is a "rolling *corpus*," which must be analyzed on the local level of verse.

What is meant by a rolling *corpus* is that small pieces of pre-existing text trigger exegesis or commentary. MT is to be understood as a commentary or commentaries built on pre-existing elements...In general the theory is bound up with the persuasion that the rolling *corpus* "rolled" over a long period of time and was still rolling in the post-exilic period.¹⁵

McKane's close textual analysis of hypothetical sources is made through analogy to analysis of the differences between the two layers of Jeremiah to which we actually have access. A third and final distinction between primary and secondary, early and late, can be made between two extant editions of Jeremiah. The Septuagint translation of Jeremiah into Greek is one eighth shorter and contains meaningful variations from the Masoretic Text – enough to conjecture that the translation of the book into Greek was based on another, earlier edition of the Hebrew text. This *Vorlage* has recently been confirmed by the discovery of Qumran fragments of the text (4Qjer(b,d)),¹⁶ which are closer to the LXX version. According to Emanuel Tov¹⁷ the LXX reflects a shorter edition that was expanded by an editor, who added his own glosses and expansions, but also introduced authentic early material that did not make it into edition I. Tov's hypothesis allows a glimpse into the type of complex compositional processes, whereby new "secondary" editions can also contain older "primary" material.

The C source or layer is sometimes conceived of as redactional "gloss"; a kind of static covering over the prophet's voice. As opposed to the lyrical heights of the poetry of

¹² Mowinckel, *The Spirit and the Word*, 18.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ There is also post-Deuteronomistic material in chapters 30-31 which I discuss in the introduction.

¹⁵ William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1986), lxxxiii.

¹⁶ "Study of the two textual traditions (i.e. MT and LXX) in the light of the new data makes clear that the Proto-Masoretic text was expansionist, and settles an old controversy...The Septuagint faithfully reflects a conservative Hebrew textual family. On the contrary, the Proto-Masoretic and Masoretic family is marked by editorial reworking and conflation, the secondary filling out of names and epithets, expansions from parallel passages, and even glosses from biblical passages outside Jeremiah." Frank Moore Cross, "The Contribution of the Qumran Discoveries to the Study of the Biblical Text," *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* 16 (1966): 82.

¹⁷ Emanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 363–384.

the A layer, it is read as "fairly monotonous prose,"¹⁸ or "swarm[ing]" with "deuteronomic clichés."¹⁹ Furthermore, these sermonic insertions, as Weinfeld claims, are viewed as cutting into the dramatic power of earlier texts. For example, regarding chapter 19, he argues that "this sermon deprives the symbolic act which Jeremiah is about to perform of all of its potential drama...The oration is a later deuteronomic insertion which only weakens the dramatic quality of the act."²⁰ The accounts of the redaction of Jeremiah, then, have been framed secondary through Romantic notions of the value of the original and authentic, versus the aesthetic weakness of the later, layer, perhaps analogous to the relation between the figures of Moses and Jeremiah.

Jeremiah and Intercession

How are we to understand then, the relationship between Jeremiah and Moses especially in regards to intercession? The most straightforward model, which takes the claims of the text at face value, reads it as an account of Jeremiah's life, thoughts, and struggles. William Holladay speaks of constructing a "lower chronology" for the life of Jeremiah, which would enable readers to line up the oracles with the narrative accounts. He claims that Jeremiah was inspired by the seventh century reforms of Josiah and by reading about the figure of Moses in the newly revealed Deuteronomy. He reads 15:1 as evidence that Jeremiah's self-understanding was shaped by the figure of Moses, as depicted in the book of Deuteronomy, and by the "conviction that he was the 'prophet like Moses' (Deut18:18)."²¹

As Holladay puts it, "It was in the light of the figure of Moses that Jeremiah lived out his own ministry, and that the figure of Samuel and the words of Ps 22 also played a part in his self-understanding."²² Holladay also claims that the poetry of Moses functioned as a literary model for Jeremiah's compositions, as Deuteronomy 32 "was known to Jeremiah as a song sung by Moses and...thus became a model for Jeremiah's own poetic diction."²³ The Book of Jeremiah, then, shares affinities with Deuteronomy because Jeremiah the prophet tried to shape his words and actions according to his role model. Extending the biographical-psychological lens, we could say that Jeremiah's evocations of Moses and Mosaic poetry could be enacting Bloomian "anxiety of influence." We could view Jeremiah as a proto-Romantic poet, concerned and doubtful about measuring up to the great prophets that came before him.²⁴ As opposed to Holladay's optimistic reading of the influence of Moses on Jeremiah, Luis Alonso Schökel claims that "Jeremiah is presented in the book as

¹⁸ Rofé, "Studies in the Compositional History of the Book of Jeremiah," 2. (my translation)

¹⁹ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 27.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹ Holladay, William L., "Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations," *JBL* 85, no. 1 (March 1966): 17.

²² William L. Holladay, "The Background of Jeremiah's Self-Understanding: Moses, Samuel, and Psalm 22," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83, no. 2 (June 1964): 153.

²³ Holladay, William L., "Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations," 19. See also John Bright, *Anchor Bible. Vol.21* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 102. "both [Moses and Samuel] were remembered as men who had interceded with God for the people."

²⁴ Holladay, William L., "Jeremiah and Moses: Further Observations," 19. See also John Bright, *Anchor Bible. Vol.21* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1965), 102. "both [Moses and Samuel] were remembered as men who had interceded with God for the people."

an anti-Moses”²⁵ because “he goes through an itinerary that is the opposite of Moses.” Schökel is less interested in the biographical details of the prophet’s life; rather, his interpretation is based on an attention to literary forms. “With respect to intercession,” argues Schökel, “Jeremiah is a negative reproduction of the great intercessor, Moses.”²⁶ Though Schökel employs literary analysis to carefully sketch out the multiple reversals which make Jeremiah an “anti-Moses,” his argument is ultimately in service of old fashioned typology. Jeremiah’s failure to live up to the example of Moses enacts the failure and destruction of the old covenant of the law, giving way to a new covenant announced in Jer 30–33. The death of the old covenant dialectically leads to a “message of hope,” which “shines forth.”²⁷

Holladay and Schökel's readings posit Jeremiah respectively as an heir or a reproduction: in other words, in a secondary position in relation to a primary source. I would like to consider, instead, the way in which Jeremiah, or the text of Jeremiah, imagines its predecessors. In what way does Jeremiah create Moses as an ideal? Reading Jeremiah as simply the diminished literary heir of the great poet-prophet Moses misses the way in which the text of Jeremiah, a product of extensive redactions, is anxiously constructing a prophetic tradition. As opposed to the linear progression of the Romantic model, the texts of Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Jeremiah were composed in many stages and may have influenced each other at various compositional points. While Jeremiah is presented as diminished in relation to Moses' intercessory powers, I would like to explore the creative powers Jeremiah has in "writing" Moses, both as a figure, but also as a metonymy for a redacted, non-originary text.

Moses is imagined in the text of the Book of Jeremiah as marking a time of favor lost to Jeremiah. Jeremiah 1, as I will show, also attempts to construct a prophetic lineage in a time of historical upheaval. My focus in the following pages will attempt to invert the chronology of loss. Rather than assuming that there is an object ("Moses") that is then remembered or lost by the subject ("Jeremiah"), after Holladay and Schökel, I propose to begin with the subject and describe the constitution of a lost object.

Loss, Lament, and Melancholia

The loss of Moses, as expressed in the text of Jeremiah, as well as the constitution of this lost ideal can be theorized through the concept of melancholia. Before examining the way that the interdiction against intercession brings Jeremiah into relation with Moses in 15:1 in more detail, then, I want to briefly digress in order to consider a parallel interdiction against mourning running through the Deuteronomistic redactions of Jeremiah. Because of the book's formation as a rolling corpus, clearly expressed affects of lament and mourning have not been completely overwritten in the Deuteronomistic redactions, thus creating a complex presentation of mourning in the composite text.

²⁵ Luis Alonso Schökel and Tawny Holm, *The Literary Language of the Bible: The Collected Essays of Luis Alonso Schökel* (D & F Scott Pub Inc, 2001), 27.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

The Jeremiah text as a whole, from its superscription placing Jeremiah as a prophet presiding over the exile, through its embodied laments or "confessions" of pain and horror, and in its descriptions of the confused, war-torn city under siege and its exile, can be read as a text of grief and loss in relation to national catastrophe. Even the oracles against the nations in chapters 46-51 can be read as the record of elaborate revenge fantasies of a disempowered people and their prophet in relation to loss. At the same time, the text contains prohibitions against mourning, which appear to have been heavily redacted by Deuteronomistic editors. In the same way that the interdiction against intercession interrupts the "normal" function of a prophet, who mediates between the people and their Yahweh, Yahweh's command against mourning interrupts the affective task of the prophet as witness.

The A layer oracles present the often-feminine voices of lament over the dead or over a city. For example,

קול בת-ציון תתיפח תפרש כפיה אי-נא לי כי-עיפה נפשי להרגים

The voice of Daughter-Zion wails, stretching out her hands,
Alas for me, for I grow weary before the killers (Jer 4:31).

The same Daughter-Zion is addressed and asked to enact the rituals of mourning over the lost bond between Yahweh and his people:

גזי נזרך והשליכי ושאי על-שפים קינה

Cut your tresses and cast them off,
take up a lament-song over the heights (Jer 7:29).

In the prophetic metaphorical system, which figures the land-as-woman, it is not always clear whom and what the feminine figure mourns: her husband, her own lost position as the desirable city, or the disruption of the covenant between Yahweh and his people. In many of the A layer oracles, perhaps as a mark of catastrophic times, Jeremiah himself takes on the role of a mourner, rather than remaining a prophet of rebuke. The traditional female role of wailing is now attributed to the prophet. For example, in Jeremiah 9:9 a first person lament interrupts a prophecy of wrath, though the distinction between the individual voice of the prophet and message of Yahweh remains somewhat ambiguous, especially when taking the difference in editions into account.

על-ההרים אשא²⁸ בכי ונהי²⁹ ועל-נאות מדבר קינה

For the mountains I take up crying and wailing;
For the wilderness-pastures, a lament.

²⁸ For the MT אשא the LXX has ἀβετε, retroverted as שאו. Reading with MT *lectio difficilior*, as the other first singular person declarations in the passage refer to punishment rather than mourning.

²⁹ ונהי missing in LXX. Possibly an MT expansion.

Daughter-Zion, the metaphorical expression of the land, becomes in this passage the object of mourning, whether it is Jeremiah or Yahweh speaking, rather than a mourning subject. Here the prophetic voice becomes the mourner and witness to devastation.

In contrast to the laments of the A layer, the oracles redacted by the Deuteronomistic editors seem to resist lament and mourning. Additionally, the sermons of punishment often include the desecration of unburied bodies, also a violation of the typical customs of mourning (7:33; 8:1-3; 15:3-4; 19:7). Chapter 16, which contains the most vehement command against normative mourning, also functions as a negative description of mourning rituals in ancient Israel.³⁰ Here, the people are told not to engage in typical mourning rituals.

כִּי־כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּית מְרוּחַ³¹ וְאֶל־תֵּלֵךְ לִסְפוּד וְאֶל־תִּנְדַּח לָהֶם כִּי־אֶסְפְּתִי אֶת־שְׁלוֹמֵי מֵאֵת הָעַם־זֶה³² וְלֹא־יִסְפְּדוּ לָהֶם וְלֹא יִתְגַּדְדוּ וְלֹא יִקְרַח לָהֶם: וְלֹא־יִפְרְסוּ לָהֶם³³ עַל־אֲבָל³⁴ לִנְחָמוֹ עַל־מֵת וְלֹא־יִשְׁקוּ אוֹתוֹ³⁵ כּוֹס תְּנַחֲמוּמִים עַל־אֲבִיו וְעַל־אִמּוֹ: וּבֵית־מִשְׁתֵּה לֹא־תִבּוֹא לִשְׁבֹּת אוֹתָם לֶאֱכֹל וּלְשִׁתּוֹת: כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִנְנִי מִשְׁבִּית מִן־הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה לְעֵינֵיכֶם וּבִימֵיכֶם קוֹל שִׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שִׁמְחָה קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כְּלָה:

For thus said Yahweh: Do not enter a house of mourning.³⁶ Do not go to lament and console with them; for I have withdrawn my favor from that people,³⁷ men shall not lament them, nor gash and tonsure themselves for them. They shall not break bread for a mourner, to comfort him for bereavement, nor offer him a cup of consolation for the loss of his father or mother. Nor shall you enter a house of feasting, to sit down with them to eat and drink. For thus said the Yahweh of Hosts, the god of Israel: I am going to banish from this place, in your days and before your eyes, the sound of mirth and gladness, the voice of bridegroom and bride (Jer 16:5-9).

³⁰ The Deuteronomistic command against mourning may be triggered by a short oracle against lament in 22:10.

³¹ LXX glosses εἰς θίασσον αὐτῶν, "to their feasting." See discussion below.

³² MT addition: וְלֹא יִקְבְּרוּ: וְלֹא יִפְרְסוּ לָהֶם בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת לֹא יִקְבְּרוּ: See discussion below.

³³ Reading with the LXX ἄρτος. The MT seems to have had a ח/ה confusion triggered by the להם in previous verses.

³⁴ Following LXX translation from a *Vorlage* probably pointing אבֵל as 'ābēl.

³⁵ MT: אוֹתָם. Reading third person singular with LXX. להם in v.7a triggered a mistaken plural.

³⁶ Literally, a house of Marzēah, also mentioned in Amos 6:7. LXX translated as εἰς θίασσον αὐτῶν, "to their feasting." The mysterious word is widely attested in Near Eastern world including texts from Ugarit, Elephantine, Palmyra, and Carthage. It seems to refer to a feast gathering in the context of ancestor cults or bereavement. See for example Jonas C Greenfield et al., *Al Kanfei Yonah: Collected Studies of Jonas C. Greenfield on Semitic Philology* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 907.

³⁷ MT plus: "declares the Lord – my kindness and compassion. Great and small alike will die in this land. They will not be buried." A good example of a significant addition to the MT edition, which continues the general Deuteronomistic tendency to explain and elaborate in the passage, as there could have been a more basic symbolic action from the A layer here which was further expanded.

This passage is rich with sociological details about mourning customs in ancient Israel, though these details are conveyed negatively.³⁸ These mourning customs, metonymized by the sound of wailing, are also juxtaposed with the happy sounds of revelry and celebration. The juxtaposition of mourning and celebration seems appropriate: a regular life cycle of a community contains both funerals and weddings, celebrations and laments. In fact, the mourning rituals themselves are a complex mix of displeasure, i.e. unhappy affect such as wailing, gashing, and pleasure: drinking, eating, visiting. Putting them together implies the deep connections between the two, and the way that mourning may eventually lead to reintegration in the community.

Yet Yahweh, in the form of catastrophic anger, interrupts both normative mourning and normative celebration. Yahweh is *גושבית*, "the one who causes to cease," from the root *שבח*, which is also the root of Sabbath, a time to desist from labor. Yahweh interrupts the labor of mourning, intervening and transforming the Israelite mourning customs into a new mode that does not allow a reintegration of the mourner back into the community lifecycle. In the most direct sense, the refusal of mourning is an aspect of Yahweh's wrath and desire to severely punish and humiliate his people. However, read against the grain, the command against mourning may be an expression of life during catastrophic times, in which normative mourning becomes unimaginable.

In order to develop a reading of the affective quality of mourning and loss expressed by the texts of Jeremiah, as well as put forth a model that considers the generative powers of loss, I turn to Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia," and the subsequent interpretations of this canonical article, especially in discussions of textual production.³⁹ In his 1917 article, Freud's primary distinction is between "the normal affect of mourning" and the pathology of melancholia. Both conditions are reactions to a wide range of losses – "the loss of a loved person, or the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on."⁴⁰ Though mourning "involves grave departures from the normal attitude to life," it is not a pathological condition. The work of mourning is painful, but necessary – a "painful unpleasure." In Jeremiah 16, for example, mourning "work" combines feasting and weeping, drinking and gashing, an implying that both mourning and celebration are part of a normative community's life.

In contrast to the normative processes of mourning, which, we could add, is also facilitated by mourning rituals, Freud posits a more mysterious kind of grief. Melancholia, according to Freud, involves "a loss of a more ideal kind," related to the subject's mind,

³⁸ The injunction against mourning rituals here has gotten entangled with the Deuteronomistic drive to root out ancestor cults. Eating and heavy drinking, gashing and tonsure, though native practices, were later prohibited by Yahwistic ideology in "an attempt to differentiate between acceptable Israelite religion and pagan practices (cf Lev. 19:27-28; 21:5; Duet. 14:15)" Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (T&T Clark Int'l, 2004), 339. The fact that these mourning customs are presented as normative may indicate an originally early layer at the core of the passage. So McKane: "It could be argued that the disagreement between v.6 and Deut 14.1 (Lev 19.28; 21.5) is an indication that Jeremiah's attitude to these rites rather than an exilic attitude is represented in v.6." McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1986, 1:368.

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology, and Other Works* (London, 1968), 237–258.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 242.

rather than external reality. The object of loss is hidden from view – “one cannot see clearly what has been lost.”⁴¹ Even if the melancholic can name his lost object, there is some part of the loss he experiences which remains unknown: “[the melancholic] knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him.” The melancholic symptoms resemble those of the mourner's, apart from “delusional expectations of punishment.”⁴² Yet in contrast to mourning, in which the work of detaching from the object one has lost comes to consciousness, “this path is blocked for the work of melancholia.”⁴³ Melancholia has an aspect of fixation, or obsession; the economy of mourning becomes disrupted, stalled. Here we can draw a tentative parallel to the interruption of mourning described in Jeremiah 16:5-9. Freud's work points to the ambivalences and repressions buried beneath the melancholic's grief, as well as the misdirections of these psychic processes. The melancholic's self-abasement, for example, may be a diverted aggression against a loved one. Freud's theory may teach us to read the vehement disavows of the sermons beyond their harsh arithmetic of crime and punishment, as records of hidden loss.

On the whole, the 1917 article judges melancholia as unhealthy. Freud speaks of the melancholic in pathologic terms: the melancholic's inward-turned grief has irrational and regressive elements, and the ego can become “diseased,” or one can “fall ill”⁴⁴ to melancholia. Yet in acknowledging the constitutive powers of identification, one of the primary mechanisms at work in melancholia, Freud opens the possibility of attributing generative powers to the melancholic condition. In recent decades, this more positive valence of melancholia as an imaginative capability has been emphasized in both psychological and literary theory.⁴⁵ For example, according to Giorgio Agamben “melancholy would not be so much the regressive reaction to the loss of the object as the imaginative capacity to make an unobtainable object appear as if lost.”⁴⁶ Agamben discusses the way the mechanisms of melancholia and disavowal form a “topology of the unreal,”⁴⁷ which is essentially the space for all cultural production. By allowing us to have emotional relationships with objects that are not actually there, we are able to “[enter] into relation with unreality.” This phantasmagoric space – the way we mourn, for example, for the death of literary characters who never existed, is a characteristic of the melancholic imagination.

⁴¹ Ibid., 244.

⁴² The delusions of the melancholic bear a striking resemblance to Deuteronomistic logic: he “expects to be cast out and punished...[and] extends his self-criticism back over the past; he declares that he was never any better.” Ibid., 245.

⁴³ Ibid., 256.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 249.

⁴⁵ Recent literature on melancholia connects Freud's clinical observations with literary traditions of melancholia, and especially to Benjaminian notions of loss. Judith Butler ties Freud's formulation of melancholia to Benjamin's treatment of the *Trauerspiel*: “In ‘The Origin of German Tragic Drama,’ Benjamin explains that a certain kind of loss emerges when established barriers begin to falter, suggesting that narrative functioned once as a way of containing loss.” Judith Butler, “Afterword: After Loss, What Then?,” in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 469. As I discussed in the introduction, Meltzer ties acedia and weakness to Benjamin's biography and reception. Françoise Meltzer, “Acedia and Melancholia,” in *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁴⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 20.

⁴⁷ Ibid., xviii.

Reading the Deuteronomistic sermons of Jeremiah along with Freud assumes that it is possible to apply a theory of individual psychology to a text.⁴⁸ However, to speak of melancholia in Jeremiah is not an attempt to psychoanalyze the individuals depicted in the text in the most diligent Viennese manner. Rather I wish to draw an analogy between the individual melancholic's intricate construction of a lost object and the way a text can preserve and create an ideal, even as it positions itself as having lost that ideal. This theoretical move from individual psychology to analysis of culture is part of Freud's work in such studies as *Totem and Taboo* and *Moses and Monotheism*. In reading, we are influenced by specters and shadows that we make real. This phantasmagoric space is also a way to understand the act of textual redaction that stitches together various fragments of different composition into one fabric. Often the resulting biblical text retains the seam lines, presenting a patchwork that we wish into a whole, which is certainly the case for the passage from Jeremiah to which I propose to turn.

Petition and Anti-petition in Jeremiah 14-15:4

The explicit evocation of Moses in the Jeremiah text is embedded in a heavily redacted passage sometimes referred to as "the great drought liturgy".⁴⁹ Rather than reading the comparison to Moses and Samuel in 15:1 on its own, it is important to consider the way this Deuteronomistic verse has been stitched together with older poetic oracles. The composite text contains a complex and ambiguous statement regarding intercession and the prophetic role that is quite different than the conventions of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history.

In what sense can chapters 14 -15:4 be read as one literary unit? The pericope is united by common imagery of drought and rain, the *leitwort* שלח ("sent") and the weaving together of multiple conditionals. It also contains structural parallels: two laments and petitions are followed by two denials of petitions by Yahweh. For these reasons Biblical scholars have often read the unit as one though it is comprised of a patchwork of smaller units from both the A and C layer, with different concerns, ideologies, and genres which have been redacted post-exile. Hence the seeming unity of the fragments is a redactional construction of a kind of fictional narrative. "The composition of the section has brought together a number of discrete units and given them the appearance of unity."⁵⁰

Though there are many shifts in voice, style, and subject matter, the smaller units are part of an overall structure, which helps build to a final Deuteronomistic statement against intercession.

Communal Lament (14:2-6)	Individual (Prophetic) Lament (14:17-18)
Communal Petition I (14:7-9)	Communal Petition II (14:19-22)
Sermon against Intercession I (14:10-16)	Sermon against Intercession II (15:1-4)

⁴⁸ Butler points to a way in which "loss [constitutes] social, political, and aesthetic relations, thereby overcoming the conventional understanding that 'loss' belongs to a purely psychological or psychoanalytic discourse." Butler, "Afterword: After Loss, What Then?," 467.

⁴⁹ Henning Reventlow, *Liturgie Und Prophetisches Ich Bei Jeremia.*, [1. Aufl. (Gütersloh): Gütersloher Verlagshaus G. Mohn, 1963). Bright refers to "The Great Drought." Bright, *Anchor Bible. Vol.21*, 97.

⁵⁰ Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant*, 307.

The chapter seems to be a composite of a number of A layer poetic oracles, which have been overlaid with Deuteronomistic prose, though the second set of lament and petition may have been composed in response to the first layer.

The communal lament that opens the pericope is probably the oldest of the units. Its pathos-filled description of a drought seems to have been composed as part of a liturgy for rain, though v.1 frames it as part of Jeremiah's prophecies, putting him in the role of intercessor.

אשר היה⁵¹ דבר־יהוה אל־ירמיהו על־דברי הבצרות: אבלה יהודה ושעריה אמללו קדרו לארץ וצוחת
ירושלם עלתה: ואדריהם שלחו צעיריהם⁵² למים באו על־גבים לא־מצאו מים שבו כליהם ריקם⁵³
: בעבור האדמה חתה כי לא־היה גשם בארץ בשו אכרים חפו ראשם: כי גם־אילת בשדה ילדה ועזוב
כי לא־היה דשא: ופראים עמדו על־שפים שאפו רוח⁵⁴ כלו עיניהם כ־איין עשב:

This which was the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah regarding the droughts:

Judah is⁵⁵ in mourning, her towns languish.

They grieve to the ground, and the wail of Jerusalem goes up.

Their noblemen send servants for water, they come upon cisterns,

Find no water, return with their vessels empty.

Because the earth is cracked, because there is no rain in the land

The farmers are ashamed, cover their heads

Even the hind in the field calves and abandons her fawn, for there is no grass

The wild asses stand in the high places, snuff the wind⁵⁶

Their eyes fail, for there is no grass (Jer 14:1-6).

The chapter begins with the description of a drought in a series of striking images that join the social to the natural world. The distress of the population and the distress of the animals unite in the figure of the mourning Judah. Misery over the drought is represented through mourning rituals – remaining close to the ground, wailing. The affect of the prolonged drought is curiously shame, perhaps over the misdeeds that have led to the drought. Various roles and structures of power are disrupted: the noblemen send their servants to get water, but they bring back empty vessels; the deer abandons her newborn; and the wild asses act like jackals and become blind. Even Judah is imagined as a mother unable to care for her satellite "towns."

⁵¹ LXX reads this somewhat convoluted grammar more simply as καὶ ἐγένετο – ויהי. The MT seems to represent better the strange temporality of the passage which reproduces an old cultic lament.

⁵² Reading with the Qere. Ketib reads: צעוריהם. 1/ confusion.

⁵³ MT plus: והכלמו והפו ראשם – "Humiliated and ashamed, they cover their heads," not attested in LXX – see discussion below.

⁵⁴ Reading with LXX. MT plus: כתנים, "like jackals." Consistent with the chapter, this is an MT expansion which is quite beautiful.

⁵⁵ Though the verbal tenses of the lament are in the perfect, they seem to be describing a situation in the present, so I have translated in the present tense.

⁵⁶ MT: "like jackals"

This passage seems to be a relatively early composition, judging by the rich poetic language and taut use of parallel lines.⁵⁷ Verse 2, for example, contains a chiasm contrasting Jerusalem and her towns. In the first parallel line, Judah/Jerusalem is in mourning (אבלה) and her towns languish (אמללה), implying that they have become like infertile women (cf 1 Sam 2:5). The metaphorical loss intensifies from verset A to verset B, from sorrow over death to an inability to bring forth life. The next line reverses the order of subjects: in verset A the towns darken, or literally become dirt colored. We can almost imagine the towns as immobile crouching female figures, desolate and silent. Verset B is comprised of an antithetical image: Jerusalem wails, and here the trajectory of mourning goes upward, toward the rainless sky, implying also an appeal to Yahweh, who is sometimes able to hear the cries of cities in misery.⁵⁸ The chiasm creates a choreographed tableau of a total and totalizing sense of loss.

The communal lament and petition acquire new meanings when they are juxtaposed with an account of war. In the context of the Jeremiah text, the prophet could be said to be ventriloquizing the people's voices, or adapting an older genre to his own didactic purposes.⁵⁹ In William McKane's words, "we are to suppose only a replica of the prayer uttered by a cultic intercessor in the context of the communal lament."⁶⁰ If we read this passage as "counter-liturgical"⁶¹ within a prophecy of rebuke, some of the descriptions take on an added valence. The noblemen's futile "sending" of their servants for water can be compared to the futile sending of the prophet to pray on behalf of the people during unavoidable catastrophe. As we will see, the root "send" (שלח) comes to function as a *leitwort* throughout the pericope. In addition, the Septuagint does not contain the first occurrence of the phrase "humiliated and ashamed, they cover their heads" in v.3. The LXX edition attributes shame to the farmers who cannot farm, but the MT also reads the noblemen as shamed. This multiplication of shame can be explained by a scribal dittography, but perhaps it also highlights the new context into which this description is read. The drought, a recurring problem in Judah, becomes overshadowed by the war in the rest of the chapter, which changes the way this fragment is read.

The third person descriptions in verses 1-6 give way to a first person plural address to Yahweh, continuous with the initial lament:

⁵⁷ My analysis of poetic parallelism is indebted to Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985). See chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of poetic parallelism and the history of its usage.

⁵⁸ Cf Gen 25:21, where Yahweh hears the cry of Sodom.

⁵⁹ According to Bright, "whether Jeremiah actually heard such litany recited in the temple on some national fast day, or whether he himself composed it and placed it in the mouth of the people, cannot be said." What he does not take into account is the possibility that a Deuteronomistic redactor added the framing verse. Bright, *Anchor Bible. Vol.21*, 102.

⁶⁰ McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1986, 1:319.

⁶¹ William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1986), 422.

אם־עונינו ענו בנו יהוה עשה למען שמך כ־רבו משובתינו לך חטאנו: מקוה ישראל מושיעו בעת צרה למה
תהיה כגר בארץ וכארה⁶² נטה ללון: למה תהיה כאיש נדהם⁶³ כגבור לא־יוכל להושיע ואתה בקרבנו יהוה
ושמך עלינו נקרא אל־תנחנו:

If our sins testify against us, Yahweh, act for the sake of your name
For our iniquities are great, we have sinned against you
Hope of Israel, its Savior in Distress-Time,
Why are you like a stranger in the land?
Like a guest, only turning aside for a night's rest?
Why are you like an astonished man?
Like a warrior unable to win?
Yet you are in our midst Yahweh, and your name is called upon us –
Do not desist from us (Jer 14:7-9).

Here too, we can read the petition on two levels, as a plea for rain and as the expression of national despair. As a petition for rain, the set of increasingly affective questions were meant to awaken the deity into response. The text raises the traditional questions of the individual lament.⁶⁴ Where is Yahweh? Why is he not helping the petitioner? The conditional of this petition urges Yahweh to act despite the sins of the people. In other words, though they may deserve the drought, Yahweh's special role as "מקוה ישראל," "the Hope of Israel" should supersede the punishment the people deserve. The honorific also puns with the secondary meaning of the root, which can refer to a collected mass such as a reservoir of water,⁶⁵ an apt way to call upon a deity with prayers for rain. The final lines can be imagined as spoken in the Jerusalem temple, the dwelling place of Yahweh: "You are in our midst." The location becomes more explicit in the second communal lament in the chapter, which names the כסא כבוד, "the seat of glory," a more direct reference to the Jerusalem temple. This lament, then, suggests that appeasement, petition, and intercession are possible. The *Sitz im Leben* of this lament could be cultic or liturgical: when the rain failed to come in Judah, a petition was uttered on the behalf of the nation by a priest or a temple prophet. McKane reads Jeremiah himself here in "a representative, intercessory role."⁶⁶

At the same time, the conventional lament at the time of drought has added pathos anticipating catastrophe. Why is Yahweh sleeping? Why is he not acting as the champion of his people? The catastrophe to befall sixth century Jerusalem – the two deportations, siege, and the burning of the city – brings the cult ideology of a local god, dwelling in Jerusalem and protecting it into serious question. The lament floats in the text unmarked: it is not set in any specific historical period. A liturgical setting implies normativity, a religious moment that returns again and again. Yet the unprecedented event of the catastrophe seems to break

⁶² For וְכָאֲרָה LXX seems to be reading "ὡς αὐτόχθων." Still ארה is a better parallel to גר, so I read with the MT.

⁶³ For MT נדהם LXX has ὑπεπν – probably נרדם. Thus, the variant is case of metathesis and ה/ר confusion. Reading with MT lectio difficilior.

⁶⁴ Cf Pss 3; 22.

⁶⁵ See Isaiah 22:11.

⁶⁶ McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1986, 1:319.

through this conventional lament, either because of the way it is echoed in the wider, exilic context of the text, or because the normativity of the lament is only a flimsy, imaginary normativity, retrojected from exile into a pre-exilic fantasy.

The first Deuteronomistic sermon reflects a break both in style and in relation to intercession.

כה־אמר יהוה לעם הזה כן אהבו לנוע רגליהם לא חשכו ויהוה לא רצם עתה יזכר עונם⁶⁷: ויאמר יהוה אלי אל־תתפלל בעד־העם הזה לטובה: כי יצמו אינני שמע אל־רנתם וכי יעלו עלה ומנחה אינני רצם כי בחרב וברעב ובדבר אנכי מכלה אותם: ואמר אהה אדני יהוה הנה הנבאים אמרים להם לא־תראו חרב ורעב לא־יהיה לכם כ־שלוש אמת אתן לכם במקום הזה: ויאמר יהוה אלי שקר הנבאים נבאים בשמי לא שלחתים ולא צויתים ולא דברתי אליהם חזון שקר וקסם ואליל⁶⁸ ותרמית⁶⁹ לבם המה מתנבאים לכם: לכן כה־אמר יהוה על־הנבאים הנבאים בשמי ואני לא־שלחתים והמה אמרים חרב ורעב לא יהיה בארץ הזאת בחרב וברעב יתמו הנבאים ההמה: והעם אשר־המה נבאים להם יהיו משלכים בחצות ירושלם מפני הרעב והחרב ואין מקבר להמה המה נשיהם ובניהם ובנתיהם ושפכתי עליהם את־רעתם:

Thus said Yahweh to this people: indeed they loved to wander, they did not spare their feet. So now Yahweh does not desire them. He will remember their iniquities. And Yahweh said to me: do not pray for the good of this people. If they were to fast I would not heed their cry, and if they were to offer sacrifices I would not desire them for I am going to exterminate them by sword, and by famine, and by disease. And I said, Ah, my lord Yahweh! Behold the prophets are telling them do not fear the sword, and you shall not have famine, for I will give your true peace in this place. And Yahweh said to me: Lies! These prophets prophesying in my name! I did not send them and I did not command them and I did not speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, magic-making, augury, and the deceit of their own heart.

Therefore, thus said Yahweh regarding the prophets prophesying in my name, though I have not sent them, who say there will be no sword or famine in this land. They will perish by sword and famine. And as for the people to whom these prophesize: they will be cast out on the outskirts of Jerusalem because of famine and sword with no one to bury them – them, their wives, and their sons and their daughters. And I will pour out their wickedness upon them (Jer 14:10-16).

The parallel lines of poetry in verses 1-9 have given way to an argument, a sermon in prose legalese. The rhetoric of the text is governed by the logic of *lex taliones*, cause and effect. The

⁶⁷ I read with LXX. MT adds: ויפקד חטאתם – "and punish their sins." This MT addition emphasizes punishment following sin, perhaps from post-exilic perspective.

⁶⁸ Reading with the Qere.

⁶⁹ Reading with the Qere.

people אהבו לנוע, "loved to wander" and thus Yahweh will abandon them. The prophets lie about sword and famine, therefore they will die by sword and famine. The concern with prophetic legitimacy echoes texts such as Deuteronomy 13 in its attempt to fix true and false prophecy as the institution became increasingly unstable.

Despite the variation in style, verses 10-16 seem written in response to 1-9. The image of the wandering deity of verses 1-9, who acts as a stranger or like a guest turning aside for the night, is answered and echoed by the image of the people who loved to wander. In an individual lament⁷⁰ the complaints and pleas of the speaker are followed by a reversal in which Yahweh goes to battle over his enemies and restores the speaker's fortunes; according to convention, the last segment of this kind of lament would contain thanksgiving and praise to Yahweh. Here, the communal petition is "answered" by the refusal of the petition. The ideology of this text is explicitly against any kind of cultic practice of petition – neither prophetic intercession, fasting, pleading, or sacrificing is deemed effective. Hence, Layer C of the Jeremiah text reinvents the petition genre as an anti-petition, which has become the location for loss of intercession.

Jeremiah complains about the false prophets who promise peace, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. These prophets preach the old paradigm: "do not fear the sword, and you shall not have famine, for I will give you true peace in this place" (14:13). It seems that in the pre-exilic imagination, both cult and security are inextricably tied to "this place" – i.e. Jerusalem, and its indestructibility. The references to Jerusalem should be read in reference to the cult theology, which took Yahweh's earthly abode as Jerusalem, making it forever indestructible. Psalms such as 46 and 48 can be traced back "to the age-old cultic traditions [of Jerusalem as] the city of God...with its God-king in the splendor of universal glorification."⁷¹ These pre-exilic psalms imagine Jerusalem and its temple as an everlasting fortress and sanctuary. For example, "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved" (Ps 46:6)⁷² or "in the city of Yahweh of Hosts/ in the city of our God/ God establish it forever" (Ps 48:9).⁷³ Pilgrimages, psalms and other cultic practices and sacrifices reinforced the belief that Yahweh's earthly abode was Jerusalem, which made it divinely defended and indestructible.

Yet the final destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE brought this belief into great cognitive dissonance. The old cultic assurance becomes a contended claim in the Jeremiah text. We can read the Deuteronomistic revision of the lament as an attempt to resolve this cognitive dissonance.⁷⁴ In a sense, the interdiction against intercession is also an attempt to resolve the cognitive dissonance resulting from the fall of Jerusalem; these sermons seem to be trying to explain how it is possible that Jerusalem got destroyed despite having a true prophet in its midst.

⁷⁰ In Psalm 22, for example, which begins with "Why have you forsaken me?" lament and petition turn to praise: for example, קהל אהללך, "I will tell your name to my brothers/in the midst of the congregation I will praise you" (22:23).

⁷¹ Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59: a Continental Commentary*, 1st Fortress Press ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 461.

⁷² אלהים בקרבה בל-תמוט

⁷³ בעיר-יהוה צבאות בעיר אלוהינו אלהים יכוננה עד-עולם

⁷⁴ This is essentially Carroll's argument. See especially Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*, New edition (XPRESS Reprints, 1996), 58.

The second set of lament-petition-sermon functions in a similar way to the first set. The petition in the first part is "answered" by an anti-petition. The explicit subject of the series is now the fall of Jerusalem, and the rhetoric of both the lament and the sermon increases in intensity. It may be that the oracles of vv.14-17-22 were composed later than the first set, as they express an exilic point of view, and may even function as liturgy during exile.⁷⁵

78 ואמרת אליהם את־הדבר הזה תרדנה עיני⁷⁶ דמעה לילה ויומם ואל־תדמינה כי שבר⁷⁷ נשברה⁷⁸
 בת־עמי מכה נחלה מאד: אִם־יִצְאֵתִי הַשָּׂדֶה וְהִנֵּה חֲלִיל־יַחֲרֵב וְאִם בְּאֵתִי הָעִיר וְהִנֵּה תַחֲלוּאֵי רֶעִב
 כִּי־גַם־נְבִיא גַם־כֹּהֵן סָחְרוּ אֶל־אֶרֶץ וְלֹא יָדְעוּ:

And say to them this oracle:

Let my eyes run with tears, day and night, let them not be silent
 For a wound has befallen Daughter-of-my-people,⁷⁹ a grievous blow.
 If I go out to the field – here! the dead by sword.
 If I come to the city – here! the famine afflicted.
 For prophet and priest wandered⁸⁰ about the land, had no knowledge
 (Jer 14: 17-18).

The role of mourning, which was attributed in vv. 2-9 to a vaguely personified Judah, is now given over in the MT to the prophet himself within an oracle. The "wail" of Jerusalem is now the voice of the prophet's tears (both "eye" and "tear" are feminine in Hebrew) that cannot be silent as they witness the horrors of war. The prophetic role here is not based on intercession, but rather on witnessing and publically keening over the catastrophe, a role usually reserved for women. Jeremiah's mourning over Daughter-Zion is part of a convention of laments of grief over a city, such as the Lament for the Fall of Uruk, or the Book of Lamentations. Though verses 17-18 can be read as a repetition of the lament of verses 1-6, they are related to the genre of lament over a city, which does not expect an "answer," as opposed to the individual lament, in which we expect complaint to be transformed to thanksgiving. As in the Book of Lamentations, this passage expresses a sense of despair about the possibility of communicating with Yahweh.

⁷⁵ See McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1986, 1:333.

⁷⁶ LXX has 2nd person pl. ἐπ' ὀφθαλμοῦς ὑμῶν, עיניכם, making the prophetic word an almost a vindictive call for sorrow. The MT in this case preserves the sense of the passage consistent with the first person in v.18.

⁷⁷ גדול is an MT plus.

⁷⁸ בתולת is an MT plus. See discussion below.

⁷⁹ MT version "For a *great* wound has befallen *Virgin*- Daughter-of-my-people." With the epitaph "Virgin-Daughter-of-my-People" the MT editors wanted to emphasize that Jerusalem has been truly violated for the first time; the language of this later edition becomes increasing hyperbolic. The MT version also slightly misreads the gradual intensification of the biblical parallelism from "wound" in verset A to "great blow" in verset B.

⁸⁰ סחרו The primary meaning of the verb seems to be going about in circles, though there may also be a secondary meaning related to trafficking – continuing on with business as usual, though without knowledge. Also on the basis of Syriac usage could mean "to beg". See William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah: Commentary on Jeremiah XXVI-LII* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 1996), 331.

The doubtful status of Jerusalem becomes tied to the now doubtful status of prophets, who are the conduit to Yahweh's will. This lament declares, "prophet and priest wandered about the land/ had no knowledge" (Jer 14:18). The prophetic office is destabilized and put to question in the landscape of war; the channel to the divine is blocked without a place. The Book of Lamentations, going further, actually outright condemns prophecy as an institution.⁸¹ In light of the catastrophe of 587, all prophets are judged as deceitful.

נביאיך חזו לך שוא ותפל...ויחזו לך משאות שוא ומדוחים

"Your prophets envisioned for you [Zion]/ illusion and lies/...and they prophesied to you oracles of delusion and deception" (Lam 2:14).

Adele Berlin reads the Book of Lamentations as trauma literature: "[it] does not look forward and does not look back, does not dwell on what went on before or will come after – its gaze is fixed directly on the event itself."⁸² A similar inability to look backwards or forwards is expressed in the use of conditionals in Jeremiah's lament. "If I go out to the field – here! the dead by sword,/If I come to the city – here! the famine afflicted." The apodosis of the conditional clauses is verb-less, giving the sense that the trauma is frozen, timeless. Though it echoes the contingency of a conditional, such as the conditional of verse 7, it actually negates the cause and effect that a conditional clause implies. The conditional clauses in verse 18, then, express a dark vision of the ceaseless grind of violence, pain and catastrophe. The lament suggests that the human condition is not dependent on prophetic, or more broadly, *any* human actions. Rather, the conditional language is proven ineffective – no matter where the speaker turns, he is confronted with corpses. This breakdown expresses fatalism, an obliteration of the possibility of agency in history and certainly of the possibility of prophetic intercession.

As in the first set of passages in vv.14:2-16, the lament is followed by a petition:

המאס מאסת את־יהודה אמ־בציון געלה נפשך מדוע הכיתנו ואין לנו מרפא קוה לשלום ואין טוב לעת⁸³ מרפא והנה בעתה: ידענו יהוה רשענו עון אבותינו כי חטאנו לך: אל־תנאץ⁸⁴ למען שמך אל־תנבל⁸⁵ כסא כבודך זכר אל־תפר בריתך אתנו: היש בהבלי הגוים מגשמים ואם־השמים יתנו רבבים הלא אתה־הוא⁸⁶ ונקוה־לך כִּי־אתה עשית את־כל־אלה:

⁸¹ "All the evidence combined points to a date in the 6th century, possibly as late as 520 but probably no later than about 540. The book was written, not during or immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem, but during the exilic period, possibly near or at its end." Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: a Commentary*, 1st ed. (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 35.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁸³ MT has ולעת, misreading the parallelism.

⁸⁴ LXX has *κόπασσον*, thus "do not desist for the sake of your name." The MT is doubtlessly more hyperbolic, but there is no good Hebrew Vorlage to explain this change.

⁸⁵ LXX has *μη ἀπολέσης*, probably for אל תחבל. Scribal error due to נ/ח confusion. I read in this case with MT *lectio difficilior*.

⁸⁶ Reading with LXX. MT adds here יהוה אלינו, glossing perhaps for liturgical use. Without it, the last set of questions dramatize calling upon the deity with the repetitions of the intimate *you*.

Have you utterly rejected Judah?
 Has Zion become abhorrent to you?
 Why did you hurt us, and there is no cure?
 We hoped for peace and there is naught,
 for a time of healing, and behold terror.
 Yahweh, we know our evil-doings, the sins of our fathers –
 we have sinned before you.
 For the sake of your name, do not despise.
 Do not defile the seat of your glory.
 Remember! Do not violate your covenant with us.
 Are there rain-makers among the false gods of the nations?
 Can the sky itself grant rains?
 Is this not you? And we look to you,
 for you have made all these things (Jer 14:19-22).

As in the first petition, we see a list of questions that implore Yahweh to act. The two petitions share common vocabulary based on the root קוה: v.19 speaks of the hope for peace (קוה לשלום) and in v. 22 the people look to Yahweh with hope (ונקוה לך). Both usages echo v.8, מקוה ישראל ("Savior of Israel"). The main image for war in this passage is a blow to the body. The people ask why they have been hit by Yahweh (מדוע הכתנו), which echoes the great blow Daughter-Zion sustained in v. 17 (מכה נחלה מאוד). Finally, the drought of vv.1-9 is echoed by a more abstract appeal to Yahweh as the bringer of rain in v. 22, suggesting a purposeful unity of images in the chapter made by a redactor. While this petition could also potentially function as a prayer for rain, its desperate appeal to Jerusalem and the covenant seems to reflect a dire national crisis.

The ideology that was previously hinted in vv.2-9 is made more explicit: Yahweh is enthroned in Jerusalem, and the relationship between Yahweh and his people is based on a covenant. As in the first petition, Yahweh's lack of response is caused by the sins of the people, but he is asked to supersede this logic of cause and effect based on confession of sins, reminder of the covenant and the avowal of belief in his superior powers. Though the passage is inflected by a heavy despair, it also continues to gesture to the possibility of effective intercession.

Finally, the second Deuteronomistic sermon commands the prophet once again against intercession.

ויאמר יהוה אלי אס־יעמד משה ושמואל⁸⁷ לפני אין נפשי אליהם הזה שלח מעל-פני ויצא: והיה
 כִּי־יאמרו אליך אנה נצא ואמרת אליהם כה־אמר יהוה אשר למות למות ואשר לחרב לחרב ואשר
 לרעב לרעב ואשר לשבי לשבי: ופקדתי עליהם ארבע משפחות נא־יהוה את־החרב להרג
 ואת־הכלבים לסחב ואת־עוף השמים ואת־בהמת הארץ לאכל ולהשחית: ונתתים לזועה לכל ממלכות
 הארץ בגלל מנשה בן־יחזקיהו מלך יהודה על אשר־עשה בירושלם:

⁸⁷ Septuagint A, the Alexandrine codex, contains the variant pair "Moses and Aaron." This is probably a hyper-correction to agree with Psalm 99:6 where Moses, Aaron, and Samuel appear together. Alfred Rahlfs, ed., *Septuaginta*, 1935, 680. See discussion below.

And Yahweh said to me: Even if Moses and Samuel stood before me my heart is not inclined to this people. Send them out from upon me and let them go. And when they say to you, where should we go? You should say to them, this is the oracle of Yahweh:

Those destined to death, to death
Those destined to sword, to sword
Those destined to famine, to famine
Those destined to captivity, to captivity⁸⁸

And I will visit four breeds of doom upon them, thus declares Yahweh. The sword to slay, the dogs to drag, the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and defile. And I will make them a horror to all the nations of the earth an account of Manasseh son of Hezekiah, King of Judah, on account of what he did in Jerusalem (Jer 15:1-4).

The refusal of petition in these verses echoes the refusal of vv. 14:11-12. Here too, the command seems to increase in intensity. Judah's punishment is expanded into a bleak dialogue between Yahweh and the people, then a dirge-like refrain, and finally a detailed and gruesome description of the punishment.

In addition to citing Moses by name, verse 15:1 also alludes to the Exodus narrative. Both Carroll and Schökel point out that this anti-petition scene echoes two significant verbs from the Exodus story: שלח ("sent"), which we have seen earlier in the pericope (14:3; 14:14; 14:15) and יצא ("go/let go").⁸⁹ However, when Yahweh tells Jeremiah, "send them out from upon me and let them go," Yahweh is not cast as the redeemer, but as the Pharaoh. Letting the people go does not mean sending them to liberty, but off to their terrible fate. The fate that the people are "sent off" also includes an abandonment of their bodies to wild animals who will desecrate their corpses. The lack of proper burial⁹⁰ is part of an entire system of refusal to mourn in a normative way expressed in the Book of Jeremiah, as discussed above. The prohibitions against intercession and against mourning can also be read as an interruption of the genres of lament and petition. These prose "refusals" interrupt the beautiful poetry of the oracles.

This final unit of "the great drought liturgy" is also concerned with providing a reason for the severe punishment. Attempting to line up the narrative of history by causes and effects is typical of Deuteronomistic ideology, but the ensuing arguments sometimes leave ragged edges. Yahweh's cruel wrath is cast as retribution against the Manasseh son of Hezekiah, described in II Kings 21:1-18. Yet while Manasseh was a terrible king according to Deuteronomistic standards, he still ruled for a stable fifty five years. Here, the precise arithmetic of catastrophe is difficult to reconcile with the messiness of history. In this verse

⁸⁸ This line may have been added post-exile to refer to the Babylonian captivity.

⁸⁹ "Both verbs are repeated with a *Leitwort* function in the Yahwist, Elohist, and Priestly layers of the unified narration." Schökel and Holm, *The Literary Language of the Bible*, 36.

⁹⁰ Also see the first sermon in the MT: ואין מקבר להמה, "there will be no one to bury them" (14:16).

the Deuteronomists settle the score with Manasseh, lining up his sins with a punishment imposed more than fifty years after his death.⁹¹

Yet while a precise reason for war and captivity is given in 15:4, the Deuteronomistic sermons as a whole create an over-determined sense of catastrophe. Other passages from the C layer provide additional causes for punishment, such as the entire nation's idolatry: "they loved to wander, and did not spare their feet" (14:10). The people are also blamed for obeying false prophets in 14:16. The oracle against false prophets uses a characteristic rhetorical structure: it begins with a description of the prophet's evil deeds (14:14) and then follows their punishment. The prophets say "do not fear the sword or hunger" *therefore*, they themselves will die by sword and hunger. The way of the world turns on לכן – "therefore," or "ergo."⁹² Other sermons in Jeremiah provide yet another reason for punishment: the people did not heed Yahweh's messengers, כל עבדי הנביאים, "my servants, the prophets," (7:26) who were sent to warn the people of their sinful course from the time of the Exodus from Egypt. The Deuteronomist interventions uphold a retrospective logic that explains and justifies history, based on the conditions of the covenant. In order to explain catastrophe the Deuteronomists must look backwards and forwards, and tell a comprehensive narrative of Israelite and Judean history.⁹³

This covenant history appears in a compact form in 7:25-26:

למן-היום אשר יצאו אבותיהם⁹⁴ מארץ מצרים עד היום הזה ואשלח אליהם⁹⁵ את-כל-עבדי הנביאים
יום השכם ושלה: ולוא שמעו אלי ולא הטו את-אזנם ויקשו את-ערפם הרעו מאבותם:

From the day that their fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day I have sent to them all my servants the prophets, day after day of sending; but they did not listen to me, and did not give heed and stiffened their necks – they did worse than their fathers.

This is a narrative of how the people did not fulfill the conditions Yahweh set before them, and therefore deserve their terrible fate. However, in order to make a case for this seemingly perfect moral machine of divine retribution, the Deuteronomists must posit the theoretical possibility of a redemptive turn of events brought on by Yahweh's servants, the prophets, who could have convinced the people to stay on Yahweh's straight path. To create a narrative that would explain catastrophe as moral failure, the Deuteronomists must recreate the phantasmagoric possibility of a success. Moses, or a successful prophet in his image, becomes a recurring figure in DtrH and Deutero- Jeremiah precisely because he epitomizes this possibility. In the following pages, I will claim that this preservation of a redemptive possibility within a text concerned with the aftermath of catastrophe is melancholic in form;

⁹¹ The Chronicler goes a step further in fixing the messiness (and injustice) of history: in 2 Chr 33, Manasseh has a conversion experience and repents of his evil deeds.

⁹² See also Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 180–181.

⁹³ In a sense, this is a way of explaining the entire project of the Deuteronomistic historians, who created a comprehensive history from Joshua to the destruction of Jerusalem drawing upon oral traditions, citations, and redactions— i.e. The Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings.

⁹⁴ The MT text is in the 2nd person plural, אבותיכם. I correct along with LXX to the 3rd person here and for אליכם. The entire chapter confusingly oscillates between 2nd and 3rd plural.

⁹⁵ See note above.

the phantasmagoric ideal of the intercessor, or the "strong prophet," becomes a melancholic object within the redacted text.

In Deuteronomistic ideology both the call to repentance and prophetic intercession structure the narrative of Israelite and Judean history. In his role of intercessor the prophet stands as a bulwark against the forces of history, and is able to reverse the negative consequences yet to come. In this way "the great drought liturgy," and its complex preoccupation with intercession functions as a thematic counterpoint to the complaints against the recurring lack of attention to Yahweh's messengers, the true prophets.

Let us review the possible ideologies of intercession discussed thus far. The first petition regarding the drought suggests that appeasement, petition, and intercession are possible, while the superscription in v.1 specifically puts the words of the people in the prophet's mouth. This mantic power is expanded and modified in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History, as intercession becomes central to the prophetic role. According to Carroll, "This was a process of transforming the primitive magic of early prophecy into an account of the rational activity of the prophet as a spokesman of Yahweh."⁹⁶ In a number of texts that we could regard as trauma literature, the fall of Jerusalem leads to an expression of despair that regards the channels to intercession as blocked.⁹⁷ If Yahweh has "utterly rejected Zion" (14:18), then the channel to turn back divine wrath is irrevocably lost.⁹⁸ The twice repeated interdictions against intercession could reflect a traumatized sensibility, a despair of action. Yet they can also be read as part of a complex act of rescue and generativity. The Deuteronomistic redactors of Jeremiah seem to be attempting to regulate and narrow the prophetic office, while at the same time rescuing its authority in the face of opposition, doubt, instability, and accusations of failure. These interdictions rewrite the Jeremiah oracles into a new kind of text, which both preserves and transforms prophetic failure.

While the Deuteronomistic redactor may be attempting to impose some order on an "untidy" collection of oracles, present Jeremiah as a "Mosaic" prophet and regulate history, giving precisely calibrated reasons for the punishment of Judah, the resulting layered text and over-determined history create a prophetic power that is anything but orderly. When the Deuteronomists deny Jeremiah an interceding role, he no longer has "mantic powers." He cannot pray on behalf of the people, bring about rain, or stop the exile. But this prophetic failure is generative; as opposed to the self-contained lament poetry of Lamentations, the disjunctive fragments of Jeremiah transform the prophet into public lamenter, a witness, and a teacher. Furthermore, they contain a prophetic power not centered in "strong" transformation and redemption.

On Conditions and the Great Drought Liturgy

The achievement of this redacted text is to fold together the failure of prophetic intercession together with its paradoxical rescue. The resulting ideological complexity is also

⁹⁶ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 59.

⁹⁷ Cf also my discussion of the end of prophecy in Rabbinic literature in Chapter 4.

⁹⁸ For a declarative statement see 7:29b.

mirrored in the grammar of the passage, specifically in the use of conditionals, marked by the particle **אם**, "if" or "even if" which functions as a *leitwort*. In a sense, the various use of conditions in "the great liturgy" structures the different ways of understanding human agency in history. Just as a verse in the A layer may "trigger" a new text in the C layer, this composite text is formed by the accretion of conditional structures. The conditional statement of 15:1 appears against the background of a text replete with conditionals. Thus the Deuteronomists rewrite the theological possibilities and impossibilities of the text through this grammatical pattern. As opposed to declarative sentences, such as the oracle of punishment in 15:2, in which those that are destined to death will unequivocally die, conditional statements create the imagination of possibilities, alternatives, paths not taken.

The conditional in the first petition imagines an alternative to cold justice encapsulated by the name of Yahweh: **אם-עוֹנֵינוּ עָנוּ בְנוּ יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה לַמַּעַן שְׁמֶךָ**, "if our sins testify against us, act for the sake of your name" (14:7). Almost in response, the first Deuteronomistic sermon poses a negative conditional with the particle **כִּי** that shuts down the possibility of redemption with punishing logic, though it imagines a penitent people going to extremes to gain Yahweh's favor: **כִּי יִצְמוּ אִינֵי שְׁמַע אֶל-רִנָּתָם וְכִי יַעֲלוּ עֲלֵהּ וּמְנַחָה אִינֵי רָצָם**, "if they were to fast I would not heed their cry, and if they were to offer sacrifices I would not desire them" (14:12). The prophetic lament (14:17-19) also contains two conditions, but as discussed above, these conditionals present the grim images of corpses and diseased bodies that negate action by an agent. The sentences lack verbs, and lack even the imagination of alternative possibilities.

The Deuteronomistic use of the conditional in this second sermon also works negatively.

אם-יֵעַמֵּד מֹשֶׁה וְשַׁמּוּאֵל לִפְנֵי אֵין נִפְשֵׁי אֶל-הָעָם הַזֶּה שְׁלַח מֵעַל-פָּנָי וַיִּצְאוּ

[Even] if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart is not inclined to this people. Send them out from upon me and let them go (Jer 15:1).

This Deuteronomistic oracle looks like a conditional, but is actually in the indicative mode rather than the subjunctive mode. It is a strong statement of refusal masquerading as a conditional, a "concessive conditional."⁹⁹ Its structure is: even if X then Y. Y is always true, no matter what X you put in the category. The concessive conditional raises the most extreme case of possible appeasement only to negate it absolutely.

The structure of the conditional, which in fact has no condition to it at all, and the echo of the exodus scene, which also evokes the possibility of changing a "hard heart," both create a kind of phantom conditional, a memory, or fantasy of transformation. This phantom conditional is metonymic of the way the C layer echoes an older prophetic gesture, i.e. interdiction, in the face of a historical crisis. Despite the repetition of the gesture, there is no possibility of change, because catastrophe has already occurred as the text is written after exile. While on the one hand this sermonic prose shuts down the possibility of petition, it also maintains and reconstructs an echo of it in its rhetoric. Though the text itself is against

⁹⁹ Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E Kautzsch and A. F Cowley, 2nd English ed., revised in accordance with the 28th German ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 494.

petition, it constructs a fantasy of an earlier age in which the conditional was a true conditional – in which it was possible to find the one way to unlock the hard heart of the ruler.

Furthermore, this phantom conditional also reproduces the fictional line of "Mosaic" prophets typical to Deuteronomistic texts, which is also constructed in Jeremiah 1. While explicitly Jeremiah is characterized as *unlike* Moses and Samuel, this passage implies that had his petition taken place in a more fortuitous time, then Jeremiah too would be able to pray on behalf of the people. Thus, his status as a true Mosaic prophet is preserved even while intercession and redemption is denied. The MT version of "Moses and Samuel" gives us a snapshot of the C layer in which both Moses and Samuel were understood as important prophetic figures. Given the Deuteronomistic ambivalence about monarchy, perhaps Moses and Samuel are meant to mark the beginning and end of the heroic era of prophecy before the monarchy. Pairing them together valorizes the Deuteronomistic view of the Mosaic prophet as part of line of tradition. In the Septuagint A variant, Aaron functions as loyal sidekick to Moses, who has become a singular prophetic figure.¹⁰⁰

According to Freud, the generative powers of the melancholic position are based on an act of rescue: "So by taking flight into the ego love escapes extinction."¹⁰¹ The melancholic withdrawal from the object "renders its object inaccessible to itself in the desperate attempt to protect itself from the loss of the object and to adhere to it at least in its absence."¹⁰² In other words, the melancholic structure is a way of preserving the object, in this case the notion of "strong prophecy," or "Mosaic prophecy," through mourning its loss. According to the text's logic, if strong prophecy once existed, even in a distant, unreachable past, its reality cannot be denied. Thus strong prophecy is preserved in Deutero-Jeremiah as a phantom possibility in order to save the entire prophetic enterprise. Following melancholia theory we could say that the refusal to mourn successfully is motivated by a paradoxical attempt to protect the prophetic text from total failure.

The heroic figures of Moses and Samuel, or "Mosaic Prophecy" as an institution have become the lost objects phantasmagorically created in the redacted text. Melancholia theory, especially in recent decades, emphasizes the agency and creativity of the melancholic subject. The pathos of loss, as Judith Butler puts it, is "oddly fecund, paradoxically productive."¹⁰³ Moses and Samuel are distanced in order to protect the possibility of "strong prophecy." Here lies the generative power of melancholia: while seemingly pointing to the loss of prophetic intercession, the text imagines, generates, and creates the prophet as intercessor in a prophetic lineage. Beyond the preservation of prophetic ideology in the sixth century BCE, I contend that this act of rescue has wide ranging cultural implications for considering trauma and agency. My discussion of the reception of prophecy in modern poetry demonstrates the generative powers of loss, or what I call weak prophecy. The notion of intercession that is constituted by these texts is also a drive for human agency in history, for the possibility of action in the face of trauma and rupture.

¹⁰⁰ See earlier note.

¹⁰¹ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 256.

¹⁰² Agamben, *Stanzas*, 20.

¹⁰³ Butler, "Afterword: After Loss, What Then?," 468.

Jeremiah in the Line of Prophets

Chapter 1 is one of the most important chapters for considering Jeremiah's position, both in relation to Moses and prophetic lineage, and in relation to what we could call the historiographical-theological questions of the text. At the same time that the chapter establishes Jeremiah's unique authority, it also fashions Jeremiah as a prophet in the shadow of Mosaic and Deuteronomistic leaders. The chapter thematizes beginnings: it frames the entire book and narrates Jeremiah's initial call to prophecy. At the same time, it also provides an image for the beginning of הרעה, "the evil" (1:14) that culminated in גלות ירושלים "the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month" (1:3). There is a constant interplay in this chapter, as in the book as a whole, between the destiny of the prophet and the destiny of the nation. Thus, the complex relationship between what is primary and secondary in the chapter in regards to lineage and the chronology of Jeremiah's life also reflects an anxiety over the causes and effects of national history.

The notion of lineage, which includes the transmission of wisdom and authority tradition from father to son, is an important feature of Deuteronomistic ideology. Weinfeld calls attention to "the constant emphasis on the educational role of the father"¹⁰⁴ as characteristic of the pedagogical address of the Book of Deuteronomy. This didactic line of transmission and tradition, going from father to son, is a recurring image in the book of Deuteronomy, from the injunction to discipline a rebellious son (Deut 21:18-22) to the call of שמע,¹⁰⁵ the "pedagogical expression with which the instructor or preacher generally begins his address."¹⁰⁶ The didactic tone of the father-teacher, which appears in Deuteronomy, is mirrored by the attempt to order history under the sign of the father in the Deuteronomistic History. The history is intent on proving how each event in the time of the fathers leads to the catastrophe of the sons in an unbroken chain of causative lineage. In Jeremiah 1, as I will show, questions of lineage and questions of history are intertwined.

While Chapter 1 is about beginnings and origins, it is not a text which is easily dated. It does not seem to have a kernel of authentic material that can be traced back to the poetic A layer of Jeremianic prophecy; rather the overview it presents of Jeremiah's life and mission seems to have been composed to frame an already existent corpus. Thus, we cannot rely here on an interpretive strategy which separates the text into the classic strata identified by Duham and Mowinkel. Rather, the chapter contains a patchwork of introductory material that reflects a few different stages of the composition of the book. The superscription of vv.1-3 functions as a heading for what seems like an earlier iteration of the book containing chapters 1-25,¹⁰⁷ while the commission in vv.4-10 contains a mission to "the nations" which reflects a longer book including the oracles against the nations in chapters 46-51 in the MT.¹⁰⁸ Because of Jeremiah's mission to "the nations," Carroll dates the commission as exilic

¹⁰⁴ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 305.

¹⁰⁵ See Deut 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 33:7.

¹⁰⁶ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 305.

¹⁰⁷ According to Robert Carroll, who follows Thiel, "the form here provides closure with 25.1-3 and may be regarded as a post-Deuteronomistic editorial introduction to the book of Jeremiah." Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 90. McKane reads the superscription as a frame for 1-39.

¹⁰⁸ In LXX the oracles come after 25:13 and follow a different order. See Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible*, 384.

or post-exilic: "in the light of the catastrophe of 587, any introduction to the book of Jeremiah would need to appeal to those who suffered the most by the fall of Jerusalem and in order to do that must address itself to the contemporary context of such social groups."¹⁰⁹ In other words, this revised mission expands Jeremiah's prophecies from rebuke of Judah to the consoling message implicit in oracles of destruction against Judah's enemies and oppressors.

Jeremiah's "lessons" regarding the almond branch and the boiling-over pot in vv. 11-16 are also difficult to date. The prophecy of immanent destruction from the North in v.13 may have originally been addressed to the historical enemies of Judah,¹¹⁰ while 15b could be read as an apocalyptic gathering of mythological enemies. At the same time, it also can be read as a prophecy of rebuke and doom to the Judeans themselves, who are castigated as idolaters in v.16b and as portrayed as Jeremiah's enemies.

Both Carroll and McKane remark on the atypical nature of the chapter: McKane points to a stylistic "unevenness" in the call narrative that stems from a "concern to do justice to the contents of the Book of Jeremiah."¹¹¹ With some frustration, Carroll asserts that "remarkably little of the tradition is reflected in the prologue."¹¹² Rather than searching for the kernel, or the core of the chapter, it is better to read it as a pastiche of prophetic vocabulary and conventions. Though the superscription and the commission are based on different ideologies and aesthetical approaches, they both reveal an anxiety about time, transmission and lineage in a time of catastrophe.

We turn first to the superscription in vv.1-3:

דברי ירמיהו¹¹³ בן־חלקיהו מן־הכהנים אשר בענתות בארץ בנימן: אשר היה דבר־יהוה אליו בימי
יאשיהו בן־אמון מלך יהודה בשלש־עשרה שנה למלכו: ויהי בימי יהויקים בן־יאשיהו מלך יהודה
עד־¹¹⁴ עשתי עשרה שנה לצדקיהו בן־יאשיהו מלך יהודה עד־גלות ירושלם בחדש החמישי:

The words of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: that was the word of Yahweh to him in the days of Josiah son of Amon the king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his rule. It also came in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, the king of Judah, until the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

¹⁰⁹ Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 96.

¹¹⁰ See *Ibid.*, 106.

¹¹¹ McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 1986, 1:24.

¹¹² Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 111.

¹¹³ LXX reads τὸ expresses a different convention for beginning prophetic books, which here duplicates v.2 unnecessarily.

¹¹⁴ MT plus: ׀, "end" missing in LXX. Perhaps Edition II reflects a more final view of Judean temporality and exile.

This superscription attempts to impose order on chaotic events. It depicts Jeremiah's career in relation to a line of Judean kings, seemingly establishing him within normative Judean history and the structures of monarchical authority. However, a close reading of the superscription reveals the instabilities and gaps this narration must cover over. It begins with Jeremiah's own lineage - his father's name, as well as his lineage "from the priests at Anathoth" and the tribal affiliation with Benjamin. At the same time, Jeremiah's life as prophet is represented alongside a line of kings: Josiah son of Amon, Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, and Zedekiah, also son of Josiah. These dual lines of lineage suggest the continuity of father to son. The inherited roles of priest and king connote a continuous social fabric of inherited patriarchal traditions, knowledge and power.¹¹⁵

Generally, prophetic superscriptions mark the peculiar genre of the prophetic narratives and oracles: the strange and fabulous is firmly anchored in history, often dated by the calendar of kings.¹¹⁶ Yet superscription of Jeremiah is noticeably long in comparison to the superscriptions of other prophetic books, perhaps because it both does the regular work of the prophetic superscription, but is also the record of problem. With exile on the near horizon, fixing events "in history" becomes more problematic – as the calendar itself becomes unmoored. Thus, the end of Jeremiah's ministry is marked by dual calendars: time is counted by the old system, the lineage of Judean kings, but it is also marked by the catastrophic historical event of the exile of Jerusalem. The doubling of the preposition, **עד**, "until," in v.3 reveals a kind of stutter in the text in bridging the distance between these two calendars. Hence, the conventional superscription sets up a tension between normative historical time, counted by the succession of monarchs, and disrupted time – between inherited roles and the complete disruption and transformation of social roles due to catastrophe and exile.

Though the superscription seems at first glance to convey a continuity of priests and kings, a closer look at the history behind the dry facts reveals the fissures in continuity. Despite the seeming authority Jeremiah gains from being from a line of priests at Anathoth, the allusion to Anathoth also anticipates the upcoming national exile, as Abiathar the priest was banished to Anathoth from Shiloh by Solomon after he aided the rebellion of his older brother, Adonijah, against the king.¹¹⁷ According to the Deuteronomistic history, Abiathar's banishment is a part of the fulfillment of the word of Yahweh, who promised dynastic punishment for the sons of Eli.¹¹⁸ In addition to exile and banishment, then, this back-story alludes to an interrupted lineage, as the sons of Eli are replaced in the tabernacle work by Samuel.

The superscription reveals a tension between the messy and terrible events of history and the attempt to frame history and use it to create structures of authority. While listing the last kings of Judah as the backdrop to Jeremiah's ministry, the superscription also

¹¹⁵ "The association of the speaker named in the titular introduction with the reigns of specific kings is conventional, and reflects the Deuteronomistic presentation of prophecy and monarchy as twin institutions in the history of Israel." Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 92.

¹¹⁶ "The way in which the prophets give the exact time at which they received certain revelations, dating them by events in the historical and political world, and thereby emphasizing their character as real historical events, has no parallel in any other religion." Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper, 1962), 363.

¹¹⁷ See 1 Kgs 2:26-27.

¹¹⁸ See 1 Kgs 2:27.

erases two of the kings recorded in 2 Kings, smoothing out a more complicated history. The superscription lists Josiah as king, and his sons Jehoiakim, and later Zedekiah, who succeeded him. Two other kings listed in the 2 Kings are left out: Jehoahaz, the first of Josiah's sons to ascend to the throne and Jehoiakin, son of Jehoiakim, both of whom ruled for only three months. According to the Book of Kings, the last kings of Judah came to power in a series of violent breaks in lineage; as opposed to a Deuteronomistic ideal of an orderly succession of fathers and obedient sons, the sons of Judean kings tend to dramatically reverse their fathers' projects. For example, Josiah, who is the ultimate emblem of Judean kingship in Deuteronomistic ideology, stands in contrast to his father, Amon, who was killed in a slave rebellion after reigning for a mere two years. After Josiah, the institution of kingship became destabilized, as various powers attempted to seize control of the throne. Rather than smooth line inheritance that goes from father to son, the kingship moves horizontally, between the sons of Josiah, and back from Josiah's grandson, Jehoiakin, to Zedekiah, his uncle. Perhaps the most final symbolic rupture of the line of fathers and sons is the slaughter of Zedekiah's sons before Zedekiah by the Babylonians (2 Kgs 25:7).

The superscription presents a somewhat tidied-up version of the lineage of kings upon which depends the stability of the kingdom. The commission that follows the superscription uses a different strategy for creating authority for the figure of Jeremiah. Rather than linking his position to Judean monarchs, the commission constructs a prophetic lineage that can supersede the father-son transmission, and the hierarchical structures of pre-exilic Judean society. It suggests that in addition to monarchial and priestly lineage, there is a prophetic lineage that exists alongside kings and priests, or perhaps supersedes them.¹¹⁹ As I will show, the hyperbole of the chapter attempts to bolster Jeremiah's authority, while at the same time revealing the instability of the prophetic position in the time of exile. Though Moses is not mentioned by name, there are a number of elements which hint at his phantom presence as Jeremiah's prophetic "ancestor," suggesting a prophetic lineage to replace the lost stability of the line of Judean monarchs.

The commission in vv.4-10 seems to "restart the program" of the prophetic book, functioning as an alternative opening:

ויהי דבר־יהוה אלי לאמר: בטֶרם אֶצְרֶךָ ¹²⁰ בִּבְטֶן יִדְעֶתִיךָ וּבִטְרָם תֵּצֵא מִרַחֵם הַקִּדְשֶׁתִיךָ נִבְיָא לְגוֹיִם
 נִתְתִּיךָ: וְאָמַר אֵהָא אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הִנֵּה לֹא־יִדְעֵתִי דָבָר כִּי־נִעַר אֲנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי אֶל־תֹּאמַר כִּי־נִעַר
 אֲנִי כִּי־עַל־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁלַחְךָ תֵּלֵךְ וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶךָ תִּדְבֹר: אֶל־תִּירָא מִפְּנֵיהֶם כִּי־אֵתָךְ אֲנִי לְהַצִּלְךָ

¹¹⁹ Carroll acknowledges the possibility of the supersession of the institution of kingship by prophecy, though he claims, perhaps because prophecy too was fated to end, that "it is a moot point whether in the absence of the monarchy after 587 the commissioning of Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations is a replacement of kingship with prophecy." Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 98. See also Baltzer, who notes a basic competition between the office of prophet and king and a tendency to diminish the human king in the classical prophets. See Klaus Baltzer, "Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet," *The Harvard Theological Review* 61, no. 4 (1968): 567–581.

¹²⁰ Qere reads אֶצְרֶךָ from the root יִצַר and Ketib formed from צוּר, "made" or "fashioned" respectively. Reading with Qere, *lectio difficilior*.

¹²¹ MT dropped כִּי due to homeoteleuton. Reading with LXX.

נאם־יהוה: וישלח יהוה את־ידו אלי¹²² ויגע על־פי ויאמר יהוה אלי הנה נתתי דברי בפיך: ראה הפקדתך היום הזה על־הגוים ועל־הממלכות לנתוש ולנתוץ ולהאביד ולהרוס לבנות ולנטוע:

Now the word of Yahweh came to me:
Before I formed you in the belly I knew you
and before you left the womb I consecrated you.
I made you a prophet to the nations.
Then I said,
Ah Lord Yahweh, behold I do not know speaking for I am only a youth.
And Yahweh said to me, do not say "for I am only a youth"
but go to all I send you to,
and everything that I will command you – speak.
Do not fear them
for I am with you to save you.
An oracle of Yahweh.
Then Yahweh reached¹²³ his hand to me and touched my mouth.
And Yahweh said to me, behold, I have put my words in your mouth.
See, I have appointed you on this day over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and demolish,
to destroy and overthrow,¹²⁴
to build and to plant (Jer 1:4-10).

Jeremiah's commission in vv. 4-10 is given to him when he is a "youth," but it seems to echo a previous divine act from before Jeremiah's birth, making this call only a repetition of an earlier call. The text creates an echo effect; we could call it prophetic *déjà-vu*. At the time in which Jeremiah receives his call to prophecy, he is not answering a call. He has been here before. This echo is constructed around a gap, a previous commission scene, some missing knowledge.¹²⁵ As opposed to the lines of succession presented in the superscription, the parallel verses of the commission set up a chronological paradox. How can a prophet be commissioned before being "formed"? If prophetic calls are meant to be answered, Jeremiah's call to prophecy is impossible – he could not answer it because he did not yet exist. He could not be "consecrated," or set apart because he was still completely united with and depended on his mother's body.

This commission, then, disrupts the historical temporality of cause and effect, of gestation and birth. It functions according to a different temporality from that of the linearity of fathers and sons. Yahweh's call disrupts linear time, lineage time. Lineage supposes initiation: fathers are supposed to teach their sons at the right time. But here the "initiation" occurs before birth; Yahweh reaches into and beyond a pregnant woman's belly to create it. The knowledge of Yahweh is not the traditional knowledge passed from father to son as in Deuteronomy. Knowledge of Yahweh, this text suggests, supersedes tradition. It is not taught through methods of repetition, dictation or memorization; rather, it is almost

¹²² LXX again with a fuller version: *πρός με*, "to me," which makes more sense with the verb.

¹²³ Here, as in Jer 14-15:1-4, the verb "reach" or "send" (*שלח*) is significant.

¹²⁴ Probably this extra pair of infinitives has been added to the original chiasm.

¹²⁵ Cf the theory of recollection in Plato's *Meno*.

erotically inserted into Jeremiah's mouth. In the words of Geoffrey Hartman, "the word that knew him before he was conceived has displaced father and mother as begetter."¹²⁶

On the one hand, this divine intervention seems to reinforce patriarchal structure of powers, positing Yahweh as the greatest of father figures, whose initiation supersedes gestation and birth from the female body. On the other hand, by disrupting linear chronology the initiation suggests a traumatic or miraculous rupture in the patriarchal transmission of knowledge, power and tradition. In the same way, the allusions to powerful predecessors such as Moses bolster prophetic authority, while at the same time the hyperbole of the rhetoric bares the anxieties that motivate its composition.

Jeremiah's commission scene seems to suggest a previous moment of initiation for Jeremiah, but its language also recalls other call narratives, positioning Jeremiah in a line of transmission. In fact, as Norman Habel points out, Jeremiah's commission functions within the conventions of call narratives, similarly to the Elohist version of Moses' call in Exodus 3 and the call of charismatic leaders, such as Gideon in Judges 6: 11b-17.¹²⁷ Habel concludes that the parallels between the call narratives point to a pre-literary form, with "associated traditions."¹²⁸ The particular similarity between Exodus 3-4, Judges 6, Jeremiah 1, and Deuteronomy 18, however, can also point to common literary influence by Deuteronomistic editing. In contrast to reading the commission in line with what Holladay might call lower chronology, "the call form is designed to be preached or read."¹²⁹ Also against autobiography, Baltzer also points out that call narratives are meant to vindicate and legitimize a prophet in office.¹³⁰

To summarize Habel's concise argument, conventional call narratives include divine confrontation, introductory word, commission, objection, reassurance, and a sign that further motivates and inspires the prophet. Thus, Jeremiah's objection to the commission in v. 6 is formulaic, and echoes both Gideon's and Moses' objections.

ואמר אהה אדני הנה לא-ידעתי דבר כי-נער אנכי

Ah, *Yahweh* Elohim, behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am a youth.

Moses' commission in Exod 4:10 also contains a statement of refusal based on an inability to speak:

לא איש דברים אנכי גם מתמול גם משלשם גם מאז דברך אל-עבדך

I have never been a man of speaking, not in the past and not since you have spoken to your servant.

¹²⁶ Geoffrey Hartman, "The Poetics of Prophecy: Jeremiah," in *The Bible*. ed. Harold Bloom. (Chelsea House Publications, 2000), 218.

¹²⁷ N. Habel, "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *ZAW* 77 (1965): 297-323.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 306.

¹³⁰ Baltzer, "Considerations Regarding the Office and Calling of the Prophet," 568.

While we could read the speech problems of both Jeremiah and Moses as part of their autobiographical portrait, these problems can also be read as an expression of a Deuteronomistic ideal. As Helen Kenik points out, “for the prophet to be an effective spokesman for Yahweh, he must be utterly dependent and trusting; he must speak the word that is given to him and not his own thoughts.”¹³¹

By characterizing Jeremiah as a *na`ar*, a youth, Jeremiah 1 evokes another prophet called as a *na`ar*: Samuel, an ideal prophet who unites political and religious power in the Deuteronomistic history, already mentioned in relation to Jeremiah in 15:1. The word *na`ar* is a *leitwort* in Samuel’s commission, described in 1 Samuel 2–3.¹³² Samuel is called by Yahweh when he is a *na`ar* serving Eli, and this youthful commission seems to guarantee his innocent loyalty to Yahweh. He grows up under the supervision of Yahweh (1 Sam 3:19), and “all of Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of Yahweh.” As in the case of Samuel, though being young may negatively affect Jeremiah’s rhetorical power, it also establishes a kind of authority, as he comes to the office of prophecy unsullied.¹³³

After the formulaic objection, according to Habel, comes a formulaic reassurance such as Jer 1:9: “הנה נתתי דברי בפִּיךָ,” (“Behold, I have set my words in your mouth.”) The language here seems to be directly patterned after Exod 4:12, when Yahweh says to Moses: “ואנכי אהיה עם-פִּיךָ,” (“And I will be with your mouth.”) Both prophets claim to have difficulty with speech, and both prophets are reassured that divine inspiration is to be located in their mouth. There is a further intertextuality between Jeremiah 1, Exodus 3-4, and Deuteronomy 18, as many exegetes have pointed out. Yahweh promises to raise up a prophet like Moses, “from among [the Israelites] brothers” (18:18) and to put Yahweh’s words in his mouth. The language is similar to the language in both Exodus and Jeremiah—“ונתתי דברי בפִּיו” (“and I put my words in his mouth.”) However, as opposed to Holladay’s supposition that the man Jeremiah knew Deuteronomy 18 and supposed he might be the prophet that the text predicted,¹³⁴ we need to posit a more complex relation between the texts. In fact, it may well be that the text of Deuteronomy 18 was composed in reaction to the Jeremianic tradition.¹³⁵

The conventional language of Jeremiah’s commission links him to idealized Deuteronomistic prophets such as Moses and Samuel, as well as charismatic military leaders such as Gideon. In addition to establishing Jeremiah’s commission within the conventions of prophetic call narratives, the text also alludes to conventions for the commission of kings. The theme of the youth ties Jeremiah to Solomon, who is commissioned to kingship in a

¹³¹ Helen A. Kenik, *Design for Kingship: The Deuteronomistic Narrative Techniques in 1 Kings 3:4–15* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 105.

¹³² See 1 Sam 2:11; 13; 15; 17; 18; 21; 26; 3:1; 8. The sons of Eli, the servant of the priest, and Samuel are all referred to as *na`ar*.

¹³³ See Kenik’s point about the motif of the “little child” (*Design for Kingship*, 104–9).

¹³⁴ Holladay, “The Background of Jeremiah’s Self-Understanding,” 160.

¹³⁵ Dating the composition of Deuteronomy 18 is a vexed problem. Carroll and Rofé, for example, both hypothesize that the Jeremianic tradition could have influenced a late insertion into Deuteronomy. See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 99. Alexander Rofé, “The Strata of the Law About Centralization of Worship in Deuteronomy and the History of the Deuteronomic Movement,” in *IOSOT Congress Volume Uppsala 1971* (ed. VTSup 22; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 221–26 (225).

dream. He protests: "ואנכי נער קטן לא אדע צאת ובה" ("But I am a young boy who does not know his coming and going" (1 Kgs 3:7). The hyperbole of chapter 1 compares Jeremiah not only to the greatest of prophets, but also to the kings of Israel. While the superscription suggests that monarchic power and prophetic power function side by side as two parallel and complementary lines of succession and social continuity, in the commission, Jeremiah himself replaces Judean kings as the subject of lineage and succession.

The uterine commission is also a convention of Mesopotamian and Egyptian royal ideologies, at times coming to stabilize monarchical authority in cases of broken lineage. For example, the Assyrian Assurbanipal (668–627) and King Pianchi, a Nubian king who conquered Egypt and founded the 25th dynasty in the eighth century, both describe themselves as having been commissioned from the womb. The god Amun addresses King Pianchi: "It was in the belly of your mother that I said concerning you that you were to be ruler of Egypt; it was as seed and while you were in the egg that I knew you."¹³⁶ Yet Assurbanipal's succession to the throne was contested as he was the younger brother, while the Nubian Pianchi founded a new Pharaonic dynasty—in both cases the hyperbole may be coming to compensate for an anxiety regarding interruption in lineage.

The idea of a figure that combines both divine and civil authority comes to cover over the break in the Judean monarchic succession, or more broadly, in the dissolution of Judean monarchy. This Near Eastern convention for royal authority during an interrupted line of succession is now utilized to cover up and create continuity in a more large-scale "irregular succession"—national succession that has been interrupted by historical upheaval.

By composing a text that is a pastiche of a variety of conventions of prophecy *and* civic leadership, the Deuteronomistic or post-Deuteronomistic authors hope to establish Jeremiah's authority at a time of competing prophetic claims. While creating a link between Jeremiah and Moses, and even offering Moses as an ancestor or model for Jeremiah, thus creating a sense of continuity and authority to the prophetic office and oracles, the redactors of the passage, who put the commission with the superscription, actually reveal the disjunctive nature of this lineage. Moses, as prophetic father, is in some ways only possible as a mirage, as this particular echo of the prophetic figure of a man who combined absolute and exclusive divine inspiration, civic leadership and heroism, and a quasi-monarchic power, is probably manifested for the first time in the Jeremianic corpus. Through these comparisons, Jeremiah becomes a figure who is both greater and weaker than prophets and leaders he resembles. Through this intertextuality, the Jeremiah text actually evokes a man who never existed: a strong prophet, a melancholic object constituted only by the threatened and weakened text.

At the same time that the chapter functions as a prologue to the life of Jeremiah, it also is made to serve as the prologue for national catastrophe. The second sign Yahweh provides to Jeremiah is a סיר נפוח, usually translated as boiling-over pot (Jer 1:13). Yahweh interprets the image or vision for Jeremiah as "evil will be opened from the North on all the dwellers of the land" (1:14).¹³⁷ This oracle answers questions about the direction of danger:

¹³⁶ M. Gilula, "An Egyptian Parallel to Jeremia I 4-5," *VT* 17 (1967): 114. Quoting *Zeitschrift Für Ägyptische Sprache Und Altertumskunde* no. 66 (1930): 90.

¹³⁷ See discussion above for alternatives to enemies of Judah.

Where is the enemy coming from? How will this evil be “opened” or be born? The question of physical direction signals also an over-determined “quest” for the origin of “the evil.” In Deuteronomistic ideology, empires become divine tools for punishing Judah. Thus the evil is to come about on account of leaving Yahweh, worshipping other gods, and bowing down to man-made idols (1:16).

As discussed, the Deuteronomistic History, as well as the book of Jeremiah, seems to reflect a preoccupation with the origin of “the evil.” When did Yahweh first turn against his chosen nation? What is the sin that led to the terrible punishment? As we saw above, the explanations for exile are over-determined. Destruction is blamed on dynastic retribution, traced specifically to King Manasseh’s idolatry (see Jer 15:4 and 2 Kings 23) and by implication, to the problematic institution of monarchy itself. Elsewhere, though, the nation is found guilty from the era of the conquest, before the institution of monarchy was established, or even further back “from the day that your fathers departed from the land of Egypt until this day” (Jer 7:25).

In “Différance,” Derrida links the question of authority to questions of origins, and to a quest for a “principal responsibility.” For Derrida, writing itself entails a complex set of problems relating to authority and origin. In writing down a text, “what is put into question is precisely the quest for a rightful beginning, an absolute point of departure, a principal responsibility.”¹³⁸ The quests for Jeremiah’s beginning, both the concern with his birth and call to prophecy, as well as the sources of his prophetic lineage, mirror the over-determined allocation of blame and responsibility in the book of Jeremiah, especially in its Deuteronomistic redactions.

Both the superscription and the commission posit two different ways of understanding history: the first is a historiography of cause and effects. By going back to the beginning of catastrophe, one can understand its reasons. Though the post-exilic position can be one of political powerlessness, the fantasy of first causes is a fantasy about divine and human power in history – to know, to understand, and to influence great events, even if only retrospectively. This fantasy is also one of continuity; the same divine ruler and the same covenant rules exist before and after exile; Yahweh is unchanged despite the destruction of his temple.

However, the first chapter of Jeremiah also contains a traumatic perception of history, in which the catastrophe has no cause, no beginning, and no reason; this stance threatens to break through the Deuteronomistic ordering process, through disjunctive and incoherent connections, or to topple its rhetorical structures through its over-reaching hyperbole. It infects the way in which the narrative of Jeremiah’s life and calling can be ordered. If the catastrophe has no principal responsibility, or is wildly over-determined, how is it possible to envision an orderly narrative for Jeremiah, the prophet presiding over the fall of Jerusalem? The way in which the chapter presents Jeremiah’s life and times reveals the strain of the attempt to provide a normative call narrative that would make sense of the years leading up to the catastrophe as well as the disjunctive oracles that the redactors inherited from that time period. On the one hand, Jeremiah is made to conform to the patriarchal

¹³⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 6. See also my discussion of oral vs. written prophecy in chapter 3.

structures of power: fathers and sons, monarchical lineage, and even a (Mosaic) prophetic lineage. On the other hand, the divine call is presented as an interruption of tradition and knowledge transmitted from father to son – an alternative, impossible temporality in which Jeremiah could be called before he existed, in which effect and cause are scrambled, when it is impossible to have true knowledge about prophetic beginnings, or by extension, historical causes.

The juxtaposition of this orderly historiography and an underlying chaos reveals the fragility of the father-son transmission. As opposed to the Deuteronomistic fantasy of culture and tradition, in which fathers create and teach their children, this chapter seems to suggest a melancholic alternative, in which sons must constitute themselves in a lineage of phantasmagorical fathers. After the catastrophe, the “fathers” of the chapter, both as historical causes (of catastrophe) and as prophetic ancestors, must be imagined and created by their sons. Perhaps the backwards construction of this prophetic lineage can function as a new image for considering textual transmission and redaction of prophetic sources, making the historical prophet an unattainable melancholic object.

CHAPTER TWO

Isaiah's Call Narrative and the Stutters of the Prophet-Poet

In the previous chapter I argued that the redactors of Jeremiah created a figure of a strong prophet to compensate for the disappointments and failures of prophecy during a time of national catastrophe. Thus the diminished and belated figure of the prophet Jeremiah comes to generate an idealized, unattainable model. In this chapter, I argue that it is the form of the Book of Isaiah itself that comes to carry authoritative power. As I trace the redaction and reception history of Isaiah's call narrative, I will argue that the sense of coherence and symmetry celebrated by readers of Isaiah is the product of a strong redaction process. This redaction imposes a sense of order and meaning, and even a kind of liturgical harmony on a text of stutter, interruption, and occasional incoherence.

My previous chapter narrated the tensions, anxieties, violent textual acts and creative moments involved in the accretion of layers in a prophetic text. In this chapter I extend my scope to discuss both redaction and reception. Specifically, I will discuss the eighteenth century reception of the Book of Isaiah as part of the formation of the literary aspect of what Jonathan Sheehan calls the Enlightenment Bible. The Book of Isaiah functions as a supreme example of the biblical literary achievement for the eighteenth century exegete, Lowth, who claimed the classical prophets as biblical poetry. Lowth's influential lectures and commentary introduced the formal link between prophecy and poetry. Yet even as Lowth lauded the controlled craft and sublime elegance of the text, when he linked prophecy to poetry, he imported instability, weakness, and incoherence into the genealogy of the Romantic lyric. These elements were ready to be uncovered by poets who were interested in interruptions to harmonious correspondence and could hear not only prophetic strength, but prophetic weakness.

In reading Lowth's reception of Isaiah, I will discuss his key notion of "correspondence" symptomatically – both in the formal sense, as parallel lines in poetry, and in the wider sense of a responsive, "answering" dialogue. I argue that even as Lowth celebrates Isaiah, reading this prophetic book as literature represses moral questions and a radical political potential, as well as the text's complex interplay of weakness and strength. Through discussing Lowth I would like to illuminate the price of a "literary reading" of the Bible.

Isaiah's Call Narrative, a Close Reading

In Lowth's account, the antiphonal chant of the seraphim, which appears at the beginning of Isaiah's call narrative, is the origin of biblical parallelism, in its perfect, atemporal "correspondence." As the location for the origin of poetry, chapter 6 of Isaiah is a strange mix of prophetic power and prophetic weakness, divine harmony and jagged interruption. These interruptions are both part of the narrative of the chapter as well as its formal texture. The interruptions and disjuncts in dialogue between human and divine, prophet and nation are echoed by the interrupted parallelism of the verses. In a chapter that mixes prose and poetry, the parallelisms themselves are often uneven and hard to understand. The chapter can be roughly divided into two thematic sections: the throne

epiphany (vv. 1-7) and the malevolent commission (vv. 8-13), though this division does not indicate a significant difference in style or compositional history.

Chapter 6 is a key chapter for considering the representation of prophetic power and prophetic weakness in the biblical text. Isaiah's throne vision is one of the most compelling and influential texts of prophetic revelation in the Hebrew Bible and beyond. It narrates a moment of immense prophetic power in which the veil between the human and divine is removed for a moment, and the prophet, as intermediary, is allowed a glimpse of Yahweh and his seraphic attendants. This throne vision, or theophany, is powerfully recast in Ezekiel, Daniel, Enoch and the Book of Revelation, and is the basis for the early literature of the *Hekhalot*, the detailed mystical descriptions of ascendance to the divine throne, as well as constituting the heart of much of later Jewish and Christian mysticism. The influence of Isaiah's throne vision is not confined to an esoteric mystical tradition; the seraphim's responsive chant, which Isaiah is permitted to hear, became foundational to Jewish and Christian liturgy and theology as the poetic kernel of the *kedushah* liturgy and the *Sanctus*, respectively.

Yet while Isaiah is clearly a prophet of great power, this chapter also contains a strange falling off or diminishment of prophetic power. The passage juxtaposes the possibility of immensely powerful prophetic access and power in the theophany with a prophetic message turned strange, in which the prophet's relation to redemption and coherence is diminished. While Jewish and Christian liturgy still cites the seraphim's chant, the rest of the chapter did not enter post-biblical liturgy.¹ The chanting of the seraphim, often read as a beautiful harmony, begins the chapter but the rest of the chapter contains many instances of disturbing, discordant and sometimes incomprehensible speech that make it far from ideal as a model for aesthetic greatness by Lowthian standards.

While the problems of prophecy are more pronounced in the commission, the throne vision is also threaded with a tension between strength and weakness, both in content and in form.

בשנת־מות המלך עזיהו ואראה² את־יהוה³ ישב על־כסא רם ונשא ושוליו⁴ מלאים
את־ההיכל: שרפים עמדים ממעל⁵ לו שש כנפים שש כנפים⁶ לאחד בשתים יכסה פניו ובשתים
יכסה רגליו ובשתים יעופף: וקרא⁷ זה אל־זה ואמר קדוש קדוש קדוש⁸ יהוה צבאות מלא⁹

¹ I am speaking here of late Jewish and Christian liturgy. I find Clements' conjectures about the early liturgical use of the entire chapter quite convincing. See discussion below.

² 1QIsa^a has אראה incorrectly, as proper knowledge of the vav-conjunctive was forgotten during the 2nd Temple period. All Qumran variants are cited according to Eugene Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: transcriptions and textual variants* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

³ MT has אדני, probably a pious substitution for the Tetragrammaton. See Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah: a Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 248 n.1b.

⁴ Literally, "the edges" or "the fringes" of a coat. LXX has τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ "his glory." The LXX Vorlage refrains from anthropomorphizing descriptions of Yahweh's body. In addition, the notion of δόξα is part of the theology of the Greek translator. See Emanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 267.

⁵ LXX reads ἀλλοῦ αὐτοῦ, "around him," a pious scribal correction to refrain from placing the seraphim above Yahweh.

⁶ 1QIsa^a missing second occurrence due to haplography.

⁷ 1QIsa^a reads וקראים, reading a multitude and not the original sense of a pair.

⁸ 1QIsa^a has קדוש only twice only but this seems like a late change influenced by Ps 99.

כל־הארץ כבודו: וינעו אמות הספים¹⁰ מקול הקורא והבית ימלא עשן: ואמר אוֹי־לִי כִי־נִדְמִיתִי¹¹ כִּי אִישׁ טִמְא־שִׁפְתַיִם אֲנִי וּבִתּוֹךְ עַם־טִמְא שִׁפְתַיִם אֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב כִּי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ יִהְיֶה צְבֹאוֹת רֹאוֹ עֵינַי: וַיַּעֲף אֵלַי אֶחָד מִן־הַשְּׂרָפִים וּבִידוֹ רִצְפָה בַּמִּלְקָחִים לָקַח מֵעַל הַמְּזֹבֵחַ: וַיִּגַע עַל־פִּי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נֹגַע זֶה עַל־שִׁפְתֶיךָ וְסָר עוֹנֶךָ וְחִטָּאתְךָ תִּכְפֹּר:

In the year of the death of King Uzziah I saw Yahweh sitting on a throne raised up on high and his train filling the temple. Seraphim were standing in attendance above – six wings, six wings each.

With two they cover their face,
and with two their feet,
and with two they fly.
And each called to the other and said:
"Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts,
the whole earth is full of his glory."

The pivots on the thresholds shook from each calling voice,
and the house itself filled with smoke.

And I said: "Woe is me! I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a nation of unclean lips, but my eyes have seen the king, Yahweh of the heavenly hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, and in his hand was a hot coal he had taken with tongs from above the altar. And he touched me with it on the mouth and said:

"Behold, this has touched your lips,
your guilt will depart
and your sin will be atoned for" (Is 6:1-8).

Biblical scholars have long debated about the appearance of Isaiah's call narrative six chapters into the book and not at its beginning. In its current position, the narrative comes as an interruption to the oracles that preceded it in the book, as a kind of untidy second beginning to the book. Chapter 6 begins a series of hagiographic narratives of the prophet's life set in the momentous times leading up to and during the Syro-Ephraimic war.¹² As opposed to chapters 1-5, which are almost exclusively composed of parallel lines,

⁹ LXX has *πλήρης*, probably מלאה. Reading with MT *lectio difficilior*.

¹⁰ LXX clarifies: *ὑπέρθρον*, "lintel of a door." The Hebrew is "not attested elsewhere as an architectural term." Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 223.

¹¹ The Hebrew root *דמה* is ambiguous here. It can mean to cease to exist, or in this case, die, secondary meaning which is rarer: "to be silent." The LXX reads according to the first meaning, *κατανευγμαί* – "I am stunned." Another meaning at play may also be "like, resemble" cf Ez 1:5 and in the rest of Ezek 1.

¹² Biblical scholarship has proposed various theories to explain the appearance of these narratives, roughly from chapters 6-8. Duhm and his followers put forth the idea of a *Denkschrift*, a kind of prophetic memoir, which was originally the core of the Book of Isaiah. Recently, in contrast, Blenkinsopp has considered these

these historical narratives are a mix of narrative prose, embedded with possibly older poetry-oracles.

With the first verse, the fantastical visions and events that befall Isaiah are set clearly in monarchical history, as is typical of prophetic texts. In the year of the death of a sickly, leprous king,¹³ Isaiah sees a vision of the divine court. Yahweh of hosts is attended by mythical beings – winged creatures of fire or serpent-like features.¹⁴ In the background of the passage is the contrast between the sick king, who marks mortality and sin, and the transcendent and potent deity. Besides contrasting the two kings, the chapter also implicitly compares two kinds of devotees: the heavenly seraphim, who continuously praise Yahweh, and the earth-bound Isaiah, whose language stutters with fearful exclamation, who interrupts the harmony of the divine court.

The seraphim chant or sing a hymn that is a song of praise for Yahweh.¹⁵ The hymn seems to be antiphonal, exhibiting what Lowth will later call "correspondence." Yet the seraphim are not only images of duality: each pair of wings is tripled, and their antiphonal song starts with a three-part repetition. The effect of the play of doubles and triples, both of organs and of poetry, is an overwhelming sense of repetition and redundancy, rather than a balanced harmony.¹⁶ The "supernumerary" quality of the seraphim also marks the supernumerary aspect of the divine assembly: "Yahweh of hosts" is lord of an army of angels and stars, and he accordingly speaks in the plural in v.8.

The chant of the seraphim is probably an older liturgical hymn embedded in the prophecy. After the text was canonized, this rhetorically powerful liturgical unit was once again retrieved from the narrative to become part of Jewish and Christian liturgy.¹⁷ There is a kind of similarity between the seraphim's bodies and their hymn. Like their three sets of wings, they repeat *קדוּשׁ*, "holy" three times. Other cases of three-part word repetition include curses and cult practices, suggesting that the hymn of the seraphim is an old, magical formula (see Ps 99; Jer 7:4; 22:28; Ezek 21:32). At the same time, there is also a doubling effect in the hymn, which is comprised of two predicate sentences.

texts as later editions to the corpus – similar to the prose narratives in Jeremiah that surround an early oracular core. See discussion below.

¹³ The text of Isaiah doesn't refer to leprosy, but a parallel text from 2 Kings 15:5 records "Azariah," a scribal error for Uzziah, punished for allowing local shrines to flourish. "וינגע יהוה את המלך ויהי מצרע עד יום מתו" ("Yahweh struck the king with disease, and he was a leper until the day of his death.")

These sparse details become a full scale morality narrative in 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 about a king who dares to act as a priest, but this is a narrative expansion composed centuries later.

¹⁴ For an exhaustive discussion of the possibilities see Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 264–265.

¹⁵ Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms; a Form-critical Introduction*, Facet Books. Biblical Series 19 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 11.

¹⁶ Herbert Marks describes "the excessive object" of the prophetic vision in a dense article that uses the concept of Kant's sublime, as read by Thomas Weiskel, as a hermeneutic for prophetic call narratives. As we will see, the discourse on the sublime aspect of Isaiah's call narrative begins with Lowth. "In the throne vision in Isaiah 6, the mind is thwarted immediately by the supernumerary wings of the seraphim and repetitiveness of the hymn they sing to one another, a redundancy reinforced by the once echoing of the word *qādōš*, 'holy', even before the magnitude of the calling voice makes itself felt." Herbert Marks, "On Prophetic Stammering," *YJC The Yale Journal of Criticism: Interpretation in the Humanities* 1, no. 1 (1987): 67.

¹⁷ According to Hans Wildberger, the chant of the seraphim, was "without a doubt...part of the liturgy in the Jerusalem cult. The adoration of the heavenly beings serves as a model for the adoration which the earthly community is to replicate." Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 265.

As I will discuss, the seraphim's hymn has been read as a paradigm for biblical parallelism. Though there are certainly some parallel relations between words in these lines, it is hard to make a case here for the clear cut parallelism of a verse like 6:9b. The most likely possibility is an antithetical parallelism, in which the attribute of holiness is parallel to an attribute of glory (though the כבוד of Yahweh is a noun here not an adjective). The phrase יהוה צבאות, "Yahweh of hosts" parallels מלא כל הארץ, "the whole earth [is] full." These phrases are neither semantically nor syntactically parallel, unless we consider that both phrases connote a massive plurality, whether this be the hosts of heaven or the fullness of the earth. Perhaps "Yahweh of hosts" in verset A stands for the location of heaven, creating a merism with the "earth" in the verset B. Fully interpreting the double or triple parallelism of the chant seems better left to theologians, but suffice to say that it would be difficult to base a poetic system on this intricate example. There is much parallelism between the phrases, but it takes some interpretive wiggling to make it line up smoothly.

The singular "calling voice" in v.3b can be identified with the seraphim, though its shift to singular also suggests the voice of Yahweh as storm god with a terrifying power, such as the voice in Psalm 29. In either case, the voice has the power to rattle the house, in contrast to Isaiah's terrified utterances. As opposed to the synchronized seraphim, Isaiah is out of tune with his interlocutors. The seraphim call out to one another in harmony, but Isaiah is in the midst of a nation of unclean lips. Both the nation and Isaiah cannot call out to one another. His woeful cry is more of a soliloquy than part of a correspondence.

The disparate characteristics of divine and human language are foregrounded by the word choice of Isaiah's cry. The Hebrew verb נדמית, root דמה, can mean either destroy or become silent. In the first meaning, Isaiah is scared that the direct sight of Yahweh will kill him. Translating "I am undone" or "I am destroyed" emphasizes Isaiah's fear and is aligned with a theme of prophetic death and rebirth in the passage.¹⁸ In the second more rare sense, "I am struck dumb," as Lowth translates, creates a kind of stutter or muteness in contrast to the seraphim's song. Perhaps the MT text puns on both meanings of the verb, highlighting the contingency of language.¹⁹ The seraphim's lips are pure, and capable of sublime song, while Isaiah's lips are "polluted" and he dwells among people of unclean lips, i.e. people of deceitful or sinful language (Hebrew root טמא). Purification of Isaiah's language and preparing him for his mission as divine mouthpiece occurs through his lips. Isaiah's pollution is the pollution of human language with its jerky stops and starts, its stutters, and its ambiguity – in opposition to a harmonious divine speech transcending temporality and history.

The seraphim have no past or future, no sin or redemption. Their chant is composed of predicate clauses, which produce an atemporal effect. On the other hand, Isaiah's "uncleanness," is essentially a historical problem, marked by the causative particle כי, "because." Certain generations are more sinful than others; kings do right and wrong. Isaiah's uncleanness may even remind us of King Uzziah's leprosy – which stands in

¹⁸ See Ronald Hendel, "Isaiah and the Transition from Prophecy to the Apocalyptic," in *Birkat Shalom: Studies in the Bible, Ancient Near Eastern Literature, and Postbiblical Judaism Presented to Shalom M. Paul on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday* (Winona Lake Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 275.

¹⁹ A third meaning of the verb is to resemble. The pun is suggestive especially when Isaiah's call becomes a model for the Romantic poet-prophet, who figures scenes of inspiration.

opposition to the holiness of Yahweh and the seraphim. Perhaps the impurity of Isaiah's language and lips is precisely its implication in the prose narrative of history, mortality and sin, what Fredrick Jameson calls "the hurt of history."²⁰

The purification rite described in vv.6-7 purifies Isaiah's lips and adjusts his language to a dialogue with the divine. As the seraph touches Isaiah's mouth with a coal, he pronounces an expiation formula in triple parallelism. The expiation works in three stages: touched – departed – expiated. (נגע – סר – תכפר) The parallelism creates a mini-narrative: as the guilt is physically burned off, the sin will be expiated or atoned for, or a cultic term literally meaning "covered over."²¹ As the ritual demonstrates, sin can be removed, but this removal is also an act of covering. In the complex economy of revelation and concealment in the chapter, purity can cover impurity, as the seraphim cover their genitals, and in contrast, a covering can also function as a block to redemption as in v. 10. The question of expiation, or forgiveness of sin, ties together both parts of this chapter: the ritual creates a contrast between the power of the seraph and human power. The seraph has the power to make the walls shake and can pardon through magic and ritual. This is precisely the power that will be taken away from Isaiah at the end of the chapter, i.e. the power to pardon. As I argued in chapter one regarding the power of intercession, the power to pardon marks more broadly the possibility of influencing history.

ואשמע את־קול יהוה²² אמר את־מי אשלח ומי ילך־לנו²³ ואמר הנני שלחני: ויאמר לך ואמרת לעם
הזה שמעו שמוע ואל־תבינו וראו ראו ואל־תדעו: השמן ל־ב־העם הזה ואזניו הכבד ועיניו השע²⁴
פן־יראה בעיניו ובאזניו ישמע ובלבבו²⁵ יבין ושב ורפא²⁶ לו: ואמר עד־מתי יהוה²⁷ ויאמר עד אשר
אם־שאו ערים מאין יושב ובתים מאין אדם והאדמה תשא²⁸ שממה: ורחק יהיה את־האדם ורבה
העזובה²⁹ בקרב הארץ: ועוד בה עשריה ושבה והיתה לבער כאלה וכאלון אשר בשלכת³⁰ מצבת במ
זרע קדש מצבתה:

²⁰ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 102.

²¹ Compare the notion of atonement as "covering" to Is 1:16 where the people are implored to wash themselves and be purified from sin: "רחצו הזכר."

²² MT has אדני. See above.

²³ LXX reads πρὸς τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον – translating לַעַם הַזֶּה. Wildberger thinks this change was triggered by v.9, but could equally be motivated by an anti-anthropomorphic tendency writing over Yahweh speaking in plural to the divine assembly.

²⁴ LXX grammar is quite different, adding a causative and changing the verbs from commands to Isaiah to declaratives about the people. ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν αὐτῶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμυσαν, "For this people's heart has grown fat, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and they have shut their eyes." Moises Silva, trans., "Esaías," in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint and the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under That Title* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 830. See detailed discussion below.

²⁵ MT has: ולבבו haplography in transcribing the word. Correcting with 1QIsa^a

²⁶ LXX: ἰάσομαι αὐτούς, "I will heal them." This seems like a scribal attempt to explain the mysterious self-reflexive healing the MT describes. See discussion.

²⁷ See above.

²⁸ LXX: καὶ ἡ γῆ καταλειφθήσεται ἔρημος "and the land will be left desolate" probably translating תשא. *Lectio Difficilior* with the MT.

²⁹ For MT עזובה LXX has "οἱ καταλειφθέντες" "Those who have been left." Either the translation or the Hebrew *Vorlage* transforms the oracle into a prophecy of redemption. See discussion below.

And he said, "Go and say to that people:
 'Keep listening, but do not comprehend,
 and keep seeing, but do not understand.'
 Fatten the heart of that nation.
 Make its ears heavy
 and glue shut its eyes,
 lest it sees with its eyes
 and hear with its ears
 and comprehend with its heart –
 and will return and be healed."
 And I said, "How long Yahweh?" and he said:
 "Until cities lie waste
 with no inhabitants
 and houses are bare of people
 and the land be ruined into desolation.
 And Yahweh will banish the population,
 and the deserted places are vast in the midst of the land.
 Even if a tenth part remain in it,
 it will be eaten dry³¹
 Like a terebinth or an oak whose stump³² remains standing when it is felled.
 Its stump is a holy seed (Is 6:8-13).

Now that he has been purified by a near-death experience, Isaiah's language corresponds to divine language, in both form and content. Yahweh speaks in perfect parallel: "Who will I send/and who will go for us?" (6:8a) Isaiah's two word rhyming response echoes Yahweh's two part question: הַנְּנִי שְׁלַחֲנִי, "Here I am, send me" (6:8b). The correspondence between the two *שִׁלַּח* verbs is metonymical of an ideal relationship between Yahweh and his prophetic mouthpiece. But while v.8 seems to suggest that Isaiah has been successfully initiated into the role of prophet, his subsequent commission brushes against the generic conventions of prophecy, casting doubt on his role as messenger. The chapter sets up an enormous contrast between the possibility of seeing Yahweh himself, and the inability of the nation to perceive the divine message in any form. Isaiah, the man who saw Yahweh and lived, is now stripped of prophetic agency to address and redeem the nation. He is commissioned to give the nation a malevolent, nearly incoherent message, which conceals the possibility of redemption.

³⁰ From here and until the end of the chapter are multiple textual problems, suggesting a misunderstood, unstable text. Q^a contains a few variations: *משלכת* "cause to fall" (rather than MT *בשלכת*: "if someone felled") and for MT *בם* reads *במה*. BHS also suggests amending to *אשרה*, but the parallelism of the previous verses leads us to expect two trees, not three. LXX reads *ὡς τερεβινθος και ὡς βάλανος ὅταν ἐπιέσῃ ἀπὸ τῆς θήρας αὐτῆς* – probably: *מצבתה [זרע קודש] מצבת במ זרע קודש אשר בשלכת כאלה וכאלון אשר בשלכת*. The chronology of the rest of the Septuagint variations suggests that this is a later scribal error due to homoiarchton. Nonetheless, the last phrase seems to be concerned with second Temple politics, suggesting that "*זרע קודש מצבתה*" was a late redaction.

³¹ Cf Isa 3:14; 5:5

³² Wildberger suggests reading after Tur-Sinai, *מצבת* as "new plantings" – but is still seems more logical to imagine the remains of a felled tree as a stump, which highlights the contrast between the dead stump and the vital "holy seed" in the closing image of the chapter.

Ideally, if the prophet is a mediator, even his terrifying messages are intended to warn his audience, causing them to repent. Oracles attributed to Isaiah earlier in the book teach us to expect a balance between threats of destruction and promises of redemption. For example, consider the contract Isaiah presents between Yahweh and the nation in 1:19-20.

אם-תאבו ושמעתם טוב הארץ תאכלו: ואם-תמאנו ומריתם בחרב³³ תאכלו

If you agree and give heed, you will eat the goodness of the earth;
But if you refuse and revolt, you will be eaten by sword.

In prophetic ideology, historical events are set in motion by the moral conduct of the nation and its king.³⁴ The prophetic word anticipates and explains the logic of cause and effect. In contrast, the commission of Isaiah 6:9-13 breaks the implicit contract of the prophetic rebuke. As Ron Hendel notes, "For the first time in the literature of biblical prophecy, words are not intended to communicate but to obscure communication."³⁵ We could say furthermore, that language is not only obscured, but becomes a tool meant solely to punish. Isaiah's commission creates a cognitive dissonance between the contract that prophecy is supposed to offer and the sheer malevolence of divine intentions. Rather than attempt to prevent the terror ahead, the prophetic word pushes the nation toward destruction.

The oracle starts by addressing the nation (v.9b) but it then shifts into an indirect address in which only the prophet is interpellated (v.10) and required to act upon the body parts of the nation. As opposed to prophetic "contract" we saw in 1:19, in which the nation is granted agency to change its own destiny, the nation here is reduced to the dumb object of prophetic action. Perhaps this shift from a direct address to an indirect address dramatizes a breakdown of language. Yahweh explains his intention, "Lest it sees...and is healed," (6:10b) but even this somewhat unsatisfactory explanation is withheld from the nation, and by implication, the nation is left with a chaotic and illogical view of history. Instead, the explanation is addressed only to Isaiah and as Hendel suggests, to the future readers of the prophecy, who may see more clearly than eighth century Judeans.³⁶

This second oracle (6:10) follows a pattern of chiasmus. The commands regarding the heart, ears, and eyes of the nation (לב-אזניו-עיניו) are followed by a negative hypothetical which lists eyes, ears, and heart (עיניו-אזניו-לבבו). The verse ends with an extra clause: ושב ורפא לו, "and will return and be healed." The clause itself is grammatically odd since the nation is imagined to act reflexively, as if it still had some agency.³⁷ The hypothetical possibility of reversal, which has already been denied, disrupts the tightly structured patterning of the verse. This final turn suggests the irregular quality of redemption, which is not a kind of mechanical reversal of sin, but rather disrupts the pattern of language. Rather

³³ Q^a and other versions have מהרב possibly due to haplography.

³⁴ This ideology became a method of historiography for the Deuteronomists, as we saw in chapter 1. As opposed to the impossible conditionals of Jeremiah 15:1, here we see a conditional with real consequences based on human behavior.

³⁵ Hendel, "Isaiah and the Transition from Prophecy to the Apocalyptic," 275.

³⁶ "The reader of the text is intended to understand, to see and to hear the prophetic words as they are written in the book. This creates a conceptual distance between the uncomprehending contemporaries of Isaiah and the willing readers of the text." Ibid.

³⁷ The Septuagint solves this problematic "stutter" by having God (not) heal the nation.

than suggesting a balance between destruction and redemption, redemption is read as a break in a pattern in which sin is balanced by punishment.

In the following pages, I suggest a number of ways that the redactors of Isaiah mitigated, or softened this passage. The Septuagint version of the verses, which is quoted numerous times in the New Testament,³⁸ preserves a version that cuts what H.G. M. Williamson has called the "Gordian knot" of the verses³⁹; instead of the MT's Hebrew verbs in the second person singular imperative, such as קָרַח , "make fat," the Greek translation contains verbs in the third person singular aorist, such as $\epsilon\pi\alpha\chi\upsilon\sigma\theta\eta$, "become gross" describing the action of the heart. The entire verse reads: ""For this people's heart has grown fat, and with their ears they have heard heavily, and they have shut their eyes."⁴⁰ The nation's dullness, or in the terms of the New Testament, the unbelief of the Jews, is thus the *cause* of Yahweh's punishment, not the consequence. As opposed to the Septuagint edition of the Book of Jeremiah, which seemed to preserve an earlier Hebrew *Vorlage*, the Septuagint translation of Isaiah is probably a later iteration of the MT text, and the theological differences can be read as interpretations.⁴¹ The Septuagint variations in this chapter reflect a reticence regarding the anthropomorphizing of Yahweh. On the whole, the text raises much less theological problems: the prophecy against the nation is now explicable, and the oracle of v.12 predicts an end to punishment. At the same time, centuries of Christian interpretation have also grappled with the theologically troubling passage of 6:9-10. Jerome's interpretation refuses the loophole the Septuagint provides, constructing a complex theodicy. "We cannot appeal to the Septuagint to avoid the apparent blasphemy in the Hebrew."⁴²

After this dark commission, Yahweh's oracles are interrupted by a human cry. Isaiah exclaims עַד מַתַּי יְהוָה "How long Yahweh?" (6:11). We saw previously how the seraphim's chant echoes a typical hymn of praise recited in the temple. Isaiah's agonized question also echoes the ritual language of an individual lament.⁴³ This language brings with it a generic expectation: "the order in many of these psalms is a characteristic one: first, the wailing, almost desperate lament and the passionate prayer; then, suddenly the certainty of deliverance in a jubilant tone."⁴⁴ The individual lament typically ends with a dramatic swing toward thanksgiving, which has been explained by Gunkel as remnant of an "original priestly absolution"⁴⁵ or by Alter as a precise literary depiction of a dramatic psychological

³⁸ See Matt 13:14, Mark 4:12, Luke 8:10, John 12:40; Acts 28:26,27. Within these citations, used in different contexts, are also meaningful variations. For a close reading of the citation in Mark in the Parable of the Sower, which Kermode argues is based on the Targum and not on the Septuagint, see Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 28–35.

³⁹ H. G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press, 1994), 48.

⁴⁰ Silva, "Esaías," 830.

⁴¹ "Although the LXX translation often deviates greatly from the MT because of LXX's extensive exegesis, there is no reason to believe that its underlying Hebrew text differed much from MT." Emanuel Tov, *Hebrew Bible, Greek Bible and Qumran: Collected Essays* (Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 54.

⁴² *Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators*, The Church's Bible (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2007), 85.

⁴³ See Pss 6:4; 74:10; 80:5 for similar use in personal laments, and Pss 90:13; 94:3 for use in collective laments.

⁴⁴ Gunkel, *The Psalms; a Form-critical Introduction*, 20.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

transformation.⁴⁶ However, in the prophetic landscape constituted by this chapter, all bets are off. Isaiah's question and complaint is not "answered" by thanksgiving. In fact, a real divine answer to this typically rhetorical question interrupts the lament genre.⁴⁷ We saw a similar manipulation of genre in Jeremiah 14-15, as the communal petition was interrupted by Yahweh's voice against petition. Rather than assuaging Isaiah's despair, the future predicted by the oracle is dark and terrifying. Furthermore, Isaiah is not given an actual, temporal limit to his terrible task or to the duration of exile: rather, the divine answer is given in a series of hyperbolic, atemporal images.

עד אשר אִם־שאוּ ערים מאין יושב
ובתים מאין אדם
והאדמה תשאה שממה

Until cities lie waste with no inhabitants
And houses are bare of people
And the land be ruined into desolation.

The triple parallelism of these verses pulls toward an almost mythical concept of ruin and desolation; the polis, the house, and the land itself are emptied out in devastating progression from civilization to wilderness. Thus, the parallelism within the verse creates a dynamic of intensification. Here is an example of the way the formal quality of the parallelism in prophetic poetry creates a "semantic skid from the historical to cosmic."⁴⁸ At the same time, Isaiah's actual question remains unanswered.

The oracles in vv. 9-11 present a vision of despair and punishment without the comfort of redemption in sight. I propose to read the subsequent redactions to the text as a response to the bleak abruptness of these oracles, an attempt to stabilize dissonance. In this way we could say that the weakness of the prophecy generated creativity. The relentless despair of the prophecy in 6:1-11 was problematic to later readers of the Isaianic prophecy; certainly the malevolence of verses 9-10 would not be appropriate for liturgical or institutional use. The only way to mitigate the darkness of the text was to suggest a "corresponding" recovery, suggesting an economy of punishment and redemption.⁴⁹ Thus, as I will show, verses 12-13 reflect a series of attempts to "fix" the text. Even as these "fixes" were amended to the text, though, the chapter remained an interpretive crux that continued to trouble translators and exegetes, generating new "fixing" methods.

The first fix to the text is historical: verse 12 mitigates the vision of punishment and death with a vision of exile or deportation, which seems to have been added after the end of the Northern Kingdom in 721 BCE and perhaps even in reference to Judah's exile in 587

⁴⁶ Alter reads Psalm 13, for example, as a countermove from complaint and supplication to thanksgiving: "The speaker... finds himself plunged into a fierce reality where things seem to go from bad to worse to the worst of all... there is no discursive means in verse to imagine anything but its ominous intensification, except for the sudden, unaccountable, paradoxical swing of faith that enables the speaker at the nadir of terror to affirm that God will sustain him, indeed, has sustained him. Generically, the supplication has been transformed in a single stroke into a psalm of thanksgiving." *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 66.

⁴⁷ Hendel points out, "this expression of lament is transformed into a vehicle for revelation of the future." Hendel, "Isaiah and the Transition from Prophecy to the Apocalyptic." cf Zechariah 1:12

⁴⁸ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 153.

⁴⁹ Cf Isa 40:2 which uses economic metaphors for redemption.

BCE.⁵⁰ Thus, the hyperbolic, mythical imagination is in some sense softened by history. Furthermore, reference to Yahweh in the third person (רחק יהוה את האדם) is stylistically inconsistent with the earlier first person speech, and taken together with the historical evidence, attests to a later hand. In the Septuagint translation, this verse is given even more positive valence: the עֲזוּבָה, which I translated as "desolate places," is read as a remnant that "will be multiplied on the land,"⁵¹ as discussed above.

Verse 13 seems to be a polemic against the hope of a remnant, though it is quite garbled, so interpretation must be tentative. The tenth part of the nation that remains, perhaps Judah after the fall of Israel, is due to be "eaten dry" or to "revert to pasture." In these verses we can see a vacillation between hope and despair, symptomatic of the tumultuous history of Judah after the eighth century, and an attempt to line up the prophecies with the direction this history is to take. The simile used to characterize the destruction of the remnant is vaguely hopeful. The metaphorical register of the fallen oak and terebinth suggest destruction, reduction in stature, but also an organic potential for new life.⁵² The last part of the verse changes figures, shifting from simile to allegory. The phrase "holy seed" itself only appears again in Ezra 9:2 as part of a condemnation of mixed marriages, and seems to impose a distinction regarding Judean racial identity from the Persian period on this eighth century text.⁵³ The notion of the holy seed provided an impetus for "the actual formation of eschatological and apocalyptic sects throughout the period of the Second Temple."⁵⁴

The envelope structure of the chapter seems to provide some secondary evidence for redactional tampering. Verse 11, where the pericope may have originally ended is an antithetical return to the images in the beginning of the chapter. The fullness of the temple in v.1 and of the earth in v. 3 (מלא כל הארץ; מלאים את ההיכל) are set in stark contrast to the empty houses and towns, and the desolate earth: שִׁמְמָה – אֵין אָדָם – אֵין יוֹשֵׁב. The root יֹשֵׁב, to sit or dwell, functions as a *leitwort*. Yahweh sits on a throne as a sign of permanent, timeless authority (6:1); in contrast, Isaiah dwells amidst an unclean people (6:5), and finally civilization is unraveled through the image of houses without dwellers in v.11. When we read the chapter from vv.1-11, or even include v.12, which contrasts Yahweh's glory (כבוד) filling the land to the desolation in the land, the arc of the chapter is antithetical. The intimacy of divine revelation gives way to distance and divine punishment. Verse 13, though, changes the arc of the chapter. The holiness that the seraphim chant now returns as the holy seed (qādōš vs. qōdeš). With this addition, the Judean remnant on earth seems to echo and repeat the holiness of Yahweh and the seraphim in heaven, and the chapter becomes transformed into a mysterious unity of divine and human attributes.

⁵⁰ Cf Jeremiah 15:2 which mitigates death, sword and famine with captivity, discussed in my last chapter.

⁵¹ As Wildberger puts it, "this does not automatically presume there was a different Hebrew text besides the MT version, since... καταλειφθέντες could be a translation of עֲזוּבָה." Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 251 n.12a.

⁵² See Job 14:7: יֵצֵא חֹטֵר מִגֹּזַע יֵשִׁי כִּי יֵשׁ לְעֵץ תִּקְוָה אִם יִכְרַת: "And a shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse."

⁵³ The words are also not attested to in the Greek version, which contains an alternative ending to the chapter, though this omission is probably just the result of a scribal mistake due to *aberratio oculi*. See the discussion in Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 251.

⁵⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book: Interpretations of the Book of Isaiah in Late Antiquity* (Grand Rapids Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 227.

If we are trying to retrieve the authentic kernel of Isaianic poetry, perhaps these last few garbled lines are less significant, especially because they obscure the more skillful poetry of the previous verses. Rather than trying to isolate these kernels, I want to show their paradoxically generative power. Even a careful philologist such as Hans Wildberger explains that "the fact that so many glosses are found in this section is indicative of how intensively readers involved themselves with the narrative of Isaiah's call."⁵⁵ This "intensity" seems to me to be precisely the power of the difficult and troubling prophecy.

According to Brevard Childs, the additions to chapter 6 are not to be read as merely "optimistic" glosses, "stemming from an editor's wishful thinking and thus to be eliminated from the ipsissima verba of Isaiah."⁵⁶ Rather, they are an example of the midrashic quality of textual redactions, what Childs calls "a textual extension or *Fortschreibung*." The mystery of death and rebirth of lines 1-11 "strove for an exposition of the meaning of v.13. The tree had been felled, but its stump still stands and in the stump is the holy seed waiting to sprout in God's time."⁵⁷ According to Childs' approach, which tries to take into account the effects of the canonical text rather than isolating an authentic kernel of Isaianic oracles, the earlier passage required or almost generated the more positive redactions of the last lines. However, while Childs reads the quality of striving as a positive move toward meaning, which continues the sense of the text, I read the glosses as a symptom of anxiety.

Thus, Childs' viewpoint is useful for considering the generative quality of the text, what he calls its "striving." Rather than a failed prophet, who cannot convey a message to the people, Isaiah becomes the bearer of a mysterious proto-messianic message. The holiness of the seraphim in heaven is finally made to correspond to the holiness of the Jewish nation on earth. This correspondence, though, is achieved by repressing the moment of despair that the text records, ending in line 11. The movement of the chapter from historical time into a messianic future is born in the moment of breakdown of prophecy and of language.

The Historical Composition of the Book of Isaiah

The way in which the redactions at the end of the chapter 6 attempt to shape irregularities and "solve" theological tangles and dissonances, what we could call a dynamic of redaction, is evident in the shaping of the Isaiah corpus throughout. The compositional history of the Book of Isaiah itself can be read as a process of shaping irregularities into regular shapes and forms; a process by which the weaknesses and instabilities of prophetic texts are reinterpreted and fashioned into figures of authority. The changes in Isaiah's message wrought by the redactional frame, as well as subsequent translations, citations and exegesis can be read as attempts to contain and fix these weaknesses.

Since the late nineteenth century, biblical criticism has attempted to unearth the compositional layers and ideologies that shaped the composition of the Book of Isaiah,

⁵⁵ Wildberger, *Isaiah*, 258.

⁵⁶ Brevard Childs, *Isaiah*, 1st ed. (Louisville Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

building on an insight about its two different authors going back to Abraham Ibn Ezra.⁵⁸ It seems clear that the book in its current form contains texts from the Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian periods. Most of the theories explaining the composition of the book have highlighted the ideological and historical construction of the Isaiah text.

Perhaps the most provocative ideological explanation for the formation of the Isaianic text has been put forth recently by Joseph Blenkinsopp.⁵⁹ In analyzing Isaiah 1-39, so called "First Isaiah" or "Isaiah of Jerusalem," he notes that the book is divided into "sayings" and narrative episodes with very different ideological perspectives. The Isaiah of the "sayings" (or poetry) is "an uncompromising critic of the political and religious establishment of his day."⁶⁰ On the other hand, the narratives present a different figure: the "man of God of the narrative sections...in which Isaiah plays a positive and corroborative role in society."⁶¹ In these the narratives, rather than acting as a vocal critic of authority, Isaiah supports and advises the king. For Blenkinsopp, the disparity between these two ideologies is explained by a regularizing, normativizing "makeover" – in sections that contain "sayings" embedded in narrative, like chapters 6-8, "it seems [the older sayings of Isaiah] were inserted deliberately to create a prophetic profile and a model of ruler-prophet relationship to set against the dissident figure behind the sayings, whose relationship to the political leadership was almost invariably adversarial."⁶² Blenkinsopp's theory of composition regarding Isaiah 1-39 is analogous to the Deuteronomistic revisions of Jeremiah that redact the "original" sayings of Jeremiah, as discussed in the previous chapter. Blenkinsopp explicitly connects the textual history of Jeremiah and Isaiah: "In terms of ideologically motivated scribal activity, therefore, Jeremiah and Isaiah are parallel case histories."⁶³ In light of our close reading of chapter six, we could refine this picture. The "sayings" embedded in the narrative do not necessarily add up neatly to a picture of a prophet-as-critic. Rather, we could say that in the case of chapter six, the "sayings," or poetic oracles, have a tendency to pull at the narrative, unraveling the portrait of Isaiah as a "strong prophet."

While Blenkinsopp's notion of a "make-over" is a compelling but hard to substantiate hypothesis, the make-over of the prophecies in the latter sections of the book (chapters 40-66) has been acknowledged by biblical scholarship since the early twentieth century. The pseudepigraphical text of Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-55) and Trito-Isaiah (55-66) seem to have been joined to the prophecies of Isaiah of Jerusalem centuries later. In addition, chapters 1-39 contain late redactions and insertions, as we saw in the last verses of chapter 6. While once scholars supposed that First Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah were joined somewhat arbitrarily after their composition was complete, recent decades of scholarship have pointed to a good deal more of continuity between the texts. Clements' position, for example, "is that from the time of their origin, the prophetic sayings of Isaiah 40-45 were intended as a supplement and sequel to a collection of the earlier sayings of the eighth-century Isaiah of Jerusalem."⁶⁴

⁵⁸ See Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1902).

⁵⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Opening the Sealed Book*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁴ R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 83.

For example, we can trace a complex intertextuality in the corpus regarding the theme of blindness and deafness. We saw that chapter 6 set up a contrast between Isaiah's powers of perception and those of the nation. The theme of prophecy blocking hearing and seeing, or the notion of perceptual stupor also appears in parallel texts such as 29:9-10; 33:10. In contrast, in Second Isaiah, prophecy leads to awakening and seeing. Chapter 42, for example, reverses the metaphors of vision in 6:9-10, and reads prophecy as a revealing, awakening force, rather than a force for concealment and obscuration.

החרשים שמעו והעורים הביטו לראות

"Listen, deaf ones! And you who are blind – look and see!" (Is 42:18). Later eschatological strata of Isaiah 1-39 continue to amplify the theme of blindness and deafness, though a passage like 35:5-6 literalizes the metaphor. In the end days, says the oracle, the blind, deaf, and lame will be miraculously cured.

אז תפקחנה עיני עורים ואזני חרשים תפתחנה
אז ידלג כאיל פסח ותרון לשון אלם

Then the eyes of the blind will open and the ears of the deaf will open.
Then the lame will skip like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will sing.

Thus when we read a passage like 6:9-10 in the context of the corpus, the more optimistic intertexts exert a mitigating power, limiting the era of the blindness/deafness of the nation, or even turning it into a necessary condition for redemption.⁶⁵

By collecting together texts from a span of at least two centuries, the redactors of Isaiah restructured the early dark prophecies of rebuke and punishment into a cycle of punishment and redemption. Deutero-Isaiah is notable for the use of antithetical images that create mirror images of rebuke and redemption. Richard Clifford lists these polarities as "the first and last things, Babylon and Zion, Israel and the nations, Yahweh and the Gods (or their images), the servant and Israel."⁶⁶ Clifford refers to a "device of parallelism" in creating these antithetical figures. In a sense, Deutero-Isaiah rewrites the older religious traditions, by opposing the "old Exodus-conquest" with "the new act by which Israel comes into existence." In a sense, Deutero-Isaiah's antithetical structures "rewrite" chapters 1-39: when Deutero-Isaiah refers to "former things" in 41:21, these things are the prophecies of chapters 1-39.⁶⁷

Carroll's understanding of the "shaping" of the Book of Isaiah stems from his analysis of the loss of Judean monarchy and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians as a failure that comes to shape the redactions and interpretations of Isaiah.

The Book of Isaiah as it now stands is a great palimpsest of interpretations of the ongoing experiences of the city in light of future expectations. Thus on the surface the Book of Isaiah looks like ideal material for showing that the reinterpretive

⁶⁵ Ibid., 83–88. See also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 404–405; Hendel, "Isaiah and the Transition from Prophecy to the Apocalyptic," 272–276.

⁶⁶ Richard J Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 4.

⁶⁷ This point is made by Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 80.

(hermeneutic) response to dissonance was an important feature of the *earliest* interpretations of prophecy.⁶⁸

Carroll shows, for example, how the cognitive dissonance of the loss of the Davidic monarchy is prevented by transforming oracles about the House of David into Messianic aspirations.⁶⁹ He also shows how the interpretations of prophecy are motivated by communal and institutional needs. Because "no community can thrive on a diet of destruction predicted for the future" the end of Isaiah chapter 6, which prophesizes unremitting and total annihilation, is mitigated by "a note appear[ing] at the end of the vision [whose]... ambiguous brevity is a brilliant defense against failure for there is nothing stated by it that could be refuted by subsequent events."⁷⁰

Clements' set of related articles on prophecy also aim to explain the apparent symmetry of rebuke and consolation: "the scribes who have preserved and ordered the various prophetic collections...sought to ensure that divine threats be followed and counterbalanced by divine promises."⁷¹ Clements' article on the redaction of Ezekiel contains generalizations useful to the redaction of all prophetic texts.⁷² The motivation for the "constant, and at times almost doctrinaire, rounding off of dire and fearsome threats with words of hope and assurance"⁷³ is given a functional or formal explanation:

The stimulus toward this feature, which often becomes most marked where the original threat appears most sharp and incisive, must have originated as a literary device made necessary by the manner in which the prophetic texts were being read, possibly liturgically...It is the literary preservation and the continued use of the prophetic texts that has prompted this distinctive structural shaping of the material.⁷⁴

Like Carroll, Clements posits institutional needs shaping the final form of the prophetic corpus. The prophecies' continued usage, perhaps in liturgy, seems to be a determining factor in their symmetry and harmony; the jagged edges of the older prophecies seem to be rounded off and made part of a more stable religion structure. But perhaps the relation between the texts is a more dynamic one; what Clements calls "sharpness," or what Carroll calls "failure," remains a sharp kernel within the more harmonious or domesticated text.

On Literary Readings and Robert Lowth

In the previous pages, I showed how Isaiah's throne vision, one of the most important passages of prophecy in the canon, achieves its rhetorical effect through an interplay between balance and disruption, harmony and stutter, revelation and obscurity. In my close reading I aimed to read the text against the grain, reading for imbalances and

⁶⁸ Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions*, New edition (XPRESS Reprints, 1996), 131.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 102.

⁷² See also Chapter 3, on the transition from oral to written prophecy in the Book of Ezekiel.

⁷³ Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy*, 166.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

dissonant moments rather than symmetry. In the following pages I want to present an eighteenth century reading of Isaiah by Lowth that continues the harmonizing effects of the redactors of Isaiah, by emphasizing the heightened formal qualities of the text and repressing its formal weaknesses.

Lowth is a significant figure to my argument for two main reasons. Firstly, he inaugurated the formal link between prophecy and poetry, bringing the prophet-poet into European Romantic literature as a figure of rhetorical strength and mastery, while at the same time unwittingly importing prophetic weakness into the lyric. Admittedly, the idea of the prophet-as-poet can be traced to sixteenth and seventeenth century English poets such as Sidney and Milton. However, as Ian Balfour notes, before the mid-eighteenth century "the thesis that prophecy was poetry in the strict sense retained for a long time the status of an intuition, a suspicion still to be confirmed."⁷⁵ As opposed to the Psalms, which were always read as poetry proper, the classical prophetic texts – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve Prophets had been considered prose. Lowth was the first to demonstrate the poetic character of the prophetic books and to assess them based on their literary qualities.⁷⁶

At the same time, Lowth's influential lectures and commentary crystallized a new way to consider the biblical text. While Lowth was himself a high ranking member of the Anglican clergy, his approach paved the way for a secular reading of the Bible based on its literary merits and effects, rather than its religious meaning. Lowth's method included reading the Bible's tropes and forms carefully, just as he read classical poetry. Today, such a literary reading of the biblical text can seem self-evident. In turning my gaze on Lowth I hope to historicize the seemingly ahistorical act of reading the Bible as literature. In a similar way, I wish to locate Lowth's great discovery of a seemingly neutral formal term, "biblical parallelism," in a specific part of the prophetic corpus. As I will argue, though parallelism characterizes Northwest Semitic poetry, especially Hebrew and Ugaritic poetry, Lowth's use of the term is inflected with an ideological sense, what I called earlier the dynamics of redaction, or the creation of strong prophecy out of prophetic fissures and fault-lines. My symptomatic reading of Lowth's literary approach to the Bible can be roughly grouped into three constellations: reactions to the weak prophecy of the Biblical text itself, the construction of "The Enlightenment Bible" as a document for a secular age, and the way in which Lowth's aesthetics function as part of the eighteenth century discourse on enthusiasm.

⁷⁵ Ian Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002), 59. In addition to a prophetic mode in poetry, prophetic speech and writings were an important and explosive feature of the religious and revolutionary tracts of the seventeenth century, as I discuss in the following pages.

⁷⁶ Lowth placed a new value on the everyday, seemingly "vulgar" imagery of Hebrew poetry that was to shape the Romantic revolution and its emphasis on the "commonplace." For example, Lowth cites 2 Kings 21:13 "and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it, and turning it upside down." (For Lowth's Latin I have substituted KJV.) This is an example "in which the meanness of the image is fully equaled by the plainness and inelegance of the expression; and yet such is its consistency, such is the propriety of its application, that I do not scruple to pronounce it sublime." Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 62. As Prickett argues, by providing a poetics of non-metrical poetry, Lowth also inadvertently redefined the boundary between poetry and prose, a re-mapping which was to have far reaching consequences for the modern lyric.

Lowth's observations first appear in a series of lectures in Latin he gave at Oxford over the course of nine years, beginning in 1741.⁷⁷ In these influential lectures, Lowth sets out to create a biblical poetics to rival classical poetics. His lectures are followed up and expanded upon in his 1778 translation and commentary on the Book of Isaiah.⁷⁸ His commentary is a jumbled, glorious mix of the most up-to-date philology, utilizing versions and manuscripts hitherto unavailable or underused, and a focus on material culture based on the latest innovations in archeology, botany and anthropology. Both his comparisons to classical poetry in the lectures, and the philology and anthropology of the commentary are in service of an aesthetic project, as he aims to "discover and relish those delicate touches of grace and elegance that lie beyond the reach of vulgar apprehension."⁷⁹ Lowth's lectures on Hebrew poetry were an attempt to "learn the origin of the art" of poetry, which he located in the sacred poetry of the Hebrew Bible, in order to "estimate the excellence" of *all* poetry, from ancient Greek poetry to contemporary English poetry.⁸⁰

Perhaps Lowth's most renowned contribution to biblical scholarship was his conception of biblical parallelism.⁸¹ As Stephen Prickett claims, parallelism "redefined the conception of Hebrew poetry."⁸² Previous failed attempts had been made to discover a set meter for Biblical poetry,⁸³ but Lowth's innovation was to establish that biblical poetry existed and could be appreciated independently of a metrical system that was irretrievably lost, since the true pronunciation of biblical Hebrew was not preserved by Diaspora Jews.⁸⁴ In Lowth's lectures, the existence of biblical parallelism, along with such features as a specialized poetic diction, indicates a lost poetic metre and functions as evidence for Lowth's central argument that prophetic texts are poetry. In the subsequent reception of Lowth's term, biblical parallelism becomes not only the mark of lost metre, but a defining feature of poetry in its own right, which comes to transform what is generically marked as poetry in the Romantic era and beyond.

⁷⁷ These lectures were first published as *De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* in 1753, and were swiftly translated by the renowned biblical scholar Johannes Michaelis into German in 1758 and subsequently by George Gregory and into English in 1787, published under the title *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*.

⁷⁸ Robert Lowth, *Isaiah. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory*. (London: J. Nichols, 1778).

⁷⁹ Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. Gregory, George (London: J. Johnson, 1787), 5.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ The Latin is *parallelismus membrorum*, literally parallelism of members. See James Kugel for an insightful critique of Lowth's discovery that critiques parallelism as a formal mark of poetry. I am indebted to Kugel's critique of Lowth's formal ideology, though I remain convinced of a distinct type of poetical biblical text. James Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

⁸² Stephen Prickett, *Words and The Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 41.

⁸³ See for example, Bishop Hare's system: Thomas Edwards, *A New English Translation of the Psalms from the Original Hebrew Reduced to Metre by the Late Bishop Hare with Notes Critical and Explanatory Illustrations of Many Passages Drawn from the Classics* (Cambridge: J. Bentham, 1755). which is refuted by Lowth.

⁸⁴ "I think we may with safety affirm, that the Hebrew poetry is metrical...[yet] since the regulation of the metre of any language must depend upon two particulars, I mean the number and length of the syllables, the knowledge of which is utterly unattainable in the Hebrew, he who attempts to restore the true and genuine Hebrew versification, creates an edifice without a foundation."Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 34. See also Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 182. For a discussion of the rebuttal of Lowth's Jewish contemporaries see David B Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 57–88.

Lowth noted that the primary feature of the biblical poetic line was "a certain equality, resemblance, or parallelism...so that in two lines...things for the most part shall answer to things, and words to words, as if fitted to each other by a kind of rule or measure"⁸⁵ (my emphasis). In his explanations, Lowth emphasizes the elegance, sweetness, and sense of craftsmanship – what he calls 'artifice' – that these equivalences provide. Many studies since Lowth have examined and developed the notion of parallelism, both in relation to Hebrew poetry and to the conventional word-pairs of its early Canaanite predecessor, Ugaritic poetry.⁸⁶ Since the early 1980's, a virtual renaissance in the study of biblical parallelism and biblical poetic has produced many important studies illuminating the craft and effect of repetition, variation, and the cumulative effect of this use of artful language.⁸⁷ Notably, Alter has made important corrections to Lowth's relatively static picture of parallelism. Lowth's insight, without doubt, reflected an important feature of biblical poetry. However, in the following pages it is my intention to read this discovery as part of Lowth's idiosyncratic aesthetic ideology.

In Lowth's lecture titled "The Prophetic Poetry is Sententious,"⁸⁸ he demonstrates how the "very early use of sacred music in public worship" was to influence the formal features, or "the peculiar character" of Hebrew poetry. In a sense, here Lowth anticipates Hermann Gunkel's emphasis on understanding the *Sitz im Leben* of biblical texts, especially poetic texts, and Clements' argument about the use of prophecy in liturgy. The original, religious hymns of the Hebrews, he claims, "were alternately sung [by] opposite choirs."⁸⁹ In other words, religious music and consequently all biblical poetry, was originally responsive in form, which explains its parallel structures. Lowth's examples of responsive poetry include the Song of the Sea, in which the women respond to the men's song, various examples from the psalms, the dedication of the Temple in Ezra, and the women's victory song for David and Saul (Exod 15:1-18; Ezra 3:11; 1 Sam 18:7).⁹⁰ Thus the literal call and response of the singers has been transformed into a formal feature.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 157. Lowth creates a kind of scientific taxonomy for species of parallelism: synonymous parallelism is "when the same sentiment is repeated in different, but equivalent terms." Ibid. Antithetical parallelism is when "a thing is illustrated by its contrary." Ibid., 161. The synthetic, or constructive parallelism is when "the sentences answer to each other...merely by the form of construction." Ibid., 162.

⁸⁶ John Jebb, *Sacred Literature* (London; Edinburgh: T. Cadell and W. Davies: W. Blackwood, 1820); E. Sievers, *Metrische Studien. I: Studien Zur Hebräischen Metrik* (Leipzig, 1901); Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yabwistic Poetry* (Missoula, Mont.: Published by Scholars Press for the Society of Biblical Literature, 1975).

⁸⁷ See Alter's indispensable guide to the subtle craft of Hebrew parallelism, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. See also James Kugel's critique of Lowth in *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*. See also Adele Berlin's discussion of parallelism and linguistics in *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Stephen Geller, *Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry* (Missoula Mont.: Scholars Press, 1979).

⁸⁸ Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 154.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ When Lowth translates Isaiah, he notes more examples of corresponding choirs. He reads a choral call and response Isa 40:9 between "the daughter that bringest glad tidings to Jerusalem" and the cities of Judah. Lowth, *Isaiah. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory.*, 317. For Isaiah 62: 6 Lowth reads a temple watch of Levites, who sang back and forth to each other. Ibid., 387. He later links the call and response of the watchmen to a contemporary Eastern custom: "The watchmen in the camp of the caravans go their rounds, crying one after another, 'God is one, He is merciful;' and often add 'Take heed to yourselves.'" Ibid. He sets Isa 63:1-6 as a call and response between a voice marked CHORUS and a voice marked MESSENGER. Ibid., 119.

⁹¹ Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 156.

The "correspondence" that appears in the biblical text between two parts of a line is imagined as a dialogue between two singers, or two speakers, such as night watchmen. The Hebrew root ענה (*`nb*) is taken by Lowth to be emblematic of the echo of response or correspondence embedded in Hebrew poetry – literally it means "to answer," but it is "used more generally to denote any song or poem."⁹² Since parallelism originates in responsive song, Hebrew poetry is implicitly intertwined with questions of dialogue between speakers.

Lowth's final and arguably most important example for the correspondence at the heart of biblical poetry is the hymn of the seraphim described in Isaiah's theophany.

In the very same manner Isaiah describes the seraphim chanting the praise of Jehovah: "they cried alternately,
 "Holy, holy, holy, JEHOVAH God of Hosts!
 "The whole earth is filled with his glory."⁹³

Lowth's translation of the passage reflects his desire to link the cries of the seraphim to the many responsive human choirs he previously listed. While the King James Version translated their song as a kind of spontaneous conversation: "one cried unto another," (6:3) Lowth emphasizes the almost rehearsed, liturgical aspect of the cries: "...and they cried out *alternately*"⁹⁴ (my emphasis). Though the Hebrew root *`nb* is not present in this text, Lowth's translation almost suggests it.

This final example of corresponding choirs stands out because it links divine and human speech. In Lowth's lists of choirs, this is the only non-human manifestation of responsive singing. Lowth glosses over this distinction quite quickly. "In the very same manner Isaiah describes the seraphim chanting the praise of Jehovah."⁹⁵ But we might linger and ask, what is the "very same manner?" How can other-worldly seraphim sing like humans? In Christian typology, divine action provides an example for human practice. Here, the text seems to imply that that this figuration works backwards, as if the seraphim took human practice as their model.

For Lowth, parallelism is a way to create elegance and order. However the parallelism of the seraphic correspondence within the context of the chapter suggests "irregularity" rather than elegance. The chapter mixes poetry and prose, as Lowth himself acknowledges by printing some of the chapter in prose blocks, while other parts are end-stopped. In addition, as noted above, it is difficult to resolve the song of the seraphim into

⁹² The two different meanings of the root in Hebrew probably have different origins, as is testified by their cognates in Arabic, making this a false etymology for poetry. Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, [New ed.]. (Peabody Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 772 & 777.

⁹³ Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 155. For the biblical quote, given in Latin, I've substituted his later English translation: .Lowth, *Isaiah. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory.*, 11.

⁹⁴ A similar change from the KJV is Isa 27:2:

MT: ביום ההוא כרם חמד ענו לה

KJV: In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine

Lowth: To the beloved vineyard, sing ye a responsive song

Here, Lowth inserts the sense of responsiveness, to what was previously translated as just a song, without clear formal features.

⁹⁵ Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 155.

Lowth's taxonomy. Lowth relies on Jerome to make the parallelism coherent;⁹⁶ Jerome, and generally the Christian interpretive tradition, reads the triple repetition as a reference to the trinity. In that sense, "Holy, Holy, Holy" and "JEHOVAH God of Hosts," are both descriptions of the divinity, the former in its trinity, and the latter in its unitary nature. The first part of the hymn then describes the divine court, and the second part, earth. This is only an apparent antithesis, though, because messianic time will reveal the heavens and the earth to be "unseparated." Here we see how Lowth must rely on various allegorical readings of the text to make these enigmatic lines parallel according to his system. On a literal level, which I will discuss later on, it is harder to use them as a model for poetic parallelism. Thus, at least in regards to this passage, it may be more accurate to speak of an "invention" rather than a "discovery" of biblical parallelism.

Lowth claims that the Book of Isaiah is the best example of prophetic poetry in the Hebrew Bible, perhaps of all poetry;⁹⁷ this claim is central to his argument about the aesthetic value of the Hebrew Bible, and is based on his innovative inclusion of the prophetic books in the genre of poetry. Thus, the example of parallelism from Isaiah is an especially marked location.⁹⁸ Lecture XXI, on "The Peculiar Character of Each of the Prophets" concludes that "if the Hebrew poetry at present is possessed of any remains of its native grace or harmony, we shall chiefly find them in the writings of Isaiah."⁹⁹ The harmony of the seraphim's song, the correspondence shaping biblical poetry, and the harmony of the Isaianic text are interrelated structuring principles. Lowth's sense of the harmony of Isaiah is partially an extension of the same correspondence he values in individual lines of poetry.¹⁰⁰ This interrelatedness means that the sense of balance and harmony within a verse is echoed by larger structures, such as the close relation between two chapters.

The thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth chapters of Isaiah contain a remarkable prophecy. It is a simple, regular, and perfect poem, consisting of two parts according to the nature of the subject...The first part of the prophecy contains a denunciation of extraordinary punishment...and afterwards, in consequence of this event, a full and complete restoration is promised to the church itself.¹⁰¹

Lowth celebrates the formal "perfection" of the poem, in which judgment and destruction are followed or answered by restoration. He recommends reading both halves in order to fully discern the "order and arrangement of the subject."¹⁰² The correspondence between chapters 34 and 35 is conveyed by the ampersand linking the heading to the two

⁹⁶ "Ut mysterium Trinitatis in Una Divinitate demonstret; et nequaquam templum Judaicum, sicut prius, sed omnem terram illius gloria plenam esse testentur" Jerome, quoted in Lowth, *Isaiah. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory.*, 182.

⁹⁷ Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 176.

⁹⁸ Ezekiel is the most sublime poet, but this does not make him the best poet. While sublimity is term of great significance, great poetry consists of both sublimity and elegance. Though he does not make a clear distinction between "the beautiful" and "the sublime" as Burke, and later Kant would make, there is already in Lowth a sense of these two different aesthetic functions. See my discussion below.

⁹⁹ Lowth, *Isaiah. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory.*, 176. Note also the melancholic sense of successful poetry as "remains."

¹⁰⁰ The explicit idea that parallelism might also apply to larger structures was noted by John Jebbs, early in the 19th century. Jebb, *Sacred Literature*.

¹⁰¹ *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 171.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 173.

chapters.¹⁰³ Balfour goes a step further in linking microcosm to macrocosm, though his doctrinal reading somewhat loses Lowth's emphasis on form:

The structure of the two chapters mirror, in Lowth's revisionary reading, the rhythm of the Christian Bible itself; the first foregrounds God as a destructive, vengeful force, and the second part envisions a full restoration of the 'church.' Clearly, the doctrinal content of Lowth's hermeneutic is already at work in the task of description.¹⁰⁴

Lowth is certainly not the first to note that prophecies of rebuke are often balanced with prophecies of consolation, and that images of punishment correspond to images of restoration and redemption. Certainly, this "harmony" has been part of the earliest shaping of the Book of Isaiah and its reception history. But Lowth's innovation is to locate that duality, or balance, almost exclusively in the craft of the text. In discussing Isaiah 34 & 35, he refrains from a theological discussion about grace and redemption; rather, he focuses on the "order, disposition and symmetry"¹⁰⁵ of the text.

For Lowth, then, "biblical parallelism" is not confined to a limited, technical term. His notion of parallelism is tied to broader theological and aesthetic considerations and is not limited to the individual line. Lowth demonstrates that an awareness of parallelism is an important tool for the philologist; at the same time its philological use echoes an older Christian hermeneutics. Because the structure of the line creates coherent relations between words, whether synonymous or antithetical, the discovery of parallelism allows the biblical scholar to unearth and correct previously damaged lines. In the preface to the translation of Isaiah, Lowth shows how parallelism helps explain words – "sometimes it will suggest the true reading"¹⁰⁶ and so "inveterate mistakes...which have disgraced the text above two thousand years...are happily corrected."¹⁰⁷ Lowth's reference to scribal mistakes as inveterate or disgraceful implies that philology can be a moral enterprise.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, for Lowth, parallelism is a scholarly tool, but it is also a kind of moral compass, a way to restore the text to a state of grace.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ This is the only place chapters are linked with this typography. Suggestively, the typography is picked up by William Blake in "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," to refer to these very chapters. Lowth's ampersand seems to infect the entirety of Blake's text. "Now is the dominion of Edom & the return of Adam into Paradise; see Isaiah XXXIV & XXXV chap:" William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V Erdman, Newly revised ed (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2008), 34.

¹⁰⁴ Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, 78.

¹⁰⁵ *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 170.

¹⁰⁶ Lowth, *Isaiah. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory*, xxx.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxiii.

¹⁰⁸ The OED defines "inveterate" as "settled or confirmed in habit, condition, or practice; habitual, hardened, obstinate." Lowth's use of the term may suggest a Jewish scribal tradition, or the inveterate Mistake of the Jews according to Christian doctrine.

¹⁰⁹ Besides the parallelism of lines, Lowth's commentary is imbued with references to parallel texts such as Kings or Psalms, or parallels between texts in Isaiah – 40:5 to 52:10, for example, which help clear up textual corruption. He also notes the parallels the Isaianic texts after chapter 40 makes between the Exodus from Egypt to the return from Babylonian captivity. Lowth, *Isaiah. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory*, 310. Thus, the translation and commentary of Isaiah, a text replete with both thematic and textual parallels, becomes a productive place to stage the discovery of formal parallelism.

According to Lowth, "The prophetic, indeed, differs in one respect from every other species of the sacred poetry: when first divulged it is impenetrably obscure: and time, which darkens every other composition, elucidates this."¹¹⁰ The work of the biblical scholar, then, is an essential part of the afterlife of prophetic poetry; the philologist becomes an agent of hermeneutic grace because the unique nature of prophetic text itself is to constantly unfold. As Balfour puts it, "so miraculous is this process that the very act of interpretation is rendered superfluous...the text is not presented as an interpretation of history; rather, history emerges as the certain interpreter of the text."¹¹¹ The contemporary scholar's ability to understand the prophetic text is based in part on the Holy Spirit which "has itself condescended to remove the veil" by fulfilling obscure prophecies throughout the design of history, which is ultimately "illuminating."¹¹² In linking prophecy and poetry, Lowth seems to imply that the understanding of parallelism can become part of the mechanism of the mystical afterlife of the prophetic text.

In most of the lectures, parallelism is synonymous to "correspondence." However, at a few key moments, "correspondence" comes to mean something beyond parallelism within the verse. For example, in his discussion of Psalm 42, "one of the most beautiful specimens of the Hebrew elegy," or what Gunkel would call an individual lament, Lowth notes a "correspondence of the subject and sentiments of this poem." The transitions of the speaker's state of mind are depicted by "frequent and almost instantaneous transitions... [the speaker] glows with love, and droops with lamentation; he complains, he expostulates; he despairs and yet hopes; he is afflicted and again consoled."¹¹³ We saw that for Gunkel, following Mowinckel in this case, the rapid emotional transitions of the individual lament mark its roots in an expiation ritual. For Lowth, it is a sense of correspondence that knits together the rapid transitions of sentiments and gives it a sense of coherence rather than emotional chaos.

Lowth's commentary on Isaiah also contains a theological or what we might call a "prophetic correspondence." In reference to Isaiah 44:27, Lowth remarks: "Cyrus took Babylon by laying the bed of the Euphrates dry...this remarkable circumstance, in which the event so exactly corresponded with the prophecy, was also noted by Jeremiah."¹¹⁴ Here, the notion of "correspondence" links the texts of Isaiah and Jeremiah to the historical events of the sixth century BC and to each other. Correspondence becomes a way to conflate distinct historical periods, and to show how the texts of prophecy reach across the centuries, touching history. Prophetic texts are validated by unfolding events, and in this sense are in a different epistemological position than the poems of classical antiquity.

If Lowth's "correspondence" is a mysterious quality that knits together opposing emotions, a way that prophetic texts are answered by history, or the way opaque oracles come to light after centuries through an act of exegetical grace, could we posit a "correspondence" between Isaiah's throne and his commission later in the chapter? As in the case of Psalm 42, is there a way to knot together different opposing affects? Or perhaps does

¹¹⁰ Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 93.

¹¹¹ Balfour, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy*, 72.

¹¹² Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 93.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹¹⁴ Lowth, *Isaiab. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory.*, 332.

the commission mirror the vision, as in Isaiah 34 & 35, creating a balance? Lowth's treatment of the problematic verses of Isaiah 6:9-10 turns away from a moral discussion, and creates "correspondence" purely through reference to formal features. The aesthetic categories Lowth applies to the text help him smooth out and regularize this strange moment in the text, saving it from its troubling theological implications, and from having to consider the troubling lacks of "correspondence" between God and his chosen people that prophetic texts raise. Lowth's translation of 6:10 reads:

Make their ears dull, and close up their eyes;
Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears,
And understand with their hearts and be converted;
and I should heal them.¹¹⁵

While the KJV translates the last words of the verse **וּרְפָא לוֹ** as "and be healed" referring to the nation, Lowth retroverts the LXX translation to the Hebrew **וְאֶרְפָא** – "I should heal them," a verb which makes Yahweh the active agent of healing. It is striking, then, that Lowth does not solve the interpretive crux in the first part of the verse¹¹⁶ by appealing to the Septuagint's theologically easier text, nor is this alternative version even mentioned in his commentary. Additionally, while Lowth's commentary quotes extensively from Jerome, in the case of this verse, Lowth skirts Jerome's comments as well as the rich theological discussion continued by medieval commentators. On "make gross" in v.10 Lowth comments:

The Prophet speaks of the event, the fact as it would actually happen; not of God's purpose and act by his ministry. The Prophets are in other places said to perform the thing which they only foretell.¹¹⁷

Here, there is a slight attempt at resolving a problem which is not entirely acknowledged. Explicitly, Lowth avoids a theological discussion that would consider "God's purpose" in giving this command to shut down prophetic communication, by focusing on the literal nature of the event – "as it would actually happen." Implicitly Lowth recognizes that the prophetic performance of Yahweh's punishment would be highly troubling. He quotes from two other prophetic passages that also contain prophetic utterances that are "said to perform the thing that they only foretell." Jeremiah is told to destroy the nations, (1:10) and Ezekiel says he himself came to destroy the city (**בבאי לשהת את-העיר** 43:3) but this is only a manner of speech – the prophets are to "foretell," not to act. Similarly Ibn Ezra, remarks that prophecy "is only in speech," and Isaiah does not actually have the power to harden hearts.¹¹⁸ Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Isaiah only foretells the dullness of the nation, and is not actually causing them to become dull to Yahweh's message.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁶ i.e. Why is the prophet encouraging the nation to turn away from prophecy?

¹¹⁷ Lowth, *Isaiah. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory.*, 184.

¹¹⁸ Ibn Ezra raises the possibility that the verbs are in the infinitive case, but finally rules against it:

יש אומרים שמלת **השמן** – שם הפועל... וזה לא יתכן בעבור מילת פן, רק הכל ציווי. וידענו כי אין כה בנביא להשמן הלב, רק הוא בדיבור, וכמוהו רבים.

"There are some that say that "make gross" is an infinitive verb... but this is not possible due to the word 'lest' – everything must be in the imperative. And we know that the prophet does not have the power to harden the

After this somewhat convoluted distinction, Lowth appeals to an aesthetic reading in deflecting further moral discussion.

To hear, and not understand; to see, and not perceive; is a common saying in many languages. Demosthenes uses it, and expressly calls it a proverb...The Prophet, by the bold figure in the sentiment above-mentioned, and the elegant form and construction of the sentence, has raised it from a common proverb into a beautiful *mashal*, and given it the sublime air of poetry.¹¹⁹

The harsh command is here strikingly read as "beautiful" or "sublime."¹²⁰ In the biblical text, the command comes from Yahweh, whose punishing voice is contrasted with Isaiah's plaintive cry. Lowth is interested here, though, in the craft of the author-prophet-poet, rather than the divine message. "The Prophet" is the agent of the sentence, who crafts the proverb into successful poetry.

The definition of the text as poetry allows Lowth to turn away from vexing questions of the fulfillment of malevolent prophecies and the pathos of Isaiah's cry to an appreciation of the formal qualities of the text. The detailed and precise imagery, the elegant grammar of the sentence and the parallel chiasmic lines, and perhaps also the imperative verb, which as we saw, Lowth retained despite the Septuagint shift to declarative verbs, turn the saying from a proverb to a *mashal*. The difference between the lowly proverb and the beautiful *mashal* is based on the ineffable "sublime air of poetry." The proverb "to hear, and not understand; to see, and not perceive" is already syntactically parallel, but it seems to require more than parallelism – "the bare merit of a sententious neatness"¹²¹ – to become sublime. As Gregory, Lowth's translator notes, the root of *mashal* has two principle meanings in Hebrew, to compare – here we get the sense of parable – and to rule.¹²² According to Lowth, the sublimity of the *mashal* is also related to its additional meaning having to do with rule and authority. Sublimity is "expressive of power, or supreme authority, and when applied to style, seems particularly to intimate something imminent or energetic, excellent or important."¹²³

I speak not merely of that sublimity, which exhibits great objects with a magnificent display of imagery and diction; but that force of composition, whatever it be, which strikes and overpowers the mind, which excites the passions, and which expresses ideas at once with perspicuity and elevation.¹²⁴

Like many of his English contemporaries, Lowth draws on the recently discovered text of Longinus and his description of the sublime in rhetorical speech. In fact, William

heart, only in speech [or only in the declarative case? YR], as we see elsewhere (my translation). Menachem Cohen, *Mikraot gedolot ha-Keter*, vol. 4 (Ramat-Gan: Universitat Bar Ilan, 1992), 49.

¹¹⁹ Lowth, *Isaiab. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory.*, 184.

¹²⁰ The two terms are almost interchangeable here, though other moments in the text suggest two separate aesthetic affects.

¹²¹ Lowth, *Isaiab. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory.*, 104.

¹²² Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 324.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

Lowth, Robert Lowth's father, already described Ezekiel using language similar to the sublime, as a prophet in which "the harsh, demeaning, and the unpleasant...were exaggerated and stressed too forcibly...in order to produce an overwhelming shock and power."¹²⁵ According to Brian Hepworth, the younger Lowth differed from his father, who functioned in "a religious world in which higher truths are made available even by literary technique."¹²⁶ In contrast, Lowth the son analyzed "the linguistic phenomenon of Hebrew poetry as purely subjective, psychological response that was in tune with contemporary philosophy."¹²⁷

While Hepworth is invested in making a firm distinction between the older and younger Lowth in order to demonstrate Robert Lowth's secular outlook, I read Robert Lowth as an intermediary figure who negotiates in a more complex way with secularism. His notion of sublimity is both religious and psychological. Lowth was undoubtedly familiar with Shaftesbury and Addison's work on the sublime. Edmund Burke's influential *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* was published in between the lectures in the commentary; we could speak of an intertextuality between Lowth and Burke's notion of the sublime.¹²⁸ Thus, while Lowth does not make a firm distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, the distinction almost emerges in his commentary on Isaiah 6. The chant of the seraphim is the origin of biblical parallelism, characterized by the correspondence, or ענות. Isaiah's oracles in the second part of the chapter, on the other hand, are more closely linked to the sublime *mashal*, a rhetorical quality related to force, power, and domination. The aesthetic notion of the sublime, "the force of composition, whatever it be, which strikes and overpowers the mind" is an abstract idea of power linked to the subjective experience of the mind. It turns away from the explicitly religious: in the Bible – it is *God* that overpowers Isaiah, and God that speaks frightening oracles, and not Isaiah. At the same time, the sublime, as Lowth discusses it, turns away from a discussion of the historical-political power of authoritative figures over their subjects.¹²⁹

Lowth's "Symptoms" and Symptomatic Readings

Lowth's reading of Isaiah 6 exhibits a number of incongruities or inconsistencies. Parallelism is carefully explained to his audience in lucid examples, but his paradigmatic case (6:2) fits uneasily into his taxonomy. While Lowth celebrates parallelism as an elegant harmony of equivalences, he imposes "regularity" by allegorical readings on passages that might be deemed intrinsically "irregular." Parallelism is a formal literary feature, but it is also

¹²⁵ William Lowth, *A Commentary on the Larger and Lesser Prophets*, 3rd ed. (London: Printed for James and John Knapton et al, 1730), 254.

¹²⁶ Brian Hepworth, *Robert Lowth* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 17.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Burke's description of the sublimity of the wild horse seems directly drawn from Lowth's reading of the horse at the end of the Book of Job. On the connection between Burke and Lowth see also *Ibid.*, 96.

¹²⁹ A comprehensive study of Lowth's political position and influence in relation to his scholarship is yet to be written. Hepworth notes that "he was privy to political decision-making at the highest level during the years of the American War of Independence, not only as a member of His Majesty's Privy Council and the Dean of the Chapel Royal, but also as an administrator in charge of the colonial churches, a traditional responsibility of the see of London."*Ibid.*, 44–45. It is astounding to imagine Lowth putting the finishing touches on his commentary on Isaiah (published in 1778) in the midst of administrative duties during the American Revolution.

sometimes linked to "correspondence" or "responsiveness," terms that are related to speech acts and theology. He also uses the Septuagint inconsistently: he uses the Septuagint to correct an opaque reading (Isa 6:10b) while ignoring a much cited Septuagint version in the first part of the verse.

Lowth's notion of the sublime seems to be a purely formal quality of the text. In Hepworth's reading of Lowth, the sublime embodies "an experience of the infinite – which is not a vision of a veiled God; it is an exploration of man's native imaginative resources."¹³⁰ However, Lowth often remains entangled in theological language; it is as if the text of Isaiah itself asserts its religious structures. For example, while v.10 is noted only for its aesthetic achievement, when confronted with the obscure language of v. 13, Lowth remarks: "this passage, though somewhat obscure...has been made so clear by the accomplishment of the prophecy, that there remains little room to doubt the sense of it." The final prophecy of the chapter anticipates the entirety of lacrimosal Jewish history from Nebuchadnezzar to "so many other repeated exterminations and massacres of [the Jews], in different times and on various occasions since."¹³¹ The prophetic text is not read as an aesthetic object; rather, it is the text of history itself which confirms and interprets it in "remarkable completion," and Lowth's "correspondence" suddenly slips into theology again.

The irregularities or incongruities in Lowth's relation to the biblical text can be read as "symptoms" of the ideological tensions during the time of the composition of the text and in Lowth's eighteenth century. I propose, then, to read the vacillations between secular and religious language, between the rhetoric of passion and the rhetoric of control as symptoms. The notion of reading a text symptomatically is rooted in both psychoanalytic and Marxist hermeneutics. What follows is a brief sketch of this approach to interpretation.

In Jameson's influential formulation of symptomatic reading,¹³² which ties together Marxist and Freudian analysis, the individual psychological symptom is made to function metaphorically within a literary text as an indicator of collective social tension and contradiction. Symptomatic reading, or what Jameson calls interpretation proper, "always presupposes, if not a conception of the unconscious itself, then at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one, or to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code."¹³³ Jameson's interpretive strategy is to distinguish between a manifest and latent meaning, a surface and a depth reading.¹³⁴ While a literary text seems to be composed according to purely aesthetic considerations such as genre or the configuration of various tropes, these aesthetic features mask or veil the complexities of an ideological system. As opposed to Lowth's aesthetic reading of the biblical text, historical criticism allows us to read prophecy as part of an ideological system, or as filtered through

¹³⁰ Ibid., 94.

¹³¹ Lowth, *Isaiab. A New Translation with a Preliminary Dissertation, and Notes Critical, Philological, and Explanatory.*, 185.

¹³² Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*.

¹³³ Ibid., 60.

¹³⁴ In recent years, this distinction between surface and depth reading has been challenged as a universal hermeneutics. See Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1–21. However, given the involvement of the Book of Isaiah in creating a hermeneutics of manifest and latent meanings, this still seems to be a fruitful way of thinking about this specific text, as I will show.

layers of ideologies. Furthermore, we need to read *Lowth's* text too as it is set into an ideological system.

A hermeneutics that calls attention to the latent meanings of the text, as well as the conceptual categories through which "we attempt to confront and appropriate it"¹³⁵ seems especially apt in discussing the Book of Isaiah and its reception. There is a line to be traced between the text of Isaiah, its later redactions and interpretations, the allegorical medieval system of reading that Jameson takes as a precursor to his own system, and the "symptomatic reading" he presents. I turn then to Jameson not only as a theoretical structure for my argument, but because of these genealogical connections between reading systems. Arguably, the Book of Isaiah is one of the cultural origins for reading *through* a text to esoteric meanings, rather than remaining on its surface.¹³⁶

Following Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jameson discusses the way unresolved social tensions in Caduveo society, for example, are "a source of confusion and disquiet. Yet since [the members of the tribe] were unable to conceptualize or to live this solution directly, they began to dream it, to project it into the imaginary."¹³⁷ According to Jameson, cultural artifacts, such as Caduveo face art can "[constitute] a symbolic act, whereby real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm."¹³⁸ The aesthetic act and the production of aesthetic form becomes "an ideological act in its own right."¹³⁹

Jameson's project attempts to give a symptomatic reading of not only the content of literary texts, but "the interpretive categories or codes through which we read and receive the text in question."¹⁴⁰ For Jameson, the close analysis of literary forms, in the case of my argument, a term like "biblical parallelism," can provide insight into what he calls "the ideology of form." It is not only the explicit content of the text that carries ideological meaning, but the forms of the text, and we could say in the case of Lowth, the forms *read into* the text.

Why, for example, is the discovery of biblical parallelism staged through the genre of prophecy? Lowth's poetics, while explicitly focused on technical features, are also implicitly addressed to specifically prophetic texts, which thematize questions of power and control of prophetic discourse, correspondence and lack of correspondence. In the example of Isaiah 6:9-10 we see how the "sublimity" of the text is constructed by glossing over the moments of fissure in the text itself. Reading the prophets as poets, then, emphasizes elegance, harmony and correspondence at the expense of the problem, the stutter, the flawed and frustrated dialogues of the prophetic texts. Upon analysis, the literary qualities

¹³⁵ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 10.

¹³⁶ Hendel traces how the classical prophetic texts already contain the seeds of a later "apocalyptic" reading: "As the prophetic word becomes, at least potentially, a floating signifier, it can be reconceived in correlation with other circumstances and other prophetic oracles." Hendel, "Isaiah and the Transition from Prophecy to the Apocalyptic," 265. In Isa 6:9, "the prophet's words are esoteric by divine intention." Thus "the incomprehension of Isaiah's contemporaries is a negative foil for the willing comprehension of the readers of the scroll." *Ibid.*, 273. See also the earlier discussion of 6:9 above.

¹³⁷ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (London: Cape, 1973), 179–180.

¹³⁸ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 79.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

that Lowth valorized can seem like an anxious covering of the most destabilizing texts of the Bible.

All readers of prophetic texts must grapple implicitly, if not explicitly like the Deuteronomistic redactors of Jeremiah, with prophetic failure, with the inconsistencies of prophetic belief, what Carroll calls the “serious [defect] in the prophetic conviction about history and politics as the stage of divine operations.”¹⁴¹ On the one hand, these texts present a prophetic (i.e. human) power to know and control history, while at the same time, they come up against the impossibility of this power in the face of the disaster of history. To use the language of Jameson, the causality of the prophetic ideology “is only one of the possible tropes by which [the] formal restructuration” of the raw material of historical “data” is achieved. History refuses the “thematization or reification” of ideology; “history is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its ‘ruses’ turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention.”¹⁴² As Jameson, the Marxist critic knows, the collusion of history and ideology is often tragic. Lowth’s readings, much like the early redactors of Isaiah, attempt to smooth out the jagged inconsistencies and questions raised by a text that affirms divine intervention in history and at the same time must confront time and again the failures of its ideology.

On Moral Questions and the Enlightenment Bible

According to Yvonne Sherwood and Stephen Moore, biblical scholars of the mid-eighteenth century like Lowth are already reacting to a first wave of modern criticism. Seventeenth and Eighteenth century thinkers grappled with “moral unbelief” when they considered the morally problematic landscape of the Bible, specifically, “the iconic crimes of the Old Testament.”¹⁴³ Biblical scholarship often asks questions about the factuality of the text and its composition – did the Exodus really occur? Did Moses exist? What is the *ipsissima verba* of a prophet like Jeremiah? Yet, the primary problem in reading the Bible in early Enlightenment modernity, according to Sherwood and Moore, was its moral integrity. Shaftesbury, for example, argued that the literary aspects of the Bible could not make up for its moral shortcomings.

There is a certain perverse humanity in us which inwardly resists the divine commission, though never so plainly revealed. The wit of the best poet is not sufficient to reconcile us to the campaign of a Joshua or the retreat of a Moses by the assistance on an Egyptian loan.¹⁴⁴

In Sherwood and Moore’s formulation, Shaftesbury argues “that the Bible cannot be translated into the literary since the later is based in structures of gentlemanliness, empathy, and tolerance, all of which virtues the Bible transgresses and exceeds.”¹⁴⁵ As biblical scholarship developed a scientific methodology in the nineteenth century, “questions of

¹⁴¹ Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*, 13.

¹⁴² Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 102.

¹⁴³ Stephen D Moore and Yvonne Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar: A Critical Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 54.

¹⁴⁴ Anthony Ashley Cooper Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 229–230.

¹⁴⁵ Moore and Sherwood, *The Invention of the Biblical Scholar*, 54.

textual corruption, which had existed with those of moral corruption, now dominated the emergent field of biblical scholarship, sometimes being used to solve moral problems on the quiet, under another name. The documentary hypothesis, for instance, classically promulgated by Wellhausen in his *Geschichte Israels*, dealt with moral problems covertly."¹⁴⁶ Lowth could be read as part of this continuum from early moral inquiry to an almost fetishization of methodology: his turn away from the moral questions raised by Isaiah 6 attempts to stay with the literal meaning of the text, while at the same time "covertly" mitigating it, or in the language of melancholia taken from chapter one, "recuperating" its moral high ground.

More generally, the Enlightenment posed significant challenges to readers of the biblical text throughout Europe: In the words of Hans Frei, "the depicted biblical world and the real historical world began to be separated at once in thought and in sensibility, no matter whether the depiction was thought to agree with reality (Cocceius and Bengel) or disagree with it (Spinoza)."¹⁴⁷ Shaftesbury's critique of the Bible as a moral authority is also an expression of this separation. Lowth's relation to secularization is complex: he has often been perceived as one of the "innovators" who helped develop a critical, humanistic view of the Bible. As noted above, Lowth's 1978 biographer, Brian Hepworth, reads Lowth as one of the first truly modern readers of the Bible, and perhaps one of the first Romantics. His religious references are determined to be solely pragmatic. His Old Testament, says Hepworth, "is a material phenomena, not a spiritual manifestation. It is – in spite of occasional references to heaven that are not remarkable in a man who had his career to make in the church – based on current eighteenth century theories of perception."¹⁴⁸ It is true that Lowth's theological discussions can seem a little flat in comparison to his painstaking philological discoveries and colorful depictions of the East. In discussing Lowth's conception of what Hepworth calls "the prophetic ability of the mind," a term that is perhaps almost too suspiciously Romantic, he summarizes: "Lowth is a humanistic theorist, not a Christian."¹⁴⁹

Yet, as opposed to a "clear-cut plot of Enlightenment secularization . . . more books, more readers, and more reading bred skepticism toward king and God alike,"¹⁵⁰ secularization has also been presented as a more complex dialectical process. M.H. Abrams' seminal *Natural Supernaturalism* argues that even as the Romantics seemingly enacted a break from religious language and values, Romantic poets and thinkers remained heavily indebted to Christian typology in their philosophical and aesthetic categories.¹⁵¹ While Lowth predates the Romantics, his lectures may mark the very spot of this break. In the same vein as Abrams, who opposed a linear understanding of "secularization" or "modernity," Sheehan points out that "religion is always receding and returning," and that "at the same moment that the Bible is mourned (or celebrated) as a victim of secularism, it is also recuperated as an

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 60.

¹⁴⁷ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (Yale University Press, 1980), 5.

¹⁴⁸ Hepworth, *Robert Lowth*, 94.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹⁵⁰ Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), xi.

¹⁵¹ M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism; Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971). For more on Abrams see introduction.

essential element of that transcendent moral, literary, and historical heritage that supposedly holds together Western society."¹⁵²

If the Bible can no longer be read as the direct, literal, and error-free word of God, how is it to continue to have value? As Sheehan understands it, the formation of the Enlightenment Bible as a cultural rather than a primarily religious document is part of an attempt to recuperate the biblical text from a crisis of skepticism and secularism. "Enlightenment scholars first made available a version of biblical authority that could and would compete with the grinding effects of skepticism."¹⁵³ English and German eighteenth century readers of the Bible were faced with a contradiction between the desire to continue to hold to the relevance of the biblical text, and the fear that it was just an archaic anthology of antique customs, suggesting that "the distance between past and present was radical and unbridgeable."¹⁵⁴ According to Sheehan, this hermeneutic problem was less acute in reading the New Testament since it "offered the traces of Christianity 'within the limits of reason alone,'"¹⁵⁵ through focusing on Christ as a moral and pedagogical model. However, as Sherwood and Moore show, arguing for biblical morality could also be a fraught enterprise. The tension, though, between relevance and archaism hung over readings of the Old Testament in particular.

Sheehan reads Lowth's project as part of the recuperative work of creating the cultural, or Enlightenment Bible that was a reaction to a historical moment in which "the text and canon of the Bible suddenly seem[ed] more than ordinary to the faithful. It [became] strange, a document whose qualities need[ed] to be investigated and understood."¹⁵⁶ A new aesthetic appreciation of the biblical text, especially its highest achievement, biblical poetry, helped to replace "prophecy" which had been "the sinew that tied Old and New Testaments, Jews and Christians, ancients and moderns together."¹⁵⁷ Following Sheehan, we could further point to the Book of Isaiah as a heightened location for the loss of the "prophetic sinew," or more broadly the medieval typological reading which once tied together the Old and New Testament. If the Book of Isaiah is not the primary location for the prefiguration of Christ, how are Christians to read and value it?

Sheehan calls attention to Lowth's use of "sublimity" as a symptom of tensions relating to secularization. In the transition from traditional hermeneutics to an aesthetic reading of the Bible – "what was an adiabhanous quality of scripture—its poetic style—became essential to its modern relevance."¹⁵⁸ Sheehan reads "sublimity" as a way to re-knot the Hebrew and the modern together, and create new relevance for the Old Testament text, with the waning of a typological reading. We could add here Sherwood and Moore's insight: the Enlightenment Bible must also recuperate the Bible from a morally problematic status. The project of making the Bible sublime declared that "the gap between ancient and modern

¹⁵² *The Enlightenment Bible*, ix. Sheehan's work is part of a more general reconceptualization of secularism in diverse fields including a more complex view of its genealogy and its contemporary manifestations. See for example Talal Asad, *Is Critique Secular?: Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2009).

¹⁵³ Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, xi.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.

was bridgeable: the Hebrews and their antique poetry would be brought back into the fold of the contemporary Christian community without a loss."¹⁵⁹ Sublimity functions as a substitute for the "correspondences" between destruction and redemption, or history and prophecy. In Lowth's commentary on Isaiah 6, for example, it functions not only as a rhetorical or literary distinction, but as a kind of theological haunting.

Managing Enthusiasm

The underlying assumption of a symptomatic reading is that Lowth's insights about the biblical text do not exist in a historical vacuum; rather, they are manifestations of the intellectual and social tensions, as well as the irresolvable contradictions of the middle and late eighteenth century. In addition to considering the tensions and contradictions of secularism, Lowth's project can be read as a reaction or even a repression of the political ferment of seventeenth century England, manifested as a discourse regarding prophetic enthusiasm and its regulation. Thus in his commentary, suppressed English political and ideological tensions echo the ideological tensions of the original authors and redactors of the prophecies.

While Lowth's "Poetic Bible" – the sum of his lectures, translations, and commentary – strives to make prophecy relevant, the message of the prophetic text cannot become dangerously relevant. According to John Mee's study of the discourse of Enthusiasm in English Romanticism and in its cultural antecedents, enthusiasm functioned as Enlightenment's "chaotic nemesis."

The 1640s and the 1650s were widely regarded in the eighteenth century as the product of religious enthusiasm run riot. A historical memory of uneducated prophets and tub preachers rushing into print to announce the rule of the Saints, however vague and imprecise its grasp of the historical facts, provided the *locus classicus* of the enthusiasm for the century that followed.¹⁶⁰

Prophetic enthusiasm was opposed to a culture of politeness and civility; it was dangerous because it could quickly stir up popular unrest. Besides explicitly political concerns, Mee shows how the discourse of enthusiasm was related to class anxiety regarding the zeal of the unruly mob and became medicalized to include a more general fear of contagion. Yet, enthusiasm and prophetic revelation could not be banished completely, as "the Holy Spirit could not be dispensed with entirely by Christians, even by Anglicans."¹⁶¹

Perhaps the most notorious "tub preacher" of the English seventeenth century was Abiezer Coppe, whose 1649 publication of *A Fiery Flying Roll* prompted an Act of Parliament against "Atheistical, Blasphemous and Execrable Opinions."¹⁶² Coppe's address to "All the Inhabitants of the earth; specially [*sic*] to the rich ones" was heavily dependent on the language and performance of the Hebrew prophets, Ezekiel above all. Coppe's vehement

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 159.

¹⁶⁰ Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 24.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 32.

¹⁶² Abiezer Coppe, *Abiezer Coppe: Selected Writings*, ed. Andrew Hopton (London: Aporia Press, 1987), 3.

rhetoric against the rich and powerful drew immediate parallels between ancient Israel and contemporary revolutionary England; his first revelation includes a call echoing both Ezekiel and Jonah, to "Go up to *London*, to *London*, that great city, write, write, write."¹⁶³ His dangerously egalitarian message – "the true Communion amongst men, is to have all things common, and to call nothing one hath, ones own"¹⁶⁴ – is inseparable from the eccentric and enthusiastic form it took. Coppe himself describes his public appearances as "charging so many Coaches...staring on them as if I were to look through them, gnashing with my teeth at some of them, and day and night with a huge loud voice proclaiming the day of the Lord throughout London and Southwark."¹⁶⁵ Sensationalist pamphlets describing "Ranters" like Coppe described his public speech as "belching forth imprecations, curses, and other such like stuffe, as is not fit to be once named amongst Christians."¹⁶⁶ When examined by a committee debating the "Blasphemy Act" he purportedly "refused to be uncovered, and disguised himselfe into madnesse, flinging Apples and Pears about the roome."¹⁶⁷

Sixty years later, the second-most reprinted book of the eighteenth century, Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, starts with "A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm" that attempts to remedy or provide an antidote to outbreaks of religious "panick" much like Coppe's.¹⁶⁸ Shaftesbury casts the problem of enthusiasm in medical terms as an infectious outbreak during "melancholy occasions" when "Vapors naturally rise; and in bad times especially, when the Spirits of Men are low...during the Unwholesomeness of Air or Diet, or when Convulsions happen in Nature."¹⁶⁹ For Shaftesbury, the best cure for enthusiasm is wit and ridicule; he describes a puppet-show mocking "these prophesying Enthusiasts...their strange Voices and involuntary Agitations."¹⁷⁰ The bodies of the prophets are puppet-like "in their State of Prophecy, being not in their own power."¹⁷¹ While Shaftesbury is unequivocally damning of contemporary religious enthusiasts, who practice what he calls "reviv'd Prophecy,"¹⁷² he remains ambivalent about the Hebrew prophets: "I learn from Holy Scripture that there was *the evil*, as well as *the good Spirit* of prophecy."¹⁷³ Shaftesbury concludes his letter on an ambiguous note; "Inspiration is a real feeling of the divine presence, and Enthusiasm a false one. But the passion they raise is very much alike."¹⁷⁴ Shaftesbury's letter exemplifies that complex status of Enthusiasm in the eighteenth century; impossible to banish completely, yet in need of regulation.

The identification of prophecy and poetry is entangled in this ambivalence about passion, inspiration and enthusiasm. According to Mee, poetry and prophecy were never quite equated.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶⁶ "The Routing of the Ranters Being a Full Relation of Their Uncivil Carriages, and Blasphemous Words and Actions at Their Mad Meetings..." (London, 1650), 3.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, vii.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 18.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 28.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 34.

The parallel regularly drawn between poetry and prophecy in the late eighteenth century remained...fraught. Twentieth-century critics have made the idea of the Romantic prophet a familiar one to us, but even after Lowth's lectures on the sacred poetry of the Hebrews made the identification of poetry and prophecy a commonplace, the idea of the latter appearing in the eighteenth century was still tainted with enthusiasm.¹⁷⁵

Lowth's combination of scholarly historical data, Orientalist anthropology and detailed philology served to obscure a more recent interpretation of the prophetic texts that could serve as inspiration for social revolution. In Mee's words, "Lowth's historicism provided a protective barrier between the Bible and contemporary enthusiasm."¹⁷⁶ Lowth's aestheticization of the prophetic texts, then, is a way of regulating enthusiasm and repressing the moral issues that the prophetic text raises, whether these be condemnations of social inequality or depictions of troubling relations between God, the nation and history. We can read Lowth's explicit desire to tie prophecy to poetry, while situating prophecy firmly in oriental antiquity, as an attempt to contain and regulate the dangerous and radical enthusiasm that prophetic discourse could unleash. Lowth's reluctance to engage in moral questions helped to distance the biblical text from contemporary political events.

Constructing Isaiah as a Strong Prophet

Lowth's taste for poetry seems caught between a neo-classical appreciation of balance, beauty and harmony, and a proto-Romantic understanding of poetry originating in enthusiasm and passion. The sublime is sometimes imagined as the force of passion that must be controlled, and sometimes it is described as the power to control agitation. He claims early on in the lectures that the affections of religious poetry "break and interrupt the enunciation by their impetuosity: they burst forth in sentences pointed, earnest, rapid and tremulous."¹⁷⁷ With such statements he seems to anticipate forms such as the Romantic fragment. He concedes that the prophetic impulse "bears away the mind with irresistible violence, and frequently in rapid transitions from near to remote objects, from human to divine."¹⁷⁸ Here we might recall Abiezer Coppe and the specter of his ranting and gnashing of teeth before carriage-goers. Furthermore, predictions are not always coherently ordered: they are often "improperly connected" and arranged "injudiciously."¹⁷⁹

Still, as Lowth proceeds with his close readings of Hebrew poems, he comes to emphasize the elegance and control of Hebrew poetry. Because he is constructing an apologia for biblical poetry, he is anxious to prove that despite their seemingly incoherent surfaces, the best prophetic texts, when read properly, are not actually "irregular." Since he is arguing for an aesthetics based on balance, he is forced to minimize the "irregularities" he discovers in the prophetic text. The notion of "correspondence" sometimes helps bridge the gap between the seemingly irregular text and its deeper "regularity" or meaning. As we saw in the case of Isaiah 34 & 35, the best prophetic texts contain a perfect aesthetic and moral balance between the restoration of the church and the punishment of the wicked, an elegant

¹⁷⁵ Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 57.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 23.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 297.

and harmonious correspondence between destruction and redemption. Even when a "correspondence" is unclear, it will become balanced by future events that the text anticipates.

Lowth creates an opposition between untrammelled enthusiasm and frenzy, and the harmony of poetry. As a *mashal*, poetry can become a means for controlling enthusiasm, "a style and expression directly prompted by nature itself, and exhibiting the true and express image of a mind violently agitated."¹⁸⁰ Lowth's emphasis on balance and harmony, and the way it generates power and authority, while at the same time controlling enthusiasm, is evident in his description of the individual characters of each of the biblical prophets. Isaiah is "the first of the prophets in both order and dignity, [who] abounds in such transcendent excellencies, that he may be properly said to afford the most perfect model of the prophetic poetry."¹⁸¹ Ezekiel – the prophet of choice for figures like Coppe, and for William Lowth – has a pathos that seems too extreme; he is described as "magnificent, terrible and sublime." Isaiah is able to balance the "elegant and the sublime," the "forcible and ornamented." The literary value of Isaiah is achieved by his control over form: he "greatly excels... in all the graces of method, order, connexion, and arrangement."¹⁸² There is some implicit sense too, of the masculine control Isaiah is able to exert over his emotions. In contrast to Isaiah, Jeremiah's style seems to be a little too slack. "His sentiments... are not always the most elevated, nor are his periods always neat and compact."¹⁸³ Jeremiah's stylistic flaws seem to be related to a kind of feminine affect he inspires – "[his] principal aim is to excite the gentler affections, and to call forth the tear of sympathy or sorrow."¹⁸⁴

In Lowth's formulation, Isaiah's symmetries save prophecy from untrammelled enthusiasm. For example, immediately after conceding some of the irregularity of the prophetic texts, Lowth returns to discuss Isaiah 40, which is "the most elegant specimen remaining of inspired composition."¹⁸⁵ Despite its textual difficulties, a correct observer "shall neither find an irregularity in the arrangement of the whole, nor any want of order and connexion as to matter or sentiment in the different parts."¹⁸⁶ For Lowth, the perfection of Isaiah, what we might call his strong prophecy, stems from "art or genius."¹⁸⁷ However, as we have seen, the balance, symmetry, unity, and harmony of the text is often the work of redaction, rather than an original Isaianic author. The texts that Lowth celebrates: Isaiah 6, Isaiah 34 & 35, Isaiah 40, are themselves partially comprised of reactions to earlier texts of prophetic weakness, and bleak unremitting despair.

If we read chapter 6 as emblematic of Isaiah-the-poet's rhetorical achievement, and even more generally for the art and power of biblical poetry, as Lowth would have it, we can see that in addition to the powerful prophetic rhetoric valorized and introduced by Lowth into German and English Romanticism, the prophetic "voice" carries with it a set of irregularities, or disorders, which Lowth sometimes attempts to describe through his articulation of the sublime. The prophetic text presents multiple interruptions of the seraphic

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 38.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 174.

¹⁸² Ibid., 176.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 178.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 177.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 176.

"correspondence." Rather than reading Isaiah's prophecy as elegant poetry, perhaps it would be better to read it as a set of interruptions – whether these be the interruptions of the unclean human voice in the midst of the seraphic choir, or the frustrating and devastating gaps in correspondence between the prophet, the divine, and his audience –portrayed in the chapter as well.

As I have argued, even as he discovered and provided taxonomies for many formal features of the biblical text, Lowth created a Bible for his age. If what was once the unified Christian Bible began to show fissures, his version of an Enlightenment Bible gave new aesthetic value to the prophetic texts, the unstable texts of the fault lines. In an era of new speculation about subjective experience, Lowth reconstituted the prophet as a grand model for poets, while at the same time keeping England safe from tub preachers. Lowth was not the first to respond to a tension in prophetic texts between a sense of design, order, and symmetry and great "irregularities" – such as dramatic shifts in address, the mixing of prose and poetry, moral obscurity, and textual incoherency. Lowth has given us the idea of the prophet as a creative genius and author; the next wave of biblical scholarship began to view what was artifice in prophecy negatively, reifying the short fragments of prophecy, rather than its great correspondences. As opposed to valorizing Isaiah, biblical scholars armed with Romantic notions of authenticity came to disparage Ezekiel.

CHAPTER THREE

Ezekiel's Apostrophe, Textuality, and Distance

What is the place of text and textuality in prophecy? In most of the narratives of the prophets that appear in the Hebrew Bible, prophecy is presented as an act of spontaneous, live speech: the prophet tears the coat off the king, summons the earth and sky as covenant witnesses to rebuke the transgressing nation, and pronounces oracles by invitation of political leaders. As opposed to the contemplative mode of the lyric, prophecy has been characterized as a genre of immediate, unmediated address. For example, Marks speaks for medieval and Romantic notions of prophecy when he says, "to hear a prophetic oracle is to be totally arrested in the state of sin, which it must be emphasized, is not an effect of some previous act or mental attitude, *but of the fact of being addressed.*"² The first generations of modern biblical scholars read prophecy as a phenomenon based almost exclusively in oral culture. According to Hermann Gunkel, "the prophets were not originally writers but speakers. Anyone who thinks of ink and paper while reading their writings is in error from the outset."³

The critical study of prophecy, especially in the last one hundred and fifty years, has been conceptualized through the binary structure of oral and written speech. In the study of the prophets, this distinction is particularly inflected by a Romantic valuation of the spoken word and the direct address, related more broadly to notions of originality and authenticity as it informed biblical scholarship. The nineteenth century Protestant founders of modern biblical scholarship made the distinction between oracles composed orally, the *ipsissima verba* of the biblical prophets, and the redactions and secondary additions of figures such as scribes, tradents, students, and epigones. This initially sharp dichotomy was made more complex as specific philological projects were undertaken by subsequent generations of scholars throughout the twentieth century, yet it remains an implicit underlying structure in many interpretations of the prophetic texts.

The distinction between oral and written prophecy can also be transposed to the language of strong and weak prophecy. The oral prophets are imagined as ecstatic poets, who spoke their words directly to a live audience. This notion can be traced back to Lowth, who considered all poetry to originate in the "vehement affections of the mind...sudden exclamations, frequent interrogations, apostrophes even to inanimate objects."⁴ As we saw, this basic and immediate enthusiasm is shaped by the public performance of antiphonal song. In *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, Johann Gottfried Herder reads Lowth's parallelism as expressing an even more immediate embodied experience: "the systole and diastole of the heart and breath."⁵ Herder also links the rhythms of early Hebrew poetry to shouts of joy, song, and dance. Milman Parry and Albert Lord's work on Homeric poetry helped establish

² My emphasis. Herbert Marks, "On Prophetic Stammering," in *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 77.

³ Hermann Gunkel, *Water for a Thirsty Land: Israelite Literature and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 87.

⁴ Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. Gregory, George (London: J. Johnson, 1787), 38.

⁵ J.G. Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, trans. James Franks, vol. 2 (Burlington: Edward Smith, 1833), 23.

that parallelism began as a mnemonic tool, a mechanism for producing and preserving early poetry, including early prophecies, such as the Oracles of Balaam.⁶

The communication of these "strong" prophets with their audience was idealized as unmediated by paper and ink, or by geographical distance, which in turn echoed their unmediated communication with divine power. Though these prophets were often critical of the institutions of monarchy or cultus, their public role was closely tied to the locations, temporal rhythms, and songs associated with these institutions. Thus the power of the oral prophets is religious, as they have a direct connection to God, aesthetic, as they are true poets, and finally political, as they are embedded in the political and social fabric of Ancient Israel. At the same time early, unmediated prophecy was imbued with the pathos of the ephemeral; it was subjected to flawed memory – garbled, misread, and lost.

Written prophecy, on the other hand, has often been cast as a secondary development. Though there is some great "late" poetry, such as the sixth century poems of Second Isaiah, on the whole late prophecy has been characterized by scholars as

a loose collection of degraded imitations of oral poetry, clunky prose insertions, or scribal glosses and mistakes that misunderstand poetic structures, garbling the aesthetic achievement of the parallelism of prophetic poetry. Hermann Gunkel, for example, ends his important essay on prophecy on a low note: "in the following age [after Deutero-Isaiah] the tones that had sounded continued on, in general without any special originality."⁷ Aesthetic evaluations of the redactions of Jeremiah are on the whole negative – we may recall Rofé and Weinfeld's characterizations of the C layer of Jeremiah as "monotonous" or "clichéd."⁸ For Gerald Bruns, "the process of turning prophecy into a text would only be complete when fugitive texts become bound to the Torah as an integral part of its canonical domain."⁹ In the processes of textualization and canonization, the revolutionary power of "fugitive texts" is made to conform to institutional power structures.¹⁰

Written prophecy is intrinsically at a distance from a public, ecstatic situation: "it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility,"¹¹ recorded by students, scribes, or priestly bureaucrats. At times the labor of anonymous redactors or scribes has been attributed to institutions of prophetic schools or personified as the labor of prophetic "tradition," which is as read as a counter-force to the voices of inspired, unique individuals. The mediated nature of written prophecy is echoed by its unstable and mediated relation to the divine: the end of the era of classical prophecy is characterized by a growing multitude of

⁶ As parallelism was originally a technique of oral poetry, Frank Cross hypothesizes that early oracular utterances were constrained by rigid "musical and oral-poetic canons." Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 141.

⁷ Gunkel, *Water for a Thirsty Land*, 130.

⁸ See Chapter 1.

⁹ Gerald Bruns, "Canon and Power in the Hebrew Scriptures," in *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Cambridge Mass. USA; Oxford UK: B. Blackwell, 1990), 81.

¹⁰ In recent decades, these judgments are being revisited, especially by scholars of apocalyptic literature, "Rather than viewing the process and effect of canonization as a linear trajectory from charisma to institutionalization, however, recent scholarship has emphasized the ongoing diversity of claims to divine knowledge throughout Second Temple Judaism and beyond." Philippa Townsend and Moulie Vidas, "Introduction," in *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 4.

¹¹ William Wordsworth, "Preface to the Second Edition of 'Lyrical Ballads,' 1800," in *Selected Poetry of William Wordsworth* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 665.

"false prophets" and by difficulty adjudicating true prophecy. As Robert Wilson puts it, the increasingly pressing questioning of prophetic authority in post-exilic prophecy may explain the phenomenon of prophetic anonymity, the re-use of earlier prophetic texts and an ensuing decrease in public prophetic activity.¹² The sense of mediated prophecy grows into full fledged mediating figures, such as angels, flying scrolls, dreams and words on walls, as classical prophecy "develops" or alternately devolves, as some scholars suggest, into the apocalyptic genre.¹³

Written prophecy is largely associated with the exilic and post-exilic era: prophecy no longer provides advice and critique of specific Israelite and Judean kings and is no longer tied to cultus, such as sacrifice and festivals. In its most extreme formulations, such as in the work of Julius Wellhausen, late prophecy is deemed aesthetically degraded, remote from divine inspiration, and religiously ineffective, or alternately overly effective as a tool of the priestly regime, whose ideologically is far from the original values of the classical prophets. We can trace an intellectual genealogy from Wellhausen to Max Weber to the formulation of Bruns: "the prophetic word has something unwritable about it."¹⁴

Ezekiel Between Oral and Written Prophecy

The figure of Ezekiel stands at a juncture of the transition between oral and written Hebrew culture; between the cessation of unmediated prophecy and the rise of the apocalypse, between Jerusalem-centric theology and the exilic dispossession. Ezekiel is the first to prophesy outside the holy land. The notion of prophecy from exile, removed from the signifier of the land of Israel and the temple has been regarded even with suspicion in Jewish exegetical tradition. According to Moshe Greenberg, "from early times arguments have been advanced to remove at least part of the prophecies to a Judean setting. Rashi (following the Mechilta and the Targum) combines a theological scruple against the fitness of prophecy on foreign unclean soil with the observation that 'the exile is not apparent' in some prophecies...concluding that not only Ezekiel begin his career in the land of Israel but that some of the prophecies in his book must belong to the time he still lived there."¹⁵ Here we see that the notion of a prophet in exile is uncomfortable to early and medieval Jewish commentary; these scruples and qualifications attempt to "save" Ezekiel by setting his prophetic work in Judah.

In the following pages, I wish to discuss the negative presentations of Ezekiel as a written prophet in biblical scholarship. When Wellhausen distinguishes between oral and

¹² Robert Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 291.

¹³ See for example Hartman's characterization of apocalyptic prophecy as "prophecy among the scribes," implying the loss of the classic or authentic "prophetic" element in its reinterpretation and expansion into an apocalyptic vision. Lars Hartman, *Prophecy Interpreted: The Formation of Some Jewish Apocalyptic Texts and the Eschatological Discourse of Mark 13 Par.* (Lund: Gleerup, 1966). See also discussion in R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Prophecy: From Oracles to Canon*, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 182. For a counter-argument see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination.: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed, The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁴ Bruns, "Canon and Power in the Hebrew Scriptures," 73.

¹⁵ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 15.

written torah, Ezekiel marks the transition from oral to written prophecy, from authentic inspiration to scribal imitation and interpretation. As I will show, this system of binaries reinscribes strong prophecy as authentic, direct, oral, and inspired. In the shadow of Wellhausen, Ezekiel's weak prophecy has been deemed as epigonic, scribal, baroque, deformed, failed, weakened, and decayed.¹⁶ After Wellhausen, various efforts have been made to recuperate Ezekiel, or parts of the book of Ezekiel for authentic, oral prophecy.¹⁷ Rather than attempt to save Ezekiel for oral prophecy, I propose to follow recent scholarship that has attempted to evaluate the new creative potentials of textual prophecies, such as Greenberg's commentary, or Ellen Davis's *Swallowing the Scroll*, where she considers seriously Ezekiel's claims to be in the line of prophets.¹⁸ Contrary to Wellhausen, who marks Ezekiel as uniquely unprophetic among the prophets, the following chapter examines the case of Ezekiel's textuality as metonymic of the problems and potentials of textuality in the entirety of the classic prophetic corpus. Thus, the pernicious "problems" or "weaknesses" of the special case of Ezekiel are also true for large parts of Isaiah, Jeremiah and the Minor Prophets. Specifically, in my reading of the first part of Ezekiel 6, I propose to consider Ezekiel's weakness through his vocative gestures, reading apostrophe or personified address as a trope marking or complicating lateness, distance, and textuality.

In *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, Lowth evaluates the "peculiar characteristic" of each of the prophetic texts. Each prophet is read for his unique genius. Isaiah, as we saw in the previous chapter, is considered "the most perfect model of prophetic poetry,"¹⁹ while Jeremiah is rated more sentimental, and thus not a master of the form. According to Lowth, Ezekiel is "much inferior to Jeremiah in elegance," as he is full of abrupt breaks and repetitions: "he is unpolished and rough in his language, but excels even Isaiah in his particular sublimity made of tragic vehemence, grandness and solemnity."²⁰ Lowth's ambivalence regarding Ezekiel – his sense that Ezekiel's poetics differed from Isaiah and Jeremiah, became a negative valuation for subsequent generations of biblical scholars. Even Lowth's translator, George Gregory, writing thirty years after the lectures, makes a note on Lowth's page that he disagrees with Lowth's "taste": Ezekiel has no "grandeur and sublimity" – at most he possesses "novelty and ingenuity" but on the whole is deemed an "imitator" of the great prophets.

¹⁶ According to Heinrich Ewald, "he was more an author than a prophet." Cited in Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel: a Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, trans. R. E. Clements (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 3. In invectives and threats, as well as his forceful funeral songs and songs of derision, in which he adopts older mythological material of many kinds, Ezekiel, full of untamed ferocity, is more baroque than great." Gunkel, *Water for a Thirsty Land*, 130. "Much late prophetic material, above all much of Ezekiel, has been preserved in prose or decayed poetry by circles that transmitted the oracles." Cross, *From Epic to Canon*, 141.; "The almost painful self-consciousness which produced this deformation is hardly conceivable except as belonging to a writer." Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*. (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1989), 85.

¹⁷ Gustav Hölscher first attempted to free the authentic prophetic poetry of Ezekiel from its dry prosaic husk. Gustav Hölscher, *Hesekiel, der Dichter und das Buch.: eine literarkritische Untersuchung* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1924). Walther Zimmerli puts forth a much more nuanced version of this argument, identifying kernels of probably spoken prophecy which have been subject to multiple layers of updating and redacting. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 68–74.

¹⁸ Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, 25.

¹⁹ Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, 256.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

The sense of Ezekiel as an imitator is an important part of Wellhausen's reading of the concept of torah. The final chapter of his influential *Prolegomena* is "The Oral and Written Torah," which distinguishes between the cultural mores of ancient Israel and post-exilic Judaism. The oral torah or teaching of ancient Israel derived its authority from "unwritten laws of customs"; these were flexible and adapted to situations.²¹ According to Wellhausen, "there is no torah as a ready-made product, as a system existing independently of its originator."²² This "old freedom" came to an end with "the appearance of the law," marked by the appearance of the Book of Deuteronomy in 621 B.C., and later compositions in the Pentateuch, and thus the "people of the *word* became 'a people of the *book*.'"²³ For Wellhausen, prophecy exemplified the freedom of inspiration through living words and unmediated religious experience; the rise of scribal culture and the focus on temple worship and ritual marks its death.

The authority of the written law, according to Wellhausen, signaled the end of prophecy. Thus, Jeremiah was the last of the prophets.²⁴ "Those who came after [Jeremiah] were prophets only in name."²⁵ Ezekiel belongs to the epigoni: he mediates and comments on the words of the old prophets, but he himself is not an authentic prophet. "Prophets destroy illusions"²⁶ – Wellhausen implies that Ezekiel's visions and mediations are based on artifice and not authenticity, on imitation not originality. Thus the scroll, or the book, marks "the ghost of a life which is closed."²⁷ "The water which in old times rose from a spring, the Epigoni stored up in cisterns."²⁸ As opposed to the gushing, vital, natural springs of pre-exilic prophecy, Ezekiel's text is diminished and stale. The binary of oral and written is mapped through the metaphor of springs and cisterns, nature and culture, originality and artifice, life and the walking death of ghosts.

Wellhausen and Gunkel make a firm distinction between oral and written compositions in the prophetic corpus, but these distinctions grew complicated upon further scholarly investigation. A good case can be made that early Hebrew poetry such as the Song of Deborah, was composed orally, and recorded in writing hundreds of years after it first emerged. The biblical parallelism of this early poem lends itself well to memorization, as it is rich with formulaic word pairs, anaphoras and other repetitions. On the other end of the spectrum, many texts in the Hebrew Bible make use of techniques that are only possible in writing, from the complex legal and ritualistic codes in the Book of Leviticus, to the literary devices in the stories of Genesis or the Deuteronomic history. These narratives contain meaningful differences in reported speech and a complex layering of plot summary and narrative asides that seem hard to pull off in an oral composition.

We can see how prophetic utterances could be composed in a shamanistic trance state, such as the Oracles of Balaam, or in a moment of felicitous speech – "Did you murder

²¹ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 393.

²² *Ibid.*, 395.

²³ My emphasis. *Ibid.*, 409.

²⁴ There are some Rabbinic traditions that also view Jeremiah as the last of the prophets. See *Qob. Rab.* 12.7; *Pesiq. Rb. Kah* 13.14.

²⁵ Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 403.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 474.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 405 n1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 410.

and inherit?" (1 Kgs 21:19). As in the case of the Song of Deborah, there is probably a large time gap between the utterance of these prophecies, and their preservation in writing through generations of oral transmission. Yet this gap is narrowed when we come to the case of a prophet like Jeremiah. According to the text, Jeremiah dictated his prophecies to Baruch the scribe and sent prophecies in a letter (Jer 36:4; 29:1). The biblical text presents a situation in which there is still a clear distinction between the function of the prophet and that of the scribe, yet the relation depicted between Jeremiah and Baruch is quite different from that of an oral tradition recorded by a scribe centuries after its composition. Jeremiah, or a prophet like Jeremiah, may compose his prophecies orally, but these must be influenced by the technique of writing: Jeremiah would be able to hear his line repeated back to him (or read it himself), and would not have to memorize long lines of prophecy.

The distinction between oral and written prophecy becomes even harder to parse in the Ezekiel text. The text itself seems to indicate both oral and written prophetic presentations. On the one hand the elders of Jerusalem come to Ezekiel and his house, and seem to receive a spontaneous, live prophecy (Ezek 14:1). On another occasion, Ezekiel complains that he is not being heeded because the people who come to hear him only want to enjoy his voice (Ezek 33:32). At the same time, many of these oral prophecies were shaped into book form relatively close to the time of their composition. Even assuming that Ezekiel initially composed some of his prophecies in the moment, there was not a gap of hundreds of years between the recitation of the prophecy in oral form and its transcription. Furthermore, the image of receiving prophecy as swallowing a scroll of קְנִיִּים וְהִגָּה וְהִי, "dirges, laments and woes," seems to imply processes of composition that are based in textuality (Ezek 2:10). Even if Ezekiel prophesized before a live audience, his words are still the "written words" of the scroll, transfigured in his belly.

If we look to the prosody of the Ezekiel text to provide hints about the method of composition, we can say that though there are many cases of parallelism, the language does not lend itself to memorization as easily as the compressed lines of the Song of Deborah or the oracles of Balaam. Most of the Ezekiel texts can thus be categorized as elevated prose which "makes[s] use of loosely parallel semantic-syntactic structures that distantly recall the background of poetry, but without the compactness, the strong rhythmic character, and the regularity of semantic matching and development that are observable in biblical verse."²⁹ However, embedded in the prose are a number of short texts that seem more easily sung or memorized, such the parable of the eagle (17:1-10), the lament for the princes of Israel (19:2-14), the song of the sword (21:14b-22), the song of the cup (25:32-34), and the song of the pot (24:3b-5), as well as parodic laments for Tyre and Egypt which make up the bulk of chapters 26-31. These short poems could be fragments from an earlier, oral tradition, or composed as gestures toward oral composition. It seems, then, that both oral and written methods were present in the earliest stages of the composition of the text of Ezekiel. Yet the echoes of oral speech do not prove oral composition: even composition by typewriter allows for echoes and recollections of oral speech. The distinction between oral and written composition becomes even more meaningless if we assume that the same person "composed" and "wrote" the prophecies – Ezekiel has both the function of oral prophet and written scribe.

²⁹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 137.

At the same time, as is the case for many prophetic texts, some sections of Ezekiel are composed or added to by a later author. The most direct evidence for this process of ongoing revision is the difference between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint. On the whole the LXX version is shorter by 4-5%, and has some slight variations in chapter arrangement, (chapter 7) so that we can surmise that it reflects an earlier Hebrew *Vorlage* that was then expanded by the MT, analogous to the two editions of Jeremiah. 11QEzek seems generally to follow the MT, though the Qumran scroll is too fragmentary to supply much extra evidence. Though large variations have been noted in a number of biblical books, such as Jeremiah or 1-2 Samuel, the case of Ezekiel has been seen as paradigmatic of scribal "injury." According to Tov: "In fact, such glosses or interpolations have been detected more in Ezekiel than in any other book of the Bible, and *the model of Ezekiel negatively influenced the analysis of the other books.*"³¹ As Tov implies, the "flaws" of Ezekiel come to serve as a metonymy for all prophetic texts, even in text criticism. As opposed to reading these differences as errors or "injuries"³² (in the words of G.A. Cooke) done to the text, Tov claims that they were both "created at the time of the literary growth of the book, and therefore should not be ascribed to textual errors."³³ The additions to the MT edition are on the whole interpretive expansions, but as in the case of Jeremiah, some new material in the MT might be drawn from "oral or written traditions which included some elements not incorporated in the earlier, shorter edition."³⁴ The differences, then, between the MT and LXX reflect "different stages in the literary development of the book."³⁵

In addition to the two different editions discussed above, there have been a range of different theories posited about the compositional process of the book, since Hölischer in 1924 was the first to claim multiple layers of composition. The two foremost modern commentators on Ezekiel, Walther Zimmerli and Moshe Greenberg, reflect the different ways of reading Ezekiel. Zimmerli posits expansions of oral prophecy by an Ezekiel school, while Greenberg would like to read Ezekiel as a great writer in his own right. Davis tries to negotiate a middle ground between oral composition and written composition: "it is likely that Ezekiel composed his oracles in writing, yet in a manner deeply imbued with the forms and practices of traditional oral prophecy."³⁶

In a compelling analysis, Clements hypothesizes theological connections between Ezekiel and what he calls "the emergent Priestly School," his name for the authors of the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26) and the Priestly document of the Pentateuch. Clements reads these expansions in Ezekiel as similar to the Deuteronomistic expansions of Jeremiah. Particularly, Clements and others have identified substantial expansion of the material in chapters 40-48 ("The Reconstruction Programme") which contain a detailed description of the rebuilt temple and cultus written in a different style from the rest of the book. Yet, rather than identifying a kernel and an expansion, Clements concludes that "what we have in the two literary works of the Book of Ezekiel and the Holiness Code are compositions that have

³¹ My emphasis. Emanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 410 f19.

³² George Albert Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (T. & T. Clark, 1967), xl.

³³ Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible*, 397.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 407.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 410.

³⁶ Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy.*, 38.

undoubtedly exercised a mutual influence upon each other."³⁷ His understanding of the composition of the prophetic text tries to move away from vague statements about the agglomeration of prophecy, and he is cautious about the notion of a "prophetic school" which would continue the work of the unique prophet.

In addition to this final section, Clements notes an overall editorial shaping in the revisions of doom to consolation. "The way in which even the most devastating invective against Judah has been rounded off with words of hope and assurance...is evidence enough that a considerable amount of development and reworking of the original Ezekiel prophecies has taken place."³⁸ Clements concludes that it is impossible to tell whether Ezekiel himself undertook his preservation in writing, or if later followers began the task. He ultimately returns to a notion of "original" and "later" expansions: "the work of the original prophet still retains much of the oral characteristics of prophecy, whereas the work of elaborating and enlarging upon these prophecies displays features that are more easily intelligible as a scribal activity."³⁹

Yet Clements' return to the dichotomy of oral and written is much more subtle than Wellhausen's. Clements' work on the whole moves away from considering the uniquely textual qualities of Ezekiel. Instead he posits an overall shaping of early prophecies for the primarily liturgical needs of a post-exilic community. He claims for a unity of a late prophetic redaction: "In so many ways it is the similarities between all the formulations of hope and assurance that have been woven into our prophetic literature that strike the reader most forcibly, rather than their distinctiveness and isolation."⁴⁰ Clements' ultimate conclusion of prophetic homogeneity stands in contrast to the traditional emphasis on the unique characteristics of each prophet. I will return to Clements' argument at the end of the chapter.

The Romantics and the Spoken Word

Even before Lowth, there was a sense that poetry and prophecy had an intimate connection, and this connection was made definitively in the Romantic figure of the poet-prophet, following Lowth's lectures. Thus it is symptomatic of the Romantic link between poetry and prophecy that Wellhausen's last chapter is inflected by German Romantic poetry: in its opening, he remarks that "Of ancient Israel...it is said in the introductory poem of Goethe's *West-Oestlicher Divan*, that the word was important there, because it was a spoken word."⁴¹ The first full poem in Goethe's book, "Hegira," implies that contemporary social ills may be linked to a cheapening of the numinous word, which must be retrieved by a flight to the East, both in time and geography. The speaker leaves the occidental world, which is in a state of political upheaval:

³⁷ R. E. Clements, "The Ezekiel Tradition: Prophecy in a Time of Crisis," in *Israel's Prophetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 130.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁹ R. E. Clements, "The Chronology of Redaction in Ezekiel 1-24," in *Ezekiel and His Book* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 288.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁴¹ Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, 392.

*Nord und West and Süd zersplittern,
Throne bersten, Reiche zittern;
Flüchte du, im reinen Osten*

North and South and West are quaking,
Thrones are cracking, Empires shaking;
Let us flee toward the East⁴²

The flight to the East is a version of an Arabian fantasy of nomadic caravans and sensuous pleasure: "*Shawl, Kaffee und Moschus handle*" ("Coffee, shawls, and musk exchanging"). Yet this Arabian Orient functions at the same time as a portal to an ancient world which will allow the speaker insight into ancient Hebrew:

*Dort, im Reinen and im Rechten,
Will ich menschlichen Geschelechten
In des Ursprungs Tiefe dringen,
Wo sie noch von Gott empfangen,
Himmelslehr in Erdesprachen
Und sich nicht den Kopf zerbrechen.*

Seeing rightly, seeing purely,
There I'll penetrate most surely
To the origin of nations,
When on Earth the generations
Heard God's words with human senses,
Heedless of their formal tenses.

Here Goethe follows Herder, who claimed that Biblical Hebrew had no tenses, and thus was able to better express atemporal truths.⁴³ We can trace a direct line from Lowth to Herder, Goethe, and Wellhausen that attests to the closely intertwined traditions of Romantic poetry and biblical scholarship. The prophetic inspiration Wellhausen attempts to delineate is an elaboration of Goethe's notion of "*Himmelslehr in Erdesprachen*," "heaven's-teaching in earth-language." In Goethe's idealized Hebrew antiquity, the *Himmelslehr* is not mediated by religious authorities, or by text, or by verbal tenses, but rather it is experienced by the senses through direct vision ("*im Reinen und im Rechten*"). In this fantasy of simple "*Leiben, Trinken, Singen*" textuality is suspect; the idealized figure for the poet is the rapturous singing of the native guide.

*Wenn der Führer mit Entzücken
Von des Maultiers hohem Rücken
Singt, die Sterne zu erwecken*

⁴² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Poems of the West and the East.: Bi-lingual Edition*, trans. John Whaley (Bern; New York: P. Lang, 1998).

⁴³ "For the two tenses of the Hebrew are...undefined tenses, that fluctuate between the past, the present, and the future, and thus it has in fact but one tense." J.G. Herder, *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, trans. James MarshFranks, vol. 12 (Burlington: Edward Smith, 1833), 37.

When our guide, afraid of capture,
 High upon his mule in rapture
 Sings, to set the stars a-blazing,

The guide's song is more than ornamental: it is effective. In perfect harmony between human action and the natural world, the song of the guide is able to wake the stars. The singer-guide addresses the stars, and the stars, in their own way, respond. The spoken word, then, that Wellhausen idealizes is also a vocative word.

In *Of Grammatology* Derrida traces the Western genealogy of the valuation of speech over writing from Plato's *Phaedrus* to its Romantic reiteration in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and in the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss. While speech is related to interiority, authenticity, unmediated originality, and the soul, "writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death."⁴⁴ Writing is connected to exteriority, deceit, and distance. In Levi-Strauss's post-Romantic formulations, "it is essential to realize that writing, while it conferred vast benefits on humanity, did in fact deprive it of something fundamental."⁴⁵ The Romantic and post-Romantic valuation of speech over writing is based on the idea of "social authenticity," of "self-presence, transparent proximity in the face-to-face of countenances and the immediate range of voice."⁴⁶

Gunkel's descriptions of the *Sitz im Leben* of the prophetic texts is marked by similar notions of wholesome social authenticity: "Here the prophet stands in the forecourt of the temple; around him are the men of Judah who have come to Jerusalem for a festival worship service...or the king and court have gone out into the open...[or] the elders of the people who were carried off to Babylon came to Ezekiel's house."⁴⁷ In contrast to the proximity of the voice, the act of writing in the works of Rousseau, and by extension we could add the works of Romantically inflected biblical scholars such as Wellhausen and Gunkel, indicates what Derrida calls "social distance, the dispersion of the neighborhood, [which] is the condition of oppression, arbitrariness, and vice."⁴⁸

According to Derrida, the notion of writing as deceit originates in the "myth of speech originally good."⁴⁹ He views the binary of speech/writing and its implicit value system as a myth, a collective Romantic dream. Rather than constructing narratives of a linear development of culture from oral speech to written text, he proposes inverting the categories, and seeing "writing" as a basic function of all speech. "Writing" here is used to mark a wider sense of naming, abstractions and distinctions made in all human speech – and leads to an ethics which includes "absence, dissimulation, detour, difference."⁵⁰ In contrast, "the ethics of the living word," what Wellhausen and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe call *ein gesprochen Wort*, "lives on a delusion and nonrespect of its own condition of origin...it dream[s] in speech of a presence denied in writing."⁵¹

⁴⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 17.

⁴⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 400–402.

⁴⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 138.

⁴⁷ Gunkel, *Water for a Thirsty Land*, 28.

⁴⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 137.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

The notion of "social authenticity" helps illustrate how the difference between speech and writing is related to address. Speech hearkens back to what Derrida calls "the vocative absolute," direct face-to-face conversation, in which names are unnecessary. This vocative absolute, though, is part of the dream-fantasy. Derrida claims that all language has "an originary violence... which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute."⁵²

Prophetic language has an especially potent relation to the vocative as it purports to carry the weight of divine speech. Moses was said to speak to God face-to-face, exemplifying the ideal unmediated dialogue with the divine (Exod 33:11; Deut 34:10). In some sense, Ezekiel's weakness is the weakness of all prophets "after" Moses, who can no longer speak to God face-to-face. In the following pages, I will focus on the vocative element of Ezekiel's prophecies, which dramatize both Ezekiel's distance from his object and his attempt to bridge that distance. I argue that Ezekiel's weakened prophecy, marked by its degraded prose, its multiple and sometimes confounding figurations, and its tropes of distance, is not an anomaly, or an epigonic recapitulation of authentic prophecy, but rather conveys something important about the prophetic situation in general in its human attempt to reveal the face of God in the landscape of history.

Ezekiel's Address to the Mountains of Israel, Chapter 6

Let us turn then to a specific chapter from Ezekiel to consider the ways strong and weak prophecy are manifested through orality and textuality, and how scholarship has framed these terms. In chapter six Ezekiel is commanded to turn his face toward the hills of Israel and prophesy against them. Ezekiel's textual prophecy is thus set in a fictional, visionary mode of address. I propose to read this oracle (vv.1-10) as metonymic of the limitations and weaknesses of textual prophecy, but also in order to discover its generative potential.

ויהי דבר־יהוה אלי לאמר: בן־אדם שים פניך אלי־הרי ישראל והנבא עליהם⁵³: ואמרת הרי ישראל שמעו דבר יהוה⁵⁴ כה־אמר יהוה⁵⁵ להרים ולגבעות לאפיקים ולגאותות⁵⁶ הנה⁵⁷ אני מביא עליכם חרב ואבדת⁵⁸ במותיכם: ונשמו מזבחותיכם ונשברו 59 חמניכם והפלתי חלייכם לפני גלוליכם:

⁵² Ibid., 112.

⁵³ MT has אליהם. Due to Second Temple א/ע orthographic confusion the preposition על "against," has been changed to אל "toward." See also Zimmerli: "the book of Ezekiel shows throughout a quite surprising blurring of the distinction between על and אל, which can be interchanged without fixed rules. We must see this as an influence of the Aramaic language (on Ezekiel or his exilic tradents?)" Walther Zimmerli and Klaus Baltzer, *Ezekiel: a Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 86. Perhaps also interference from 36:1, in which the prophecy to the hills is more positive.

⁵⁴ MT has אדני יהוה. I read with the shorter LXX version.

⁵⁵ See above.

⁵⁶ Reading with Qere. Ketib has ולגאות.

⁵⁷ MT has הנני, which seems to have assimilated with next אני.

⁵⁸ LXX has ἐξαρθησεται – ואבדו*. The passage alternates between first person active verbs and third person plural passive verbs. In this sentence the subject is Yahweh, thus we need the active pi'el.

⁵⁹ LXX has united ונשמו with ונשברו into one verb: συντριβήσονται. This seems like a change in translation and not in the *Vorlage*.

⁶⁰ וזריתי את-עצמותיכם סביבות מזבחתיכם: בכל מושבותיכם הערים תחרבנה והבמות תישמנה למען יחרבו ⁶¹ מזבחתיכם ונשברו ⁶² גלוליכם ונגדעו חמניכם ⁶³: ונפל הלל בתוככם וידעתם כי-אני יהוה: ⁶⁴ בהיות לכם פליטי חרב בגוים בהזרותכם ⁶⁵ בארצות: וזכרו פליטיכם אותי בגוים אשר נשברשם ⁶⁶ ושברתי ⁶⁷ את-לבם הזונה ⁶⁸ מעלי ואת עיניהם הזנות אחרי גלוליהם ונקטו בפניהם ⁶⁹ בכל ⁷⁰ תועבתיהם: וידעו כי-אני יהוה ⁷¹ דברתי ⁷²:

Instruction to the prophet (vv. 1-3a)

And the word of Yahweh was to me thus:

Son of Man, put your face toward the mountains of Israel and prophesy against them, and say, O Mountains of Israel, hear the word of Yahweh.

Thus said Yahweh to the mountains and hills, to the gullies and valleys:

Description of the coming punishment (vv. 3b-6a)

Behold, I bring against you a sword,

and I will destroy your high places.

Your altars will be made desolate,

your incense braziers will be broken,

I will strike down your slain in front of your idols.

I will scatter your bones around your altars.

In all your settlements the towns will be ruined,

and the high places ⁷³ will be made desolate.

⁶⁰ 5a in the MT begins with *ונתתי את-פגרי בני ישראל לפני גלוליהם* "And I will set the corpses of the Israelites before their idols." The entire phrase is missing in LXX. The people are referred to here in the third person and not in the second -person. The MT expansion may be harmonizing with Lev 26:30 and/or attempting to explain confusion in address. See discussion.

⁶¹ MT has added *ויאשמו*. This seems like a scribal mistake for an expansionist *וישמו*, (root *שמם*) but the verb could be an intentional connotation of guilt (*אשם*).

⁶² MT also has *ונשבתו*. I read with the shorter LXX edition.

⁶³ MT adds *ונמחו מעשיכם*: "And your works will be wiped out." Zimmerli points out that the word is not otherwise attested in, though Greenberg makes a case for this being a literary allusion to the flood narrative. Discussion below.

⁶⁴ MT starts the sentence with *והותרתי*: "and I will leave," creating an opaque grammatical construction. In the LXX, without the confusing addition, the verse is a temporal clause modifying v.9.

⁶⁵ MT reads *בהזרותכם* misreading as plural feminine ending + 2nd person mp possessive ending. Correcting to *בהזרותכם* – infinitive construct + 2nd mp conjugation. "In your scattering."

⁶⁶ *אשר* added in the MT to clarify the following misread verb, and also by mistaken parallel to previous *אשר*.

⁶⁷ MT: *ונשברתי* in the niph'al which Greenberg translates: "How I was grieved at their whoring hearts" Reading with S: *ושברתי* ("and I broke.") This is decidedly more malicious than the MT reading. The LXX has *ὄμωμοσα*, probably *נשבעתי*, which is already a version of the mistaken MT niph'al.

⁶⁸ MT adds *אשר-יסר*. LXX missing the extra grammatical convolution.

⁶⁹ This idiom usually translated as "hate themselves." MT adds: *אל-הרעות אשר עשו*, "because (על) of the evil which they did.

⁷⁰ MT reads *לכל*. Correcting with LXX *ἐν*.

⁷¹ MT addition, not in LXX. Perhaps harmonizing with 14:23.

⁷² The MT has a longer version of what Zimmerli calls the "The recognition formula":

וידעו כי אני יהוה לא אל-חנים דיברתי לעשות להם הרעה הזאת

"And they will know that I am Yahweh it was not for naught that I have spoken to do unto them this evil."

Reading with LXX. See discussion of expansion below.

⁷³ Maybe better to translate as shrines here, but I want to maintain consistency with earlier translation in v. 3.

Justification (vv. 6b-7)

In order to make your altars destroyed,
 your idols broken,
 your incense braziers uprooted.
 The slain shall fall amongst you,
 and you shall know that I am Yahweh.

Realization after Punishment (vv. 8-10)

When you are the refugees of the sword among the nations, in your scattering in the lands – your refugees will remember me among the nations where they are held captive.
 I will break their whoring heart from upon me, and their eyes, whoring after idols. They will loathe their faces⁷⁴ for all their abominations. And they will know that I, Yahweh, have spoken.

The editors of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* have refrained from marking these lines as poetry, while Greenberg's marks only vv. 3b-7 as poetry. I have broken the first seven verses of the passage into lines and stanzas to represent the loose parallelism of elevated prose. Much of the prophecy is structured in loose parallels; rather than poetry it would be best to consider it high elevated prose. In v.2 for example there are two parallel instructions directed to the prophet: "put your face" and "prophesize." In poetry we might expect "the mountains of Israel" to be paired with "the valleys of Judah" rather than the more simple parallel "to them." The rhetoric of the passages often indicates three parallel actions, such as v. 4, but there doesn't seem to be a semantic parallelism or any kind of meaningful development in the verbs.

Overall, this oracle of rebuke castigates the people for idol worship – which includes the worship at *במות*, "high places," or local shrines other than Jerusalem, the use of altars and incense braziers presumably for non-Yahwistic worship, and the use of *גלולים*, which I translate after the Greek as "idols."⁷⁵ The punishment for idolatry is described with many verbs of destruction – the places and objects of worship will be destroyed and broken, while the idolaters are to experience the violence of war and exile. In a surreal version of the *lex taliones*, the corpses of the idol-worshippers will pile up as a parody of an offering before the idols. The image suggests a double uncleanness of idols paired with carcasses as well as an ironic comment on the protective power of the idols. The oracle contains a structure of justification signaled by a Deuteronomistic-style *למען*, "in order that," in v.6. However, the logic of cause and effect is tautological, since instead of providing a cause, the subsequent verse just describes more punishment.

To this core oracle of rebuke, three verses were appended that describe the destiny of the survivors after punishment and exile: as opposed to the parallel passage in Leviticus 26, which is resolved by Yahweh's reassuring remembrance of the covenant of the fathers (Lev 26:44-45), here the survivors, ashamed, will remember Yahweh in order to realize how they have been punished. The survivors of divine destruction are imagined less as a

⁷⁴ More *ע/א* confusion. Should read *על הרעות*.

⁷⁵ The use of the word is especially prevalent in Ezekiel and the Priestly code. See especially Lev 26:30. The entire passage has many affinities with Lev 26. See also Clements' argument above.

redeemed minority, than as miserable, guilt-ridden witnesses of catastrophic history. Instead of the land of Israel, the primary location of the sin, the oracle now focuses on the various lands in which the refugees are to dwell, scattered.

With the addition of verses 8-10, the root זרה ("scatter") comes to function as a *leitwort*. The refugees are scattered like the scattered bones of the nation in 6:5 (וזריתי את) (עצמותיכם) and like the hair which the prophet is to scatter in 5:2 (והשלישית תזרה לרוח).⁷⁶ There is a constant overlay in the oracle, as there is in much of the Ezekiel text, between body and landscape. The prophet's face is aimed toward the landscape. The land is punished rather than the people who live on the land. Yet the oracle returns at its end to the human body: the refugees' crime and punishment is enacted through their heart, eyes, and face. Though the oracle as a whole is somewhat loosely structured, the return of the face of the refugees (ונקטו בפניהם) as a counterpart to the face of the prophet (שיים פניך) in v. 2 creates a frame for the section.

The different sections of the oracle are tied together through repetition of verbs of destruction, especially verbs with the sound patterns of "š." While the implicit addressees of the oracle are the Judeans, either in Jerusalem or in Babylon, the explicit addressee of the prophecy begins as "the mountains of Israel." The turn toward an imaginary addressee has widely discussed in the history of the lyric, to which we will return shortly, but for now let us mark it as an "apostrophe." The oracle, however, is inconsistent in its use of this formal feature: it quickly slips back into a more straightforward address.⁷⁷ Verse 3 begins by addressing the mountains, which are personified, as they are told to "hear the word of Yahweh," הרי ישראל שמעו דבר יהוה. The mountains seem to have a kind of body; Yahweh's sword destroys "their" high places. Verse 4 predicts destruction for altars, incense braziers, and human bodies: the altars might be conceived of as belonging to the mountains, but the possessive of חמניכם, "your incense braziers," and הלליכם, "your corpses," refers to people, not mountains. Verse 5 refers to bones, which could conceivably be the metaphorical bones of the mountains, but are more likely the bones of the dead human bodies. By verse 6 any kind of personification is impossible: מושבותיכם, "your settlements," refers unequivocally to people, not mountains.

Throughout the pericope we can see the strain in maintaining the personified address to the mountains, in the attempts of a secondary passage and then an MT gloss to try and clarify this ambiguous rhetorical moment. In vv.1-8 the objects of the prophecy are referred to in the second-person, while vv.9-10, probably post-exilic additions,⁷⁸ switch and refer to the Judeans in the third person.⁷⁹ As is typical of much of the book of Ezekiel, there is a wide discrepancy between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint. In the case of this particular chapter, we can also see how the interpretive additions of the MT try and make sense of the already complicated shifts in address in the earlier LXX edition. In the MT v.5 begins:

⁷⁶ See also Lev 26:33: ואתכם אזרה בגוים

⁷⁷ In a parallel passage in the second half of the book (Ezek 36:1-12), the mountains of Israel and the land of Israel are addressed in a more sustained way, from objects of punishment to objects of redemption. This chapter could be reflecting or repeating chapter 36 in truncated form.

⁷⁸ Zimmerli and Baltzer, *Ezekiel*, 185.

⁷⁹ לבם – עיניהם – גילוליהם – פניהם – תועבותיהם – וידעו

ונתתי את פגרי בני ישראל לפני גלוליהם

"And I set the corpses of the Israelites before their idols." The phrase zeroes in on the vague object of the prophecy, naming the Israelites, who are referred to in the third person, and thus the personified address to the mountains is collapsed. The MT pluses also spell out the punishment as the effect of the deeds of the people in v.6 adding *ונמחו מעשיכם*, "and your deeds will be wiped out"; the images of broken idolatry which stand metonymically for the traumatized people and their sin are here explained. Continuing the emphasis on deeds, the ashamed survivors loathe their faces in v. 9 with an added "because of the evil which they have done":

על הרעה אשר עשו

Again, the gloss spells out why the survivors feel ashamed. In the same vein, using almost the same vocabulary, v.10 adds that Yahweh spoke "in order to do to them this evil."

לעשות להם הרעה הזואת

In the earlier edition, the suffering survivors realize the validity of Yahweh's oracle in retrospect. With the MT addition, they (also) realize that he did not speak in vain, *לא אל-הינם דיברתי*. It is almost as if the threat of false, or insignificant prophecy hung more heavily on the redactors which they must disavow.

In a sense, the later glosses and insertions disrupt the formal "literary" features of the prophecy – such as apostrophe and metonymy. While this disruption could be deemed a degraded literary sensibility, it is also symptomatic of the intense preoccupation with the vocative in this prophecy as a whole. The various layers seem to be asking: who can be interpellated by the divine voice? How is it possible to become a "you"? We saw in Isaiah 6:9-10 that the nation was both interpellated with the command *שמעו שמוע* "listen carefully," while at the same time it was barred from hearing the prophetic message. Isaiah's anti-address to the nation turns into commands to the prophet to act upon the body of the nation in v.10. Both Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 6 exhibit a similar breakdown or anxiety regarding the vocative, expressed as a shift between second and third person.

These shifts can be compared to the parallel passage from Leviticus, which begins with a typical interpellation. Moses is told:

דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם כי תבאו אל הארץ אשר אני נתן לכם

Speak to the Israelites and tell them: "when you reach the land that I am giving you..." (Lev 25:2).

The pericope in Leviticus is characterized by the intimacy of Yahweh's address to the people, whether it is promising reward or punishment. If the Israelites obey:

והתהלכתי בתוכם והייתי לכם לאלוהים ואתם תהיו לי לעם

And I shall walk about amongst you; I will be your God, and you will be my people (Lev 26:12).

Their disobedience is also described quite intimately, as "walking contrariwise."

ואם-באלה לא תוסרו לי והלכתם עמי קרי: והלכתי אף-אני עמכם בקרי והכיתי אתכם גם אני שבע
על-חטאתיכם

And if these things fail to discipline you for me, and you will walk with me contrariwise, then I too will walk with you contrariwise, and I will strike you myself sevenfold for your sins (Lev 26:23-24).

In exile, without the land, the address to the nation is much more of a fraught enterprise: the nation is scattered, split between Israel and Babylon. "The Israelites" become an inaccurate, almost hyperbolic term for the Judean residents of Jerusalem or Babylon. "The Mountains of Israel" could function as a metonymy for the people of Israel, but they could also be the objects left behind when the nation is dispersed. From the point of view of the mountains and the land, its residents are a "they." The figural substitutions that become necessary in exile are also thematized by the passage, which is obsessed with the sin of image-making. While the nation is explicitly punished for making figural substitutions for Yahweh, Ezekiel's prophetic situation involves multiple chains of figuration.

The Weak Apostrophe

How is the vocative, then, constructed in this passage in Ezekiel, and what does its formation tell us about prophecy in exile? The Book of Ezekiel is richly patterned through its vocatives, from Yahweh's recurring commands to Ezekiel ("O Son of Man") to Ezekiel's sermons to "The House of Israel." Ezekiel is also commanded to address specific groups within the population such as "the prophets of Israel" (13:1), "the prophetesses of your people" (13:7), and "the princes of Israel" (19:1). Besides the addresses to foreign nations and to the nation of Israel, Ezekiel also addresses geographical entities such as "the Land of Israel" (7:1), and the temples of Jerusalem (20:6). In addressing a personified land, the text creates a complex allegorical system of the land-as-woman, such as Ezekiel's address of Jerusalem as a foundling girl (Ezek 16) and his allegory of the two sisters, Ohalah and Ohalibah (Ezek 23).⁸⁰ The same allegorical system produces addresses to the foreign nations as women. Finally, Ezekiel also addresses inanimate objects such as a sword (21:13) and dry bones (37:4). These elaborate personifications couched in addresses could be said to be a form of "distant speech" as they do not depict actual conversational events. Rather, we could say that they depict a fantasy of direct address.

Ezekiel's speech is distant both literally and figurally; his geographical position as distant from the Holy Land is troped by rhetorical devices such as personification and apostrophe. Many of the values associated with weakened literary prophecy are also tied to the rhetorical aspects of "distant" speech, to its loss of "social authenticity." According to

⁸⁰ This allegorical system characterizes many of the classical prophetic texts. See more detailed discussion in Chapter 4.

Gunkel, "whenever it is impossible to conceive of the prophet himself delivering a prophetic word to an audience, such a word certainly belongs to a later time of prophecy. For example, when Deutero-Isaiah addresses the heathen (49:1) this is no longer an actual but a contrived speech."⁸¹ Thus the distinction between oral speech and written text is defined as a difference between an authentic public address and a "contrived" speech which has gotten lost from the original prophetic situation.

Yet as Greenberg points out, prophecies against the nations, one of the oldest types of prophetic genres, already have a built in incongruity.

Prophecies against foreign nations – an established prophetic genre – always involve an incongruity between the ostensible audience (the foreign nation, addressed as "you") and the real audience (the Israelites, for whose ears the prophecy is intended, and for whom it bears an important message).⁸³

Greenberg complicates the idealized picture that Gunkel draws of the prophetic address: from its earliest forms, the prophetic address is a performance, a "contrived speech," which can create what Quintilian calls "a diversion of our words to address some person other than the judge."⁸⁴ In other words, while the actual "judges" of Ezekiel's speech are in Babylon, his words are diverted to speech toward the mountains of Israel, or the Judeans living there.

Like the oracles against the nations, Ezekiel's prophecies contain a gap between the contrived "you" of the oracle and his actual audience, who is put in the position of "overhearing" his prophecies. However, Greenberg's argument ultimately skirts the problem of Ezekiel's vocative, minimizing or denying the distance built into his speech. "In Ezekiel's case, little contrast would be felt between the ostensible and the real audience, since the hearers of the prophet were, in fact, Jerusalemites who identified themselves with their fellow citizens in every way. If there is any anomaly in Ezekiel's addressing Jerusalem from the exile, it is no greater than the anomalous contemporaneity of two Jerusalemite communities hundreds of miles apart at this juncture of history."⁸⁵ In his efforts to restore Ezekiel post-Wellhausen, Greenberg ultimately evades theoretical reflection on an important aspect of Ezekiel's position as prophet.

The distinction between authentic speech, which addresses a real audience directly, and an artificial contrived address meant to be "overheard," has been at the forefront of theoretical discussions of the lyric, and can provide useful vocabulary for considering Ezekiel's modes of speech. Jonathan Culler uses the term "apostrophe" to refer to the contrived addresses of the lyric: John Stuart Mill characterizes the poet as turning his back on his listeners and as Northrop Frye puts it "pretend[ing] to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a Muse, a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object."⁸⁶ What Gunkel calls contrived speech, or what Greenberg

⁸¹ Gunkel, *Water for a Thirsty Land*, 87.

⁸³ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 17.

⁸⁴ Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H.E. Butler, vol. 2 (London; New York: William Heinemann; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), 43.

⁸⁵ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 17.

⁸⁶ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 248.

notes as an "incongruity" is characterized by Frye as "pretense." We could say that Ezekiel's turn toward the Mountains of Israel and his speech to them is a kind of pretense.

In many ways, what Culler points out as an "embarrassing" artificial turn toward inanimate objects marks a diminishment, a weakness from an imaginary ideal. The vocative, claims Culler, is "precisely an attempt to bring about the condition to which it alludes: the condition of the visionary poet who can engage in dialogue with the universe."⁸⁷ Culler here is referring to a Romantic idealization of the "visionary poet," or the strong poet-as-prophet who has the power to make things happen. Consider Goethe's depiction of the song of the oriental guide who sings to light up the stars. Or consider again the first lines of Isaiah, in which the prophet summons the earth and heavens as witnesses to his rebuke against Israel, in comparison to Ezekiel's turn to the mountains of Israel, which to paraphrase Ibn Ezra, is prophecy "only in speech."⁸⁸ The distinction between an idealized "visionary poet" and the poetry of post-enlightenment which "seeks to overcome the alienation of subject from object" in the trope of apostrophe, replicates a kind of distinction between strong and weak prophecy. In other words, Culler's distinction between the visionary poet and the post-enlightenment poet is not really historical, but speaks to a basic difference between idealized strong prophecy and weak prophecy which predates the Enlightenment.

We could read Ezekiel as a prototype of a Romantic poet, who uses apostrophe "to will a state of affairs, to attempt to call it into being by asking inanimate objects to bend themselves to [his] desire."⁸⁹ Ezekiel's turn toward the mountains, like his speech to the sword, the cup, and the pot echoes the mantic turn, or the mantic touch of archaic prophets, but does not bring about an effect in the world. Elisha encounters a pot in which deadly food is being cooked and is able to purify it through his instruction to throw flour in it (2 Kgs 4:41). In contrast, Ezekiel's song to a pot has nothing to do with real food; the dangerous pot full of cooking meat is a parable for Jerusalem, which is to be "overcooked" and destroyed by siege (Ezek 24: 3-5). Unlike Elisha's power to bring back the Shunammite's son from the dead by direct contact of mouths, eyes, and palms (2 Kgs 4:33), Ezekiel speaks over dry bones. He is told:

הנבא על-העצמות האלה ואמרת אליהם העצמות היבשות שמעו דבר-יהוה

Prophesize over these bones and say to them O Dry Bones, hear the word of Yahweh (37:4).

As opposed to Elisha's powers, for Ezekiel, the dead are resurrected only in an allegorical vision.

We could read a similar diminishment into Ezekiel's apostrophe in chapter 6. According to Greenberg, the formula "Mountains of Israel, hear the words of YHWH" is a prophetic adaptation of the speech of royal heralds. The formula is meant to summon its hearers to a confrontation. However, the use of this formula in Ezekiel never leads to

⁸⁷ Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, Augmented ed. (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002), 143.

⁸⁸ See my discussion in previous chapter.

⁸⁹ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 139.

confrontation. In the case of this heraldic speech, "the message is for a party other than the real audience."⁹⁰ Thus, as Greenberg has it, "the message formula is thereby transformed into a vehicle for imparting information to the real audience on the identity of the ostensible addressee of the oracle."⁹¹

Faciality and Ezekiel's Face-turning

I propose to tie the problem of Ezekiel's "distant address" to the face-turning formula which marks a number of these apostrophic prophecies. Ezekiel 6:1 begins with a formula that appears in eight other places, in which Ezekiel is commanded to put or set his face (שׂים פָּנֶיךָ) to distant locales, such as Sidon (28:21) or Mt. Seir. (35:2).⁹² This seemingly simple formula is in fact quite complex: on the one hand, it implies a dramatic situation, a miniature *Sitz im Leben*. These are not merely prophetic words, but the material body is involved in the gesture. The next verse continues this dramatic situation, as the mountains are addressed in the second-person, as part of a kind of dialogue. At the same time, there is a degree of fictionality involved in this gesture. Compare this command to Ezekiel to the openings of prophetic poems like Deuteronomy 32: 1, or Isaiah 1:2. Both the Deuteronomy poem and the Isaiah poem summon natural elements as an audience, or as witnesses to a broken covenant. While we could read Ezekiel's gesture to the mountains similarly, the mountains of Israel are quite a different object from the always-present earth and heavens. Specifically, the mountains of Israel are not visible from Babylon. Setting one's face toward these mountains requires prior geographical knowledge, an estimation of direction based on the mediation of maps, or of calculations based on the position of the sun, or perhaps on architecture that is already oriented in a certain direction.

Interpreters from Rashi to Gunkel have grappled with the "uncomfortable" or "embarrassing" distance written into Ezekiel's performative vocative by wishing it away.⁹³ According to Gunkel, the prophetic address is characteristically couched in the second-person address and thus the prophet "must meet face to face with anyone to whom Yahweh sends him."⁹⁴ The power of Yahweh's words is enough to miraculously sustain the address across distances: "when the prophet prophesizes against foreign peoples, he turns his face in the direction they live (Ezek 25:1; see 6:2; and Jer 3:12) and *he is convinced that they will hear his words*."⁹⁵ For Gunkel, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are equal in their miraculous power to shout and be heard in the distance, at least in their own imagination. In an elaboration of this Gunkelian notion, William Brownlee found biblical, Ugaritic, and Akkadian contexts in

⁹⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, 131.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² See also Ezek 13:17; 21:2; 21:7; 25:2; 29:2; 38:2.

⁹³ Davis demonstrates that Ezekiel's "sign actions," in which we can include the turn toward invisible objects, "have been a long standing embarrassment within the biblical tradition." Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, 67. Along parallel lines, Culler diagnoses a scholarly evasion from the apostrophe: "The fact that [the apostrophe] is systematically repressed or excluded by critics suggests that it represents that which critical discourse cannot comfortably assimilate. Indeed, one might be justified in taking apostrophe as the figure of all that is most radical, embarrassing, pretentious, and mystificatory in the lyric." Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 137.

⁹⁴ Gunkel, *Water for a Thirsty Land*, 110.

⁹⁵ My emphasis.

which the idiom **שׁים פְּנִיךְ** was used for travel.⁹⁶ He hypothesizes that this is an "idiom of dispatch." In other words, with each command to turn his face, Ezekiel actually trotted off to a different physical location, as a kind of proto-wandering Jew.

Zimmerli interprets the face-setting idiom as a weakened form of a once mantic powerful utterance. On the one hand, the expressive gesture reminds us of the power of "the word as event."⁹⁷ Ezekiel's use of sign acts and expressive gestures ties him to the pre-classical prophets and seers like Elijah and Elisha. However, he is unlike an early mantic like Balaam, for whom "eye to eye contact...with those who were to face him through his word of power is regarded as necessary in every case."⁹⁸ The idiom in Ezekiel is "a saying which was once meant very objectively [and has now] become weakened and used only improperly."⁹⁹ The comparison of Ezekiel to Balaam reinscribes the notion of an early "archaic" prophecy in which words were effective. Ezekiel's face turning tends to be characterized as a kind of weakness, a diminishment from the actual "eye to eye contact" of strong prophets. According to Zimmerli, a "certain remoteness" in the language betrays its weakness, but we could say more generally that Ezekiel's prophecies are characterized by a certain remoteness both in form and content.

Words related to "face" frame the oracle, and could be said to function as *leitwörter* here and more broadly in the Book of Ezekiel. The oracle begins with Ezekiel's stalwart face (**שׁים פְּנִיךְ**) and it ends with a pronouncement against the refugees of Jerusalem who will come to "loathe their face" (**וּנְקָטוּ בַפְּנֵיהֶם**) as they grow ashamed of their idolatry (6:9). Since the phrase begins a prophecy of rebuke, the gesture of setting the face is malevolent – Greenberg reads it as a glare. Setting the face against the mountains of Israel follows closely on a sign act described in Ezek 4:1-7.

קח לך לבנה ונתתה אותה לפניך וחקת עליה עיר...ואתה קח-לך מחבת ברזל ונתתה אותה קיר ברזל
בינך ובין העיר והכינתה את-פניך אליה והיתה במצור וצרת עליה...ואל מצור ירושלים תכין פניך
וזרועך חשופה ונבאת עליה

Take a brick and set it before your face and etch upon it a city...and you – take an iron pan and set it as an iron wall between you and the city and prepare your face to it. It will be under siege and you shall besiege it...and with bared arm, prepare your face to the siege of Jerusalem and prophesize against it."

In this sign-act, Ezekiel is to mimic the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. His "face" set against the city is the face of the Babylonian Empire. The Babylonian Empire, which is rich with icons of power, is itself in turn only a "face" for Yahweh's intentions.

If we read 6:2 together with the previous sign act, it is clear that Ezekiel's gesture is part of a symbolic system. The brick symbolizes Jerusalem, but is not Jerusalem in reality. Thus glaring at the model of Jerusalem is a symbolic or magical act. In the same way, turning one's face toward the geography of the Land of Israel is symbolic or magical.

⁹⁶ William Brownlee, "Son of Man Set Your Face,'Ezekiel the Refugee Prophet," *HUCA* 54 (1983): 54.

⁹⁷ Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 182.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Ezekiel's face is turned into a mask: the face becomes closed-off, hardened. Indeed, Jerusalem besieged becomes closed off, as Ezekiel's face hardens toward it (4:7). In a sense, Ezekiel's entire prophecy is made under the sign of the hardened face. When he is commissioned, Yahweh promises Ezekiel to make his face strong or tough to match the toughened faces of the Israelites: **ונתתי את-פניך הזקים לעמת פניהם**, "And I will make your face strong against their face" (3:7-8). Ezekiel's commission suggests a "face-off" between the prophet and the face of the nation has become stiff, ugly, impenetrable. The refugees in 6:9 come to understand that they have been betrayed by their own personalities and desires, their lusting hearts and eyes. In remembering Yahweh, the refugees come to be estranged from their face, the sum of their personality. Memory, an internal process, is oppositional to the production of the image of the face.

When it comes to revelation, the face can connote an intimacy, an unmediated communication, such as the face-to-face communication of God with Moses (Ex 33:11; Deut 34:10), the priestly blessing (Num 6:24-26) or Ezekiel's vision of the **חיות**, in which he sees the four faces of each of the celestial creatures (1:10). Yahweh turning his face toward his nation is a form of blessing. The parallel passage in Leviticus imagines the beneficent face of Yahweh:

ופניתי אליכם והפרתי אתכם והרבתי אתכם והקימתי את בריתי אתכם:

I will face toward you, and I will make you fruitful, and I will multiply you, and I will maintain my covenant with you (Lev 26:9).

Yet the language of face can also be associated with distance. The face which can radiate mutuality and intimacy can turn into a hardened mask. As a punishment for disobedience Yahweh threatens to turn his face against the people: **ונתתי פני בכם** Lev 26:17). This direct punishment reverses the earlier sense of the beneficent face. In Ezekiel 39:32, the sign of divine displeasure changes from the image of direct aggression of the divine face to a hiding of the divine face:

ואסתר פני מהם ואתנם ביד צריהם

"I will hide my face from them and give them into the hands of their enemies" (Ezek 39:23). As 39:20 makes clear, Ezekiel's pre-fall prophecies occur under the sign of the hidden face of Yahweh. Thus, Ezekiel's turned face in passages like 6:1 functions as a substitution for the aggressive face of Yahweh, which is itself manifested through the actions of the Babylonian Empire. At the same time, the mountains of Israel are a substitute for the people of the land, who stand in for the actual addressees of the prophecy, the exiled Judean elite in Babylon. In a further chain of substitution we could say that the implied listeners of the prophecy themselves will only come to knowledge of Yahweh in the future, so that they stand in for their future selves.

In "Autobiography as De-Facement" de Man describes the "the figure of prosopopeia, the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased or voiceless entity, which

posits the possibility of the latter's reply and confers upon it the power of speech."¹⁰⁰ In his description, "voice assumes mouth, eye, and finally face, a chain that is manifest in the etymology of the trope's name, *prosopon poiien*, to confer a mask or a face." Perhaps we could say that Ezekiel's power to give face to faceless inanimate entities, such as the Mountains of Israel, is a double-edged sword which can make his own face inanimate. "The latent threat that inhabits *prosopopeia* [is] namely that by making the death [sic] speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death."¹⁰¹ Perhaps Ezekiel's stiffened face, turned against the nation and forbidden the unraveling which occurs in mourning, bound and made "mute," is a consequence of his chains of figurations, his own distance from a signifier, or from what Derrida calls "the vocative absolute." In the same way, Ezekiel's vision of the glory of Yahweh is marked by his use of figures to describe Yahweh's presence. The awesome vision is mediated by the qualifier כַּעֲיִן, "as if," the prepositional letter כ, "like," and דְמוּת, "figure." Even in his direct vision of Yahweh, Ezekiel's face remains averted; the thick medium of language is constantly drawn to our attention.

It seems, though, that stiffness or frozenness does not quite describe the formal qualities which we noted in Ezekiel chapter 6. The sentences jump from second-person to third person, from personification to persons, from metonymy to gloss. While the theme of the prophecy is idolatry, formally it is concerned with efforts at figuration. So far we have seen how there is a tendency in many of the interpretations of specific passages in Ezekiel to return to Wellhausen's damning characterization of Ezekiel, reading his rhetorical gestures as diminished, weakened, echoes of more powerful speech. At the same time, effort has been made to discover and emphasize the oral parts of Ezekiel's prophecy, thus saving him from epigonic status. In *Swallowing the Scroll*, Davis attempts to draw out the textual qualities of Ezekiel as productive and creative. "My goal is to find a way of accounting for the elements in this book which violate our preconceptions about prophetic speech...while taking seriously [Ezekiel's] own claim to stand in the line of Israel's prophets."¹⁰² According to her, the "increased use of writing not only serves compensatory and preservative functions, but also carries an inherent creative potential."¹⁰³

Ezekiel's use of apostrophe is double-edged: even as it performs the intimacy of dialogue it figures the impossibility of direct, oral speech for the prophet in exile. It marks a literary replication in the place of the lost ideal of face-to-face prophecy. At the same time, sustaining an apostrophe can be construed as an act of poetic will and presence. In discussing the figuration of the voice of the poet, Culler cites Walt Whitman: "Whitman says that 'I and mine' – which is to say, strong poets – 'do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes. We convince by our presence.'"¹⁰⁴ The multi-layered prophecy we have been reading is unlike a Romantic poet, in that it enacts both an apostrophe and the breakdown of apostrophe, presence and absence. I submit that the breakdown of the apostrophe in the

¹⁰⁰ Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 76.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹⁰² Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy.*, 25.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰⁴ Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, 142. See Walt Whitman, *The Works of Walt Whitman* (Wordsworth Editions, 1995), 142.

passage is an aspect of weak prophecy, a moment of creative potential amidst formal and thematic rupture which departs from Culler's closed, unified model of apostrophe.

The rupture in the apostrophe, the inability to sustain it, can be considered what Deleuze and Guattari call a "line of flight." In Deleuze and Guattari's formulation, the change from the direct(ed) face of the ruler-god to the averted, hidden face of the divine is a move between regimes of signs. On the one hand, they posit a paranoid regime, the regime of Empire, of masks, of the despot-god. The center of this regime "could not even be conceptualized if it did not have its own substance of expression for which we must find a name: *faciality*...the face crystallizes all redundancies, it emits and receives, releases and recaptures signifying signs."¹⁰⁵ Hebrew prophecy is an example of the "the passionate regime," an alternative regime of signs. In this alternative regime, "faciality undergoes a profound transformation. The god averts his face, which must be seen by no one; and the subject, gripped by a veritable fear of the god, averts his or her face in turn. The averted face, in profile, replaces the frontal view of the radiant face."¹⁰⁶ This faciality is implicitly formulated in contrast to philosophy which glorifies the frontal face, such as Emanuel Levinas' conception of seeing the face as a moment when ethics originate, as the site of the ultimate encounter with the other, or even Martin Buber's I-Thou. Deleuze and Guattari tie the transition to the "the passionate regime" to biblical narratives such as the Exodus from Egypt: "in the case of the Jewish people, a group of signs detaches from the Egyptian imperial network of which it was a part of and sets down a line of flight into the desert."¹⁰⁷

The averted or hidden face of Yahweh, and the profile-view face of Ezekiel, turned toward the Mountains of Israel, express a loss of the radiant, beneficent face. At the same time, the averted face creates a "line of flight," an escape hatch out of the stiffness of the paranoid regime. The imaginary landscape which blurs smashed idols and smashed bodies, the scattered refugees who have grown estranged from their own faces, and the slippery formal figures of Ezekiel 6:1-10 express a new regime of signs:

When the face is effaced, when the faciality traits disappear, we can be sure that we have entered another regime, other zones infinitely muter and more imperceptible where subterranean becomings-animal occur, becomings-molecular, nocturnal deterritorializations overspilling the limits of the signifying system.¹⁰⁸

In the averted face, in the broken-down apostrophe, we enter the zone of exilic prophecy, a prophecy deeply troubled by the static of the divine-human connection.

While Ezekiel has been read by the first generations of biblical scholars as an anomaly among the prophets, a transitional figure between oral and written composition, close attention to Ezekiel's textuality and his tropes of distance show that much of the prophetic texts in the biblical corpus share Ezekiel's weakness to some degree. Perhaps we could say more broadly that the attempt at "visionary poetry" is already at a distance from

¹⁰⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 115.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

the immediacy of the unmediated vocative. While poetry has been read as most reflective of the immediate address of the prophet, many of the classical prophetic texts mix poetry and prose, inserting narrative and sermonizing into the "pure" orally composed poetic oracles. The mediation of prophecy through prose is thematized by Isaiah 6, as Isaiah cannot speak the pure poetry of the seraphim. While early scholars hypothesized a purely oral composition process, the prophecies come to us as text. Even when the dramatic situation is represented as immediate, oral address, there are layers of "ink and paper" we forget in our speculation. Prophecy is an attempt to close the terrible gap, the distance between humans and the divine. However, part of its pathos is its inability to close the gap, to know the course of history. As the first chapter of Ezekiel dramatizes, prophecy works through language and figures, giving face, but it functions with the logic of substitution, not the experience of face-to-face. Finally, all the prophecy of the Hebrew Bible is to one degree or another, redacted in exile, from a time when prophecy ended. Its final form, as Clements and others point out, is influenced by subsequent historical events, later liturgical uses, and the nostalgic sense that it has been withdrawn.

CHAPTER FOUR

Treading on Thin Ice: The New Hebrew Poetry and Prophetic Weakness

In a moment of literary alchemy, the use of the prophetic mode in Modern Hebrew poetry at the turn of the twentieth century combined the figure of the Romantic poet-prophet and the biblical prophetic text through the medium of the newly "revived" Hebrew language. While the Hebrew poet-prophets of the early twentieth century, such as Shaul Tchernichovsky, Zalman Shneur, and especially Haim Nahman Bialik were at times naively portrayed as returning to a purely biblical mode, many scholars have since traced the affinities between the new Hebrew poetry and the European Romantic tradition of the poet-prophet, which started, as we saw, with Lowth and Herder, but came to the Hebrew poets through Polish and Russian literary traditions.¹ Thus, the prophetic mode of Modern Hebrew literature is constructed through a dense system of biblical, rabbinic, and European Romantic intertextuality.

In the past three chapters, I sketched out the contours of weak prophecy, both in biblical texts and in biblical exegesis. The notion of weak prophecy creates a portrait of biblical prophecy that is far from an assured monolithic institution or idea. On the contrary – my readings emphasized instability, doubt, loss, and fragmentation of the prophetic role and the prophetic texts. The following chapter is a test case for the reception of weak prophecy in a particular modern literary tradition. I contend that the notion of the weak prophecy of the biblical text can transform the way we understand the reception and construction of the poet-prophet, or the prophetic voice in Modern Hebrew literature, disrupting many conventional understandings of the relation between ancient and modern texts.

Dan Miron's recent comprehensive work on the prophetic voice offers a compelling map for the relations between the biblical text and the Modern Hebrew poets. Miron creates a dichotomy between the strength or the "majestic resonance of the [biblical] prophetic voice" and the weakness of the modern poets whose poems are "fraught with inner contradictions." In his words, "the great poet-prophets, even as they strode forward, knew they were walking on thin ice."² In other words, the ancients, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel were strong prophets, while the moderns, namely Bialik and Uri Zvi Greenberg, the great prophetic poets of Hebrew literature, are failed, weak pseudo-prophets in relation to their ancient predecessors.

The notion of a modern prophetic precariousness is based on a reification of the biblical text, a retrojection of an unambiguous moral and rhetorical stance onto the classical biblical texts – which also contain moral complexities and ambiguities, incoherent and

¹ See Chone Shmeruk, *Ha-kri'ah le-navi* [The call for a prophet] (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar le-toldot Yisra'el, 1999); Hamutal Bar-Yosef, "Byalik ve-hashirah ha-rusit [Bialik and Russian poetry]," *Moznayim* 64/9–10 (1990): 38–46.; Eli'ezer Shvaid, *Nevi'im le-'amam ve-la-enosbut* [Prophets to their people and to humanity: prophets and prophecy in 20th century Jewish thought] (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999). Dan Miron, *H.N. Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000). On Greenberg's influences see also Moshe Ron, "Malkhut u-makolet, kesef ve-emet: Uri Zvi Greenberg ve-Ezra Pound [Kingship and the grocery Store, money and truth: Uri Zvi Greenberg and Ezra Pound]," in *Uri Zvi Greenberg Studies* (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2008), 49–60.

² Miron, *H.N. Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, 2000, 50.

disjunctive language, instability and doubt. In the following pages my main focus will be on the prophetic mode in Bialik's perhaps most influential canonical prophetic poem – his 1904 "Be-ir ha-baregab" (In the City of Slaughter), as well as its ongoing critical reception in Hebrew letters, though I will also attend to Bialik's wayward prophetic son, U. Z. Greenberg, whose return to the prophetic mode combined a modernist aesthetic sensibility with a messianic neo-religious fervor. Instead of creating a dichotomy between the weakness of modernity and the strength of the ancients, I will show how the weakness of the biblical texts suffuses Bialik's prophetic poem with a sense of impotence and failure, but perhaps also a different kind of potentiality. I suggest that there is a greater continuity between the modern prophet-poets and the classical prophetic texts that is based not on the fantasy of a sublime and authoritative "voice," but on a shared sense of the precariousness of the human position and language in the face of often catastrophic history. As I will show, the image of walking on unstable ground is a recurring topos in Hebrew letters for the problematic "revival" of biblical forms, such as the prophetic mode, as well as the more general revival of Hebrew language and culture. In Miron's use of the metaphor, the thin ice represents the modern poet's precarious weakened position in relation to the stable, unwavering ancient religious texts. The reoccurrences of this unstable, or destabilizing topos in Hebrew letters will serve as a commentary on and complication of Miron's mapping system.

Strong Prophecy and Spiritual Zionism

As we saw in Chapter 2, Lowth's yoking of prophecy to poetry led to an extensive engagement with the prophetic mode in Romantic poetry and letters. The golden age of prophetic poetry came to Hebrew quite late, partially due to "the time lag" of minor languages³ and partially due to the notion of a cessation or withdrawal of prophecy in rabbinic Judaism, which discouraged a tradition of literary prophecy. This rabbinic idea had roots in biblical and extra-biblical texts; as discussed in chapter one, even the Deuteronomistic redactions of Jeremiah suggested a golden age of prophecy, now lost. The sense that the current age is diminished in its prophetic powers is expanded in apocryphal texts and in the New Testament.⁴ In a set of rabbinic texts, the end of prophecy marks the transition from national sovereignty to diasporic existence. Perhaps the best known of these formulations is the version in Babba Batra:⁵

אמר רבי אבדימי דמן חיפה מיום שחרב בית המקדש ניטלה נבואה מן הנביאים וניתנה
 לחכמים...אמר רבי יוחנן מיום שחרב בית המקדש ניטלה נבואה מן הנביאים וניתנה לשוטים
 ולתינוקות.

³ Chana Kronfeld, *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (University of California Press, 1996), 6.

⁴ For extra-biblical examples consider I Maccabees 9:27: "So was there a great affliction in Israel, the like whereof was not since the time that a prophet was not seen among them."; 2 Apoc. Baruch 85:1-3 compares the generations of the fathers, who had holy prophets as intercessors, to the current exilic generation in which the prophets have fallen asleep. L. Stephen Cook's *On the Question of the 'Cessation of Prophecy' in Ancient Israel* contains an exhaustive survey of this topos, including the early Christian version, in which Christ replaces prophecy – "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (Heb 1:1-2). (Cook's translations.)

⁵ b.B. Bat. 12a-b. (my translation)

Rabbi Abdimi of Haifa said: Since the day when the Temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to the sages... Rabbi Johanan said: Since the temple was destroyed, prophecy has been taken from the prophets and given to fools and children.

In the first formulation, prophetic texts are preserved and enshrined, while at the same time the possibility of new and disrupting revelation is foreclosed. In the guise of nostalgia or elegy, the Rabbis radically transform religious structures, claiming exclusive authority for their own interpretations. Rabbi Johanan's formulation has a slightly different tone: after the destruction of the temple, prophecy power only exists as a fragmented, scrambled revelation. Thus, the post-exilic world grows further and further away from the authority and coherence of intimacy with the divine.

One rabbinic explanation for the cessation of prophecy builds upon Deuteronomistic ideology, regarding its withdrawal as punishment:

על ג [דברים] שבזו ישראל בטלו מהם. על הנבואה על מלכות בית דוד. ועל המקדש.

"There are three things which Israel treated with contempt and they disappeared: prophecy, the kingdom of the house of David, and the temple."⁶ Yet, if prophecy was part of the golden age of kingdom and temple, it follows that, like them, it can return. Thus scholars such as Ragnar Leivestad and Peter Schäfer refer to the ancient Jewish conviction of living in the *Zwischenzeit*, "an interim period preceded by and to be followed by prophetic outpourings of the Spirit."⁷ The conviction of living in the *Zwischenzeit* of prophecy continued to regulate mainstream Jewish discussions of prophecy in the Middle Ages. Even the Hebrew poets of medieval Spain, who often cited prophetic texts and even referred to themselves as prophets through literary conceit, maintained a reticence about declaring themselves actual prophets.⁸

In the first generations of Jewish Emancipation, the notion of living in the prophetic *Zwischenzeit* was rejected as preventing Jews from living in history. The binding force of prophetic ideology, which reads history as divine punishment, was critiqued and thrown off as defeatism. For example, in an 1879 dramatic monologue written in the voice of Zedekiah, Judah Leib Gordon, a prominent poet of the *haskalah*, heaps derision upon prophecy.⁹ In the poem "*Tsidkiyahu be-veyt ha-p̄kudot*," "Zedekiah in Prison," the last doomed king of Judah tries to maintain Jewish sovereignty. According to Gordon's Zedekiah the

⁶ Abot R. Nat [Text B] 47. Translation from Cook, *On the Question of the "Cessation of Prophecy" in Ancient Judaism (Texts & Studies in Ancient Judaism)*, 171.

⁷ Cook, *On the Question of the "Cessation of Prophecy" in Ancient Judaism (Texts & Studies in Ancient Judaism)*, 27. See also Ragnar Leivestad, "Das Dogma von Der Prophetenlosen Zeit," *NTS* 19 (73 1972): 288–99.; Peter Schäfer, *Die Vorstellung Vom Heiligen Geist in Der Rabbinischen Literatur*, *SANT* 28 (Munich: Kösel, 1972).

⁸ For example, "Al-Ḥarizi, although he clearly invokes the situation of the reluctant prophet, carefully avoids any literal representation of such a call to himself." Dan Pagis, "The Poet as Prophet in Medieval Hebrew Literature," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 148.

⁹ Judah Leib Gordon, *Kol shire yehudah leib gordon* [Collected Works] (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1929).

cowardly spiritual advice of prophets like Jeremiah weakened and doomed the Judean kingdom and all Jews afterward to defeat and failure.¹⁰

The background, then, of the Hebrew call to prophecy by the intellectuals and poets of *Sifrut ha-thiyab* ("The Literature of the Revival") at the turn of the twentieth century was a dialectical return to prophecy, with its particularistic sense of national destiny, in reaction to the previous generation's investment in a distinctly universalist ethos. The figures of the prophet-poets had often been associated with nationalist movements, especially in Eastern Europe¹¹; the Modern Hebrew use of the prophetic mode specifically identified biblical prophecy with the expression of a Hebrew or Jewish national spirit. The connection between prophecy and nationalism was succinctly made by Asher Ginzberg, better known by his Hebrew *nom de plume* Ahad Ha'am, "one of the people," a consciously self-deprecating name for an elusive, elitist figure. His series of articles on prophecy were motivated by a broad desire to re-form Jewish culture as an authentic, modern national expression, while at the same time they were influenced by the political intrigues of the Russian Zionist movement, as Steve Zipperstein has shown.¹² As an intellectual and spiritual mentor to Bialik, Ahad Ha'am's vision of Hebrew prophecy provided an impetus for Bialik's poetry, but perhaps even more significantly, his essays and his charismatic presence came to shape the audience for Bialik's prophetic poems, including generations of Hebrew critics.

As the works of a Hasidic Jew turned *maskil*, turned Zionist, Ahad Ha'am's influential essays were marked by their lucid Hebrew prose, their Jewish erudition, and at the same time by the way in which they framed their arguments through the most up-to-date Western thought and science, especially the theories of John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spenser, and Charles Darwin. Ahad Ha'am's notion of prophecy in some ways starts where Wellhausen left off. Like Wellhausen, he distinguishes between an early stage of prophecy in Israelite history, and a later stage of institutionalized priesthood. However, the distinction between prophets and priests is psychologized or turned into allegories for different models of leadership.¹³

At the same time, his notion of prophecy is built on the rejection of biblical scholarship like Wellhausen's. Ahad Ha'am markedly refrained from publishing biblical scholarship in *Ha-shiloach*, the Hebrew journal he edited from 1894-1902. According to Alan Levenson, "Ahad Ha'am's declared lack of interest in biblical scholarship was a grand gesture, but also an excuse to ignore the field."¹⁴ In his article on Moses, which develops his 1893

¹⁰ See for example Zedekiah's characterization of Jeremiah lines 23-24 as "the soft hearted man with the appeasing soul/ who advised us shame, slavery, obedience."

"איש רך הלב בעל נפש נכנעת/ אשר יעץ לנו בנשט, עבדות, משמעת"

¹¹ On Slavic prophetic poetry see Victor Erlich, *The Double Image: Concepts of the Poet in Slavic Literatures* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1964). On Poland's "three bards" see Wiktor Weintraub, *Literature as Prophecy; Scholarship and Martinist Poetics in Mickiewicz's Parisian Lectures* (Gravenhage: Mouton, 1959). Miron also cites the pseudo-prophetic poems of the Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko. Dan Miron, *H.N. Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry* (Syracuse N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 13 n.13.

¹² Steven J. Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet: Ahad Ha'Am and the Origins of Zionism* (University of California Press, 1993), esp. 213–216.

¹³ We can trace an affinity here between Max Weber's work and Ahad Ha'am's through their common Wellhauseian influence.

¹⁴ Alan T Levenson, *The Making of the Modern Jewish Bible: How Scholars in Germany, Israel, and America Transformed an Ancient Text* (Plymouth, U.K.; Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 106.

article "Priest and Prophet," he constructs another kind of truth that cannot be taken away by non-Jewish biblical scholars: "We have another Moses of our own, whose image has been enshrined in the hearts of the Jewish people for generations, and whose influence on our national life has never ceased from ancient times till the present day."¹⁵ In this sense, Ahad Ha'am's appeal to a cultural Bible can read as a late extension of the project of the Enlightenment Bible, which reimagined or rescued a biblical text "made strange" by philology, archeology and history.¹⁶ In a later 1911 essay, he critiques the biblical curriculum at the Zionist gymnasium in Jaffa: when he asks a young student to read a chapter from the prophets, the student replies "How is it possible to remember? Everything is so mixed up!"¹⁷

For Ahad Ha'am, the student's confusion, his appeal to the corruption of versions and to the scholarly corrections of the text indicates the curriculum's unnecessary fidelity to philological scholarship. "From a nationalist perspective we have no need to know the original version, as it came out of the mouth of the prophet."¹⁸ He is not concerned with its "original" forms, but with "all the forms that it has taken throughout the generations and which have become active forces in the life of the people."¹⁹ This late article, though, also reveals his pedagogic need to create a unified form from the scrambled texts of the Bible, especially the prophets. As Anita Shapira puts it, "Ahad Ha'am selected certain elements from Jewish history and fashioned them into a vision of monolithic Judaism, any deviations from which were mere aberrations unrepresentative of the generous and homogenous course of Jewish character."²⁰

In his nascent formulation of the idea of prophecy, he writes that "the primary idea of Hebrew prophecy was the institution of absolute justice in all creation."²¹ The Hebrew prophets embodied the unflinching devotion to this singular ideal, and Moses is posited as the ideal prophetic figure. In fact, Ahad Ha'am's admiration of Moses was reflected in the secret Masonic-type society he founded in 1889 called *Bnei Moshe*, "The Sons of Moses." The prophet is painted as moral giant, whose commitment to truth and idealism is governed by the "the supremacy of absolute *righteousness* in [his] soul, in his every word and action."²² Moses is a platonic ideal of the Israelite and thus all other forms of prophecy, including the prophet's ambivalence, ambiguity, and incoherence are read as a diminishment from a strong prophetic ideal. The texts of the classical prophets are quoted, but not seriously engaged with. For example, Ahad Ha'am characterizes Moses' inner psychological torment through a

¹⁵ Ahad Ha'am, *Nationalism and the Jewish Ethic: Basic Writings of Ahad Ha'am*, ed. Hans Kohn, trans. Leon Simon (New York: Schocken Books, 1962), 208. For Hebrew original see Ahad Ha'am, *Kol kitve ahad ha'am* [Collected works], ed. Leon Roth (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1964), 90–92.

¹⁶ "But occasionally, the text and canon of the Bible suddenly seems more than ordinary to the faithful. It becomes strange, a document whose qualities need to be investigated and understood. And in these moments, the gap between the Bible's divine content and its human form leaps into view." Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

¹⁷ Ahad Ha'am, "Ha-gimnasyah ha-ivrit be-yafa [The Hebrew gymnasium in Jaffa]," in *Ha-tanakh ve-ha-zehut ha-yisraelit* [The Bible and Israeli Identity], ed. Anita Shapira (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005), 76.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 22.

²¹ Ahad Ha'am, *Nationalism and the Jewish Ethic: Basic Writings of Ahad Ha'am*, 212.

²² *Ibid.*

reference to Jeremiah's protest against the fire of Yahweh in his bones (Jer 20:9). The prophet's uncompromising world view is encapsulated by the rabbinic saying about Moses: יקוב הדין את ההר, "Let justice pierce the mountain."²³ Moses' devotion to the law is imagined as so severe as to be able to cut through all reality, even the strongest mountains. In contrast, his brother Aaron the priest compromises, appeases, makes pragmatic choices, and is "a man of the hour," a populist. In the depiction of the leader as "priest" we can hear a certain bitterness reflecting Ahad Ha'am's disappointing political experiences in *Hovevei Zion*, "Lovers of Zion," the society of Russian proto-Zionists, and later his critique of Theodor Herzl's flashy "smooth talking" political Zionism.

On the one hand, the prophets embody universal values, rather than instructing their audience in particular Jewish laws, customs or narratives.²⁴ Moses is not sent by God, but by "the inner 'voice of God.'"²⁵ Ahad Ha'am's use of quotation marks around religious terms indicate that he is providing an allegorical translation of the life of Moses, substituting a secular humanism for the religious language of the biblical text. In his first article, the prophets of Israel are only spectral presences in the political-national landscape: he fantasizes that they rise from their grave and pronounce an opinion on the sorry condition of diasporic Jews. The resurrection of the prophets, though, becomes a more realistic possibility in "Moses," written nearly a decade of tumultuous Zionist politics later. In the penultimate paragraph of "Moses," he transforms the rabbinic passage about the cessation of prophecy: "'Prophecy' ceases only momentarily, and then it returns and attacks its carrier and rules him against his will."²⁶ On the one hand, he seems to be asserting a messianic resumption of prophecy, a revoking of the *Zwischenzeit*; at the same time, "prophecy" remains in secularizing quotation marks.

Even as Ahad Ha'am tries to universalize Jewish texts and history, however, he claims that prophets embody a particular Jewish national spirit.

It requires unusual courage to go out boldly to meet danger, to fall single-handed on an enemy of vastly superior strength, to plunge into a stormy sea. But far greater heroism is demanded of the man who goes about consciously and deliberately to tear out of his heart a splendid hope, which has been the very breath of his life; to stop half-way when all his feelings tumultuously impel him on towards the goal which seemed so near.²⁷

²³ The phrase is cited in multiple contexts in rabbinic literature, perhaps the most pathos-filled version is in Midrash Tanhuma:

והיו ישראל אוהבין יותר אהרן ממשה, לפי שהיה משה אומר יקוב הדין את ההר, אבל אהרן היה משים שלום בין איש לחבירו ובין איש לאשתו

"The Israelites loved Aaron more than Moses, because Moses would say, let justice pierce the mountain, but Aaron would make peace between a man and his neighbor, and between a man and his wife" *Tanh. Mish. B* (seder *Hukat*).

²⁴ Cf to Y.L. Gordon's poem, in which Jeremiah cares only about keeping the Sabbath and not about Jewish sovereignty and power.

²⁵ Ahad Ha'am, *Nationalism and the Jewish Ethic: Basic Writings of Ahad Ha'am*, 216.

²⁶ Here I use my own translation, as Simon's translation has somewhat watered this phrase down. Ahad Ha'am, *Kol kitve ahad ha'am* [Collected works], 347.

²⁷ Ahad Ha'am, *Nationalism and the Jewish Ethic: Basic Writings of Ahad Ha'am*, 223.

While other nations might valorize acts of physical heroism, the Hebrew tradition demonstrates a mental heroism, an absolute fidelity to truth and heroism, even at great personal price. In this sense, Moses is the embodiment of the essence of the Jewish people; prophecy becomes the spirit of the nation speaking to the nation. In order, though, for the nation to embody this prophetic ideal it must not be scattered among the nations; rather it requires "a unification and concentration of its powers, at least – partially, in a place where it will have the ability to conduct its life according to its characteristic."²⁸ Here, in a tentative form, Ahad Ha'am puts forth his idea of the Land of Israel as a "spiritual center," for the revival of Jewish culture.

Ahad Ha'am's formulation of prophecy embodies the paradox of secular nationalism. On the one hand, he has managed to translate revelation and miracles into humanistic and scientific language; on the other hand, the Jewish people are given a national destiny, a particular role in history. In Hanan Hever's opinion, Ahad Ha'am's attempt at secularization is still suffused with theology: "the idea of the chosen people is, without a doubt, a theological idea, which focuses the attempt at universalization in the particularistic object of the Jewish people, of the Jewish religion, whose chosenness is an expression of its god."²⁹ The allusion to the rabbinic topos can be both an iconoclastic secularizing gesture and an implicitly messianic statement. Reading the prophets as ideal models is continuous with medieval Jewish tradition, including Maimonides, Ahad Ha'am idol, but claiming that their revelation is purely a human phenomenon that can return to history is sacrilegious. It is both an assertion of the continuity of the spirit of the Jewish people, from Moses to modernity, and at the same time a radical break with tradition.

Shapira's characterization of Ahad Ha'am's project as monolithic echoes the critique of Baruch Kurzweil, a mid-century Israeli critic. Kurzweil's ferocious essay on Ahad Ha'am attacked the Zionist return to the sources, and the claims of the emerging modern Hebrew literature ("new Hebrew literature") to be continuous with a secular tradition going back to medieval Spanish poetry.³⁰ According to Kurzweil, Ahad Ha'am's idea of prophecy is one dimensional and lacks the "experiential richness" of the classic prophetic texts.³¹ When Ahad Ha'am explains away revelation as an inner voice, a superego, he misses the essential drama of the prophetic texts, which are built around encounter and dialogue between God and the prophet. Ahad Ha'am's appeal to tradition attempts to create a continuity between the biblical text, the Jewish tradition, and Zionism. Kurzweil's critique calls attention to the constructed nature of this continuity; he claims that Ahad Ha'am's interpolation of "Jewish tradition" actually constructs a simplistic edifice foreign to the Jewish tradition: "Ahad Ha'am is using the crumbs of the Judaism that he dismantled in order to prove its constancy and continuity after he used the crumbs to erect an intellectual edifice that is completely foreign to Jewish thought."³² Ahad Ha'am, as Kurzweil points out, is constructing a superficial sense of a "Jewish Tradition," even though it seems that he is simply citing it. In this sense, Ahad Ha'am demonstrates how secularization *is* canonization. By attempting to

²⁸ Ahad Ha'am, *Kol kitve ahad ha'am* [Collected works], 72.

²⁹ Michael Gluzman, Hanan Hever, and Dan Miron, *Be-ir ba-haregah: bikur menhar* [In the city of slaughter: a visit at twilight] (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2005), 53.

³⁰ Baruch Kurzweil, *Sifrutenu ha-hadasha: hemsbekeh o mahapekhab?* [Our new literature: continuity or revolution?] (Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing House Ltd., 1959).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

³² *Ibid.*, 216.

redefine the prophets for secular Jewish nationalism, he retrospectively creates a "traditional" canon for the New Hebrew Literature. As I will show, the discussion of the "new" modern secular prophetic mode in Hebrew letters has often served to paradoxically reify a biblical canon of strong prophets.

Bialik and the Prophetic Ideal

We can see how Ahad Ha'am's re-articulation of the Hebrew prophets provided the impetus and inspiration for Bialik's prophetic poetry.³³ In his occasional poem, "To Ahad Ha'am," published in 1903, Bialik characterizes his generation, the former Yeshiva students now making their way in the secular world, as living in a transition time:

וְהַשְׁעָה שְׁעַת תְּהִי וְבָהּ, שְׁעַת עֲרָבוּב הַתְּחוּמִּים
שֶׁל אַחֲרִית וְרֵאשִׁית, שֶׁל סְתִירָה וּבְנִיָּן, שֶׁל זְקֵנָה וְעֲלוּמִים.

And the time is the time of chaos, the time of the mixing of realms
Of last things and first things, of tearing-down and building, of old-age and youth.³⁴

The uncertain and confused students long for a true prophet (נְבִיא אֱמֶת) to guide them. Ahad Ha'am's pedagogic certainty and charismatic authority is presented as an antidote to the chaotic uncertainty of the young Jews of devout background catapulted into modernity, willy-nilly.

רְאִינוּךָ כְּאַרְיֵאל הָאֱמֶת וְכְאִיתָן הַרוּחַ,
נְקִי-דַעַת, צְנוּעַ וְטָהוֹר בְּסִתְרֵךְ כְּבִגְדֵי,
בְּטוֹחַ בְּאֱמַתּוֹ וּבְדַעַת אַחֲרִים לֹא-תְלוּי,

We saw you as the lion of truth and the steadfast force of the spirit
Serene, modest, and pure in private and in public,
Certain of his truth, and unbound to others' opinions.

The poem "To Ahad Ha'am" bears traces of Ahad Ha'am's own notion of the prophet as spiritual teacher and guide. Yet, ultimately, the portrait of the prophet that emerges from Bialik's poems of wrath is very different from that of his teacher. In contrast to Ahad Ha'am's prophetic certainty, Bialik's modern adoption of the prophetic mode grapples with the failures and hollow places of prophecy. Bialik's poems of wrath command with authority, but at the same time they are undone by ambivalent and often incoherent prophetic gestures. As opposed to the figure of certainty and assurance that Ahad Ha'am constructs, Bialik's prophetic poems seem to address their readers with the certainty of wrath, but are also suffused with doubt and failure.

³³ Bialik began writing his poems in the prophetic mode – what he called his "poems of wrath" (שִׁירֵי זַעַם) with "Indeed the Nation is Grass" (אִכֵּן הַצִּיר הָעַם) in 1896, a quote from Isaiah 40:7. His last prophetic poem was the 1910 "Seer, Flee" (חֹזֶה לֶךְ בְּרַח) (חֹזֶה לֶךְ בְּרַח), which quotes Amos 7:12.

³⁴ Haim Nahman Bialik, *Sbirim* [Collected poems 1899-1934, critical edition], ed. Dan Miron (Tel Aviv, 1990), 149. (my translation)

Prophetic Failure in the City of Slaughter

In Miron's metaphor, Bialik's prophetic poetry strides forward on thin ice. It tries to mobilize the strength of the ancients, but it ultimately fails to climb the mountain of certainty that the biblical prophets ascended.³⁵ I propose to examine the modern prophetic weakness – its "thin ice" – in the most famous and influential example of the prophetic mode, "*Be-`ir Ha-haregah*," "In the City of Slaughter," written in 1904.³⁶ Because this seminal poem has in many ways founded and defined the genre for the next generation of prophet-poets, its critical discussion sets the tone for considering the prophetic and anti-prophetic poems to follow. More generally, the poem creates a model for the way biblical authority is both mobilized and resisted in much of Hebrew poetry.

The *poema*, written in response to the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 is a long address to a prophet, mid-way revealed to be the voice of God, calling the prophet to observe and witness the devastation and trauma left in the town in the wake of the pogrom. As Zipperstein puts it, the pogrom "emerged as a metaphor for the vulnerability of Eastern European Jewry and for the inadequacy of standard Jewish responses to oppression."³⁷ Immediately after the pogrom, Ahad Ha'am, Simon Dubnow, and others Zionist intellectuals in the Odessa circle sent Bialik on a fact-finding mission to Kishinev. Contrary to their expectations, Bialik did not write a newspaper article or historical publication, but a long epic, a *poema*.

The poem bears traces of Bialik's historical task, but besides providing a kind of eye-witness account to the events, it is also the narrative of a call to prophecy. The poet-prophet is commanded "to arise and go to the city of slaughter," to see with his eyes and feel with his hands the horrible remains of the massacre, the ghostly imploring presence of the victims, and the despicable and powerless state of the survivors. On one level, the poem reads as a prophecy of rebuke, serving as an effective piece of propaganda for Ahad Ha'am's interpretation of the pogrom as a demonstration of the "corruption of its victims."³⁸ In the "corruption" of the Ashkenazi martyrological tradition, the victims expect their suffering to be rewarded with compensation in the world-to-come. The prophet-poet is goaded by the divine speaker not to weep or feel sympathy for the victims – but rather to function as a wrathful uncompromising biblical prophet, perhaps in the stern image of Ahad Ha'am. For example, he is encouraged to ruminate on the character of the nation, after Isaiah:

"תִּצִיר תְּלוּשׁ הָעֵמֶם – וְאִם-יֵשׁ לְתֵלוּשׁ תִּקְוָה?"

"The nation is torn grass – do the torn have hope?"

³⁵ The image is taken in part from Zalman Shneur's essay on Bialik, in which he describes prophecy as a "steep mountain" (הַר מְשׁוּפָּע) that Bialik *is* able to climb, but all his contemporaries fail. Zalman Shneur, *H. N. Bialik u-vene doru* [Bialik and his generation] ([Tel Aviv]: Devir, 1958), 72.

³⁶ Bialik, *Shirim* [Collected poems 1899-1934, critical edition], 168–174. I have consulted Atar Hadari's translation, but on the whole the translations are mine. Hayyim Nahman Bialik, *Songs from Bialik: Selected Poems of Hayyim Nahman Bialik*, trans. and ed. Atar Hadari (Syracuse Univ Pr (Sd), 2000).

³⁷ Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 204.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Rather than focusing on the literary aspects of the poem, the first readers of the poem in the St. Petersburg Hebrew daily *Ha-Zeman* concerned themselves with the historical events depicted in the poem, i.e. with the alleged failure of the Kishinev Jews to defend themselves. The prophetic mode of the poem was read as a direct rebuke, intended to transform Jewish society. The poet-prophet was not seen as weakened or diminished; on the contrary, the poet was commended for his ability to mobilize biblical prophetic authority.

Many readers, such as Vladimir Jabotinsky, who translated the poem into Russian, enthusiastically read the poem as a call to arms.³⁹ Consistent with this Revisionist Zionist sensibility, the return of the prophetic mode to Hebrew letters was also understood as an expression of a return to modes of national sovereignty. For Yosef Klausner the prophetic mode expressed a return to the sensibilities of the Judean and Hasmonean kingdoms: "all who desire the revival of Israel want to return it to the political, economic, and spiritual state that existed (in Israel) during the days of Isaiah Ben Amoz and the Hasmonean kings."⁴⁰ Klausner's reference to the Hasmoneans is part of a political vocabulary shared by the poem, which criticizes the townspeople of Kishinev for their unheroic, un-Maccabean behavior.⁴¹ For Klausner, the biblical intertextuality of the poem signaled a return to the values and political structures of the biblical text. Biblical prophets, such as Isaiah Ben Amoz, mark Hebrew strength and sovereignty; the use of the prophetic mode in modern poetry invokes this strength. The purely aesthetic achievement of Bialik's poetry was not as significant as his ability to evoke the moral sublime, which was the essence of prophetic poetry.⁴² "Let [Bialik] not be sorry: a real Hebrew poet brings poetry closer to prophecy. And this is a fair compensation (שילומים) for distancing it from pure art."⁴³ As we will see shortly, the distressing problem of compensation is central to the poem; Klausner here shifts the stakes of compensation to the meta-level of the poet-prophet.

At the same time as the poem asserts its authority over the victimized, passive stance of Eastern European Jewry it vividly portrays the crisis of meaning that arises without the belief in God. The failure of God in the presence of the pogrom has become a foundational moment of Hebrew secular culture. As the poet-prophet is lead through the town, his penultimate stop is the cemetery, where the freshly dead are buried, young to old.

³⁹ "In the City of Slaughter' did actually foster the organization of Jewish self-defense in the outbreaks that followed. The poem did much, in addition, to further the cause of Zionism among the young men and women of the Pale." Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 154.

⁴⁰ Joseph Klausner, *H.N. Bialik ve-shirat hayay: arba' ab 'asar ma'amre biqoret* [H.N. Bialik and the poetry of his life: 14 essays] (Tel-Aviv: Devir, 1950), 48.

⁴¹ See lines 88-90:

"וְרָאִיתָ בְּעֵינֶיךָ אִיפֹה הָיוּ מִתְחַבְּאִים/אֶהְיֶה, בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ וּבְנֵי בְנֵיהֶם שֶׁל-הַמַּכְבֵּיִם,"

"And you saw with your eyes where hid/ your brothers, your people, descendants of the Maccabees."

⁴² The notion of an aesthetic price to be paid for prophecy will return in my discussion of U.Z. Greenberg.

⁴³ Klausner, *H.N. Bialik ve-shirat hayay*, 48.

וַיִּדְעָתָּהּ כִּי-עַתָּה לִגְעוֹת הִיא כְּשׁוֹר עֶקְוִיד עַל הַמַּעֲרָכָה –
 וְהִקְשַׁחְתִּי אֶת-לִבָּבָהּ וְלֹא-תִבָּא אֲנָחָה.
 הִנֵּה עֲגָלֵי הַטְּבָחָה, הִנֵּה הֵם שׁוֹכְבִים כָּלֵם –
 וְאִם יֵשׁ שְׁלוֹמִים לְמוֹתָם – אָמֹר, בְּמָה יִשְׁלָם?
 סִלְחוּ לִי, עֲלוּבֵי עוֹלָם, אֲלֵהֵיכֶם עֲנִי כְמוֹתְכֶם,
 עֲנִי הוּא בְּחַיֵּיכֶם וְקָל- וְחֹמֶר בְּמוֹתְכֶם
 כִּי תִבְאוּ מִחֵר עַל-שְׂכָרְכֶם וּדְפַקְתֶּם עַל-דְּלָתֵי –
 אֶפְתָּחָה לָכֶם, בָּאוּ וּרְאוּ: יִרְדְּתִי מִנְּכֹסֵי!
 וְצָר לִי עֲלֵיכֶם, בְּנִי, וְלִבִּי לִבִּי עֲלֵיכֶם:
 חֲלָלִיכֶם – חֲלָלֵי חַנּוּם, וְגַם-אֲנִי וְגַם-אַתֶּם
 לֹא-יִדְעֻנּוּ לְמָה מָתָם וְעַל-מִי וְעַל-מָה מָתָם,
 וְאִין טַעַם לְמוֹתְכֶם כְּמוֹ אִין טַעַם לְחַיֵּיכֶם.

You will know that it is the time to bellow like an ox bound to the altar –
 But I will harden your heart and no sigh will come.
 Here are the slaughtered calves, here they all lie –
 And if there is compensation for their death – tell me, with what shall it be paid?
 Forgive me, miserable ones of the world, your God is poor like you
 He is poor during your lives and even more so in your deaths.
 If you come tomorrow for your wages, knocking on my door –
 I'll open it for you; come and see: I am bankrupt!
 And I pity you, my children, my heart, my heart goes out to you:
 Your fallen dead – are dead for naught, and neither I nor you
 Know why they died, or for what cause,
 And there is no point to your death, as there is no point to your lives.

This scene has long been a touchstone for the secular reading of the poem, and is reechoed by Israeli responses to Holocaust victims, decades later. God has been given no power in people's lives, and he has no power to make meaning of their deaths.

The question of compensation that God poses to the prophet-poet is related to theodicy. If the universe is just, then the death of the victims is meaningful, and they can receive "compensation" (שִׁלּוּמִים). In prophetic rhetoric, compensation is closely linked to consolation through language. For example, in the redemptive turn of Deutero-Isaiah, amplified by Trito-Isaiah, the suffering caused by the anger of God is reversed:

בַּעֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ קִצְפָתִי וְאַכְזַרְתִּי וְאַקְצַף וַיִּלֶּךְ שׁוֹכֵב בְּדַרְדָּרָה לְבוֹ: דְּרָכָיו רָאִיתִי וְאַרְפָּאֵהוּ וְאַנְחָהוּ
 וְאַשְׁלָם נַחֲמִים לוֹ וְלְאַבְלָיו: בּוֹרָא נִיב⁴⁴ שְׁפָתַיִם שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם לְרַחוּק וְלִקְרוֹב אָמֹר יְהוָה וּרְפָאֵתִיו:

⁴⁴ Ketib is נוב, reading with the Qere.

On account of their greed I was angry
 I struck them and hid myself in wrath.
 Stubbornly, they went according to their hearts.
 I saw their ways and I will heal them,
 I will lead them and compensate them and their mourners with consoling words:
 The creator of language (the fruit of lips):
 "Peace, peace for those distant and those near"
 thus says Yahweh – and I will heal them.

In the Isaiah theodicy, the return of God to his people is seen as compensation for their suffering. The healing that was withheld in Isaiah 6:10 is now freely given. Through the use of root ברא, used exclusively to refer to divine creative acts, the language of consolation is given the status of a new divine creation. As we will see, the failure of consolation is posed in the poem as a failure of language.

In the tradition of Ashkenazi martyrological poetry, the notion of "compensation" is further elaborated: the deaths of innocents sanctified God's name in the world, thus participating in a grand divine drama and receiving reward in the world to come.⁴⁵ However, in Bialik's poem, there is no way in which to compensate for death and suffering. God's coffers are empty; the figure of God here is literally lowered in the eyes of his beholders. The poem thus radically departs from medieval Ashkenazi martyrology poems by undermining the meaningful context such literature provided for the death of the victims.

The religious crisis of meaning the poem addresses also influences the position of the prophet-poet. In a universe with an impoverished God, the prophet cannot help but be orphaned, impoverished; his strong conviction and sense of purpose are founded on an absence, a negation. The strong commanding tone of God to the prophet is revealed to be a sham, a way to cover up the senseless nature of human life on earth.⁴⁶ Kurzweil writes stirringly of the modern prophet-poet as a "messenger without a sender" who cannot cover over the rupture between "the self" and "tradition."⁴⁷

Even if it seems, in the works of other poets, as if they exhorted the values of the *tanakh* and identified with them, this cannot make us forget the essence, that the poet-prophet's faith in the sender of his mission is missing. This is the foundation of the unique tragic tone in Bialik's poems of wrath, in which the truth of the matter is that the divine-sender and the prophet-messenger are one body, and thus the sender is no less helpless than the messenger, who is nourished only through his own power, and not with the certainty of a great power above him.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Mintz reads the exhaustion of the prophetic as the frustration with the martyrological rhetoric that has become "too comfortable a purgation" for its audience. In light of Bialik's poetic silence after 1911, Mintz finally concludes that the poem "records the cancellation of one rhetorical option on the way to silence." Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, 154.

⁴⁶ Kurzweil, *Sifrutenu ha-hadasha: hemsbekh o mahapekhab?* [Our new Literature: continuity or revolution?], 25.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

He emphasizes the break with tradition that is secular Modern Hebrew poetry, which makes a wholehearted return to prophecy impossible. In Kurzweil as well as Miron's reading, the burden of modernity lies heavy on the shoulders of the great Modern Hebrew poets. The poets seem to experience the rupture of modernity more deeply than the rest of their generation, and thus it is their unique sensitivity to the tensions between tradition and modernity that informs their position.

The meaningless universe lurking behind the prophetic poem is expressed in the image of the intermingled blood of a dead Jew and a dead dog, which drains into the gutters:

וְלֹא-יִצְעַק עוֹד הַדָּם מִן הַשְּׂפָכִים וְהַאֲשָׁפוֹת,
כִּי בְתוֹהֵם רַבָּה יֵאבֵד אוֹ-יִשְׁקָ נְעֻצוֹץ לְרוֹנֵה –

The blood will no longer cry out from the gutters and garbage pails
For it will be lost in a great abyss or will feed the thorns (ll. 28-29).

The crying out of the blood in Genesis 4:10 expresses the sense in which justice is written into the order of the natural world, and murders do not go unpunished. Here, the blood seems to penetrate beneath the earth to the great, primal abyss of the cosmos. But even the terrible spilt blood of the victim makes no difference to the indifferent world. In a previous short poem written immediately after the Kishinev Pogrom, "עַל הַשְּׁחִיטָה," "On the Slaughter," the blood of the murdered victims is also imagined as soaking through to the abyss, but in this earlier poem the blood is a powerful toxic force: it eats at all the rotting foundations of the earth (כָּל-מוֹסְדוֹת הָאָרֶץ הַנִּמְקִים). In this later poem, the abyss functions as an image for an empty, meaningless universe, and the blood is ineffective. As God says in his monologue, the victims died in vain.

Another inter-text for these lines is Psalm 36, a meditation on justice in the world. As opposed to the evil criminal who does not fear God, the speaker avows his "confidence in God's overarching justice."⁴⁹

צְדָקָתְךָ כְּהַרְרֵי-אֵל מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ תִּהְיוּ רַבָּה אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה תוֹשִׁיעַ יְהוָה:

Your justice like the unending mountains,
Your judgment, the great abyss,
man and beast the LORD rescues (Ps 36:7).⁵⁰

The "great abyss" here parallels the "unending mountains," a natural image meant to represent the infinite power of God's justice. The mountain and the abyss create a merism for the entirety of the cosmos. In this psalm, the immensity of the cosmos is imagined as governed by God's will, who also beneficently sates humans with a river of delights in v. 9 (וַיַּחַל עֵדְנִיךָ תִשְׂקֶם). We can see how the lines from Bialik reverse this reassuring picture: man and beast die together, unrescued; rather than being fed by streams of delight, now thorns feed on the blood of the murdered.

⁴⁹ Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 126.

⁵⁰ Alter's translation. *Ibid.*, 127.

This abyss-void returns later on in the poem. In the dark stable, where the poet-prophet encounters the specters of murderers as blood-eating bats and owls, and the suffering ghosts of the victims, he is swallowed by a *תהום וְנֹעָה נְעֻלָּמָה*, "an abyss of hidden horror" (l.109). To return to Miron's metaphor, the modern prophetic mode conjures up the specter of strength, purpose, and meaning through the use of its biblical language; it creates the illusion of walking on steady ground, or walking up a mountain, but there is in fact only an ice-thin layer of language separating humans from a void of unjust, meaningless suffering, which is terrifying. Here, the valiant attempt of the classical prophetic texts to give meaning to suffering, through narrating history as reward and punishment, is revealed as a kind of pretense, an empty attempt to cover over the void. The poet-prophet strides forward, but under the ice are "haunting doubts, subtle dichotomies, lurking bathos, ever-present dangers of losing integrity and abusing authority."⁵¹

The poem's powerful depiction of a religious failure is mirrored by a failure of initiation into prophetic language. The original title of the poem was "*Masa Nemirov*," the prophecy of Nemirov, and many lines seem to build to a towering prophetic oracle. The speaker tells the poet-prophet to repress his speech, but these instructions seem to hint at the saved-up potential of a prophetic eruption. For example, in lines 56-57 the souls of the witnessing dead implore the prophet-poet to account for their torment, but he is commanded to meet their begging with silence:

וְהִתְאַפְקַתְּ, וְתִנְקַתְּ בְּתוֹךְ גְּרוֹנֶיךָ אֶת הַשְּׂאֵגָה
וְקִבְרָתָהּ בְּמַעְמָקַי לְבָבְךָ לְפָנַי הַתְּפֹרָצָה,

And you shall restrain yourself, and choke the roar in your throat
And bury it in the depths of your heart before it bursts out

It seems the prophet-poet's forbidden emotion is being "saved up" for some great transformation, perhaps like the hoped for recompense of the victims. The poet-prophet is asked to be a silent witness to God's insufficiencies, but his silence seems to be temporary.

... שְׁתַּק! וְדוּמָם הָיָה עֲדֵי,
כִּי-מִצְאָתַי בְּקִלוֹנֵי וְתִרְאֵנִי בְּיוֹם אִידִי;
וְכָשׁוּבְךָ אֶל-בְּנֵי עַמֶּךָ – אֶל-תְּשׁוּב אֲלֵיהֶם רִיקָם,
כִּי מוֹסֵר כְּלַמְתִּי תִשָּׂא וְהוֹרְדָתוֹ עַל-קַדְקֵדָם,
וּמְכַאֲבֵי תִקַּח עִמָּךְ וְהִשְׁבוּתוֹ אֶל-חִיקָם.

...Be silent! And silently be my witness
For you found me in my shame and saw me in the day of my undoing;
And when you return to your people – do not return empty handed,
For you shall bear the moral of my shame, and bring it down on their
heads,
And you shall take my pain with you, and return it to their bosom (ll. 163-167).

⁵¹ Miron, H.N. *Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, 2000, 50.

The initial silence of the prophet-poet is mirrored by a potential return to speech, even though this speech is figured as a violent, rebuking act. Here we see the paradoxically consoling power of a prophecy of rebuke – a rebuke is potentially given to transform the nation, and prevent further punishment. At its most hopeful, it is a pedagogical act. The rebuke makes history legible. Here, by witnessing, and then later speaking, the poet-prophet is also supposed to make *God's* suffering legible and meaningful. It is not only the victims that need to receive compensation and meaning; the poet-prophet's ultimate prophecy will provide a kind of theurgic compensation for God.

The notion of a transformation from silence to speech, or from polluted language to the purified divine language, as we saw in Isaiah and Jeremiah's call narratives, often structures the genre of prophetic commissions. For example, Elijah flees to the desert to hide from Jezebel's persecution, and prays to die. But after a prophetic encounter with the still small voice of God, he is summoned "to go return to [his] way" (1 Kgs, 19:15), return to civilization and anoint new Aramean and Israelite kings as well as a prophetic successor, and resume his decisive action against the regime. The desert-wilderness is constructed as a liminal space for strong figures like Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist, who retreat before emerging with a genuine message. The arc of the prophetic story points toward confrontation, engagement, action, the emergence of a prophetic message. In a sense, the redaction of prophetic texts has extended this narrative of personal transformation into a formal transformation from prophecies of rebuke to prophecies of consolation and redemption. The classical prophetic books form a narrative of the sin and redemption of the nation, but also of a transformation of the prophet's message from bitter to sweet.

In previous chapters, we saw how the transformation from rebuke and despair to consolation and messianic hope is essentially a formal structure, often imposed by redactors on more problematic prophetic texts. As Romantic prophetic poetry demonstrates, this formal structure of initiation, or transformation, can be translated into secular language. While the absence of a powerful God leads to a crisis of meaning, the Romantic prophetic mode could potentially provide a symbolic system to make the tragedy meaningful and the role of the witness more coherent, even without an explicitly religious framework. As M.H. Abrams has pointed out, Romanticism rearticulated medieval typologies and structures of meaning, casting the divisions between human and divine "supernatural" into post-enlightenment "natural" terms. The basic division between God and man was translated by philosophers and poets into a division between subject and object, human and nature.⁵² In the case of the prophetic mode, Romantic poetry remade the prophetic drama into a psychological narrative of the suffering and inspiration of an artist. In this translation, it was able to retain the structures of transformation inherent in the prophetic texts, while constructing the "sender" as an inner voice or a spiritualized nature.

Thus, while Romantic prophecy is not written as an explicitly religious text, it often retains the transformational sense of the biblical prophetic texts. Prophetic initiation is a trope in Romantic poetry: in an important example of Russian Romantic poetry, the poet experiences transformation in the wilderness, which in turn inspires him to speech. In the "The Prophet" by Alexander Pushkin, the poet-prophet "crosses an endless desert sunk in gloom," but after his divine encounter is commanded to "Rise, prophet, rise and hear, and

⁵² M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism; Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971).

see/ And let my works be seen and heard."⁵³ As part of the initiation, Pushkin's prophet is lost, even lies dead, but is then resurrected and transformed. Like Elijah, he is commissioned into communication with an audience.

In this final stanza of Bialik's, the poem goes against both biblical and Romantic conventions in the way that it alters and undermines the transformational structure of the prophetic commission. The liminal place of the wilderness, where prophets retreat before emerging with a genuine message, is now the end of the line for the prophetic journey. The prophetic call, dramatic as it might be, is not the origin of inspiration which leads to an eloquent prophetic speech. The final lines of the poem exemplify a prophetic impotence, the failure to be fully transformed into a vehicle of the divine message.

וְעַתָּה מֵה-לֵךְ פֹּה, בֶּן-אָדָם, קוּם בְּרַח הַמִּדְבָּרָה
וּנְשֹׂאתָ עִמָּךְ שִׁמְהָ אֶת-כּוֹס הַיְגוּנִים,
וְקָרַעְתָּ שֵׁם אֶת-נַפְשְׁךָ לְעֶשְׂרֵה קְרָעִים
וְאֶת-לִבְבְּךָ תִתֵּן מֵאֲכָל לְחֶרוֹן אֵין-אוֹנִים,
וְדַמְעָתְךָ הַגְּדוֹלָה הוֹרֵד שָׁם עַל קַדְקוֹד הַסְּלָעִים
וְשִׁאֲגָתְךָ הַמְּרִיה שְׁלִיחַ – וְתֹאבֵד בְּסַעֲרָה.

And now, what is here for you, Son of Man? Arise and flee to the wilderness
and bear with you the cup of sorrows there,
and tear your soul into ten pieces there
and your heart – let it be consumed by an impotent rage,
and your great tear – bring it down there on the heads of the rocks
and your bitter roar – send it forth
and it shall be lost in the storm.

God's question to the prophet-poet: בֶּן-אָדָם, מֵה-לֵךְ פֹּה, "what is here for you, Son of Man?" alludes to Elijah, who is summoned back from the desert with: מֵה-לֵךְ פֹּה אֵלֶיְהוּ, "what is here for you, Elijah?" (1 Kgs 19:13) However, Bialik's God reverses the directionality of the question – the prophet is summoned away from society, from the inhabited over-full landscapes of the city of slaughter, to a barren and lonely landscape of self-annihilation. Instead of bringing down a prophetic message on the heads of the people, the message is thwarted on the jagged heads of the rocks. The sounds of the prophet are "sent out," but are lost in the storm, and ultimately the prophetic call becomes, "thwarted," "drowned out by the storm, which obliterates all meaning and message," a kind of "onanistic" solipsism.⁵⁴ Since the prophet cannot produce prophetic speech, he is reduced to a modern pseudo-prophet. If the status of divinity is itself in question, he cannot be initiated into the role of a divine mouthpiece. Thus, to anticipate the discussion of Scholem's letter in the following pages, we could say that Bialik's use of prophetic language is only a *façon de parler*, a manner of speaking.

⁵³ Alexander Sereyevich Pushkin, "The Prophet," trans. D.M. Thomas, in *The Bronze Horseman: Selected Poems by Alexander Pushkin*. New York: Viking Press, 1982. Returning to English Romanticism, consider Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," and its refrain "O hear!" The wind is to function as "the trumpet of a prophecy" and "scatter...[the poet's] words among mankind."

⁵⁴ Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, 153.

The Book of Ezekiel, according to Uzi Shavit, contains a basic structure, what he calls a תבנית יסוד, "a paradigm" for transformation from silence to speech, from rebuke to consolation. In a close reading of "In the City of Slaughter," especially its final problematic stanza, Shavit argues that Bialik's poem uses and parodies the text of Ezekiel, thus exemplifying Miron's notion of pseudo-prophecy.⁵⁵ The relation of the poem to the biblical text is one of parodic reversal; the poem uses the model of the strong prophetic commission in order to deflate it. However, I submit that using Ezekiel as a "strong" and successful foil to Bialik's parodic or pseudo-prophecy breaks down when we examine the text of Ezekiel in detail, and paradoxically creates a reification of the prophetic text.

The divine voice of the poem addresses the prophet numerous times as "*Ben Adam*," "Son of Man," an address uniquely identified with the biblical Ezekiel. Like Ezekiel, the prophet of the poem is moved like a puppet by the voice of God from one terrifying scene to the other. He is commanded not to speak and not to mourn, though he is promised a return to speech. In the biblical text, this promise is realized, according to Shavit, by Ezekiel 33:22, וְלֹא נִצְלַמְתִּי עוֹד, "and I was no longer silenced." Ezekiel, says Shavit, is commanded to restrain his speech, but ultimately, his silence and angry rebukes turn to consolation. Thus, the Book of Ezekiel is read as a proto-Romantic document, a narrative of redemption or creative output through struggle and suffering. In Shavit's reading, Bialik's prophecy contains only the first truncated half of this redemption narrative – containing despair and suffering without a correlative redemption. The poet-prophet of "In the City of Slaughter," is never allowed to communicate with his audience, and thus the structure of transformation is violated.

Instead of Ezekiel's most famous consolation – the vision of the dry bones – Bialik's text contains a sarcastic and grotesque "vision of bones": the survivors of Kishinev turn itinerant beggars, *schnorers*, and fill their bags with the bones of their dug-up ancestors for merchandise at the fairs. The biblical text, then, is used only to empty it of consoling meaning. As opposed to Klausner, who claimed that Bialik paid an aesthetic price for politically powerful prophecy, Shavit reads Bialik as an aesthetic master who is willing to jettison biblical prophecy for artist achievement. Though the poem ultimately produces a diminished, emptied out prophecy, its conscious play and transformation of genres is a mark of its lyrical achievement. Thus we could say that Bialik fails at prophecy, but succeeds at poetry.

Yet as Shavit tries to explain Bialik's use of the biblical text, he also constructs or reifies the notion of a strong biblical prophet. These secularizing moves turn the biblical text static, inert.⁵⁶ In a sense, Shavit's position falls into a trap of disavowal – while explicitly discussing the secular, metaphoric prophetic speech, it also implicitly constructs a fetishized version of the biblical prophets and of the biblical God. As many of the prophetic texts

⁵⁵ Uzi Shavit, "Model ha-intertextual aliyut ha-parodit ke-mafteah le-'be-'ir ha-haregab' [The parodic intertextual model as an interpretive key in 'In the City of Slaughter']," in *Bi-mvoe 'ir ha-haregab* [At the entrance to the city of slaughter] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1994), 171.

⁵⁶ Perhaps the most revealing of Shavit's flattening statements is his attempt to characterize the God of "In the City of Slaughter": "Before us is not the classic God of the *tanakh* – the strong and just...but a modern God, caricatured, who is nothing but an image of his believers." Shavit assumes that there is only one way to see God in all the various texts of the Bible, from Genesis to Job. Bialik, even at his most militantly secular moments reads the biblical text more richly. Ibid.

discussed in the previous chapters demonstrate, the texts of classical prophecy often themselves violate generic expectations in order to express breakdowns and gaps in communication.

In fact, the Book of Ezekiel contains a complex interweaving of prophecies of rebuke and prophecies of consolation, speech and injunctions against speech, which challenge Shavit's notion of a paradigm. The tightly woven shape of the book frays in the details. For example, the first compelling moment of consolation in the text (Ezek 11:17) is embedded within a series of wrath-prophecies. Generally, Moshe Greenberg claims that the ancient division of the book into doom and consolation is "oversimplified," as prophecies of restoration actually appear in the first half, and "condemnations appear in post-fall prophecies."⁵⁷ Greenberg argues for a text rich with "irregularities" that is not governed by the modern imposition of consistency. The editor of the Book of Ezekiel "was not troubled by an occasional oracle of comfort appearing before the fall, or by words of denunciation insinuating themselves into a post-fall oracle of restoration. He did not share the modern critical allergy to variety in prophetic moods."⁵⁸

Furthermore, it is difficult to consider Ezekiel as a model of psychological transformation when the motivation for the consolation is almost external to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel.

לְכֹן אָמַר לְבֵית-יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה לֹא לְמַעַנְכֶם אֲנִי עוֹשֶׂה בַּיַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אִם-לְשֵׁם-קְדוֹשִׁי
אֲשֶׁר חִלְּלִתֶם בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר-בָּאִתֶּם שָׁם. וְקִדְשֹׁתַי אֶת-שְׁמִי הַגָּדוֹל הַמְחֻלָּל בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר חִלְּלִתֶם בְּתוֹכָם
וְיָדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה בְּהַקְדְּשִׁי בְּכֶם לְעֵינֵיהֶם.

Therefore, say to the house of Israel, thus says Adonai Yahweh: not for your sake do I act, House of Israel, but for the sake of my name which you have defiled among the nations to which you have arrived. And I shall sanctify my great name, which has been defiled in the nations, (which you defiled within them); and nations will know that I am Yahweh – the speech of Adonai Yahweh – as I sanctify myself in you, in their eyes (Ezek 36:22-23).

The text suggests a disconnection between Yahweh's forgiveness and the actions of the nation. Thus, while the conventional reading of a biblical prophet is as one who rebukes in order to transform the nation, it is unclear that this is ultimately Ezekiel's task. He is told to speak "whether they listen or not, for they are a rebellious breed – that they may know that there was a prophet among them" (2:5). The text of Ezekiel expresses a breakdown in the possibility of transforming the nation, and by extension history itself.⁵⁹ According to Baruch Schwartz, who reads against the notions of a Christian redemption narrative, Yahweh's punishment is preordained. "Ezekiel's prediction of Israel's restoration cannot be called a

⁵⁷ To complicate questions of structure, the middle prophecies against the nation, 25-32, cannot be truly classified as redemptive. Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (Garden City N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 5.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Cf the injunctions in Jeremiah against intercession discussed in Chapter 1.

message of redemption...Nor can it be called a message of salvation."⁶⁰ However, post-exile, Yahweh realizes that he needs the obedience and worship of the people only to "glorify his name" – so he must force the people to become his subjects. Schwartz even reads the "vision of the dry bones" as a resurrection that pulls people out of their graves against their will for Yahweh's "own thoroughly egocentric reasons, and in the course of doing so [he] will show them that they are wrong and he is right."⁶¹ Reading Ezekiel through this lens, Bialik's scene at the graveyard can no longer function as a mere parody of a prophecy of hope. Perhaps it actually contains an intensification of the unusual malevolence of the prophetic text itself.

The transformation from silence to speech is also more complex and strange than Shavit's model suggests. Yahweh's command to Ezekiel regarding dumbness in Ezekiel 3: 26 cannot mean that Ezekiel did not literally speak, as Ezekiel clearly continues to utter divine oracles for seven years. While after the fall of Jerusalem it seems that the gap between Ezekiel and his audience is closed, permitting him to speak more freely – curiously, "we have no evidence, however, of this new freedom, for the prophet's speech in subsequent chapters of the book is not more spontaneous than in the foregoing ones; as before, all that Ezekiel speaks is 'the word of YHWH'"⁶² In other words, the prophet's transformation from silence to speech is quite choppy; there is some sense of transformation implied by the injunctions and promises made by Yahweh, but they are not clearly mirrored by the style of the text. Instead of reading Bialik's poem as a truncated narrative of prophetic transformation, perhaps we could say that it mirrors the Ezekiel text in the tensions it continues to hold between prophetic utterance and prophetic-divine silence in the face of catastrophe.

Post-Zionist Readings & the Authority of the Biblical Text

Readers like Kurzweil, Miron, and Shavit have focused on the religious failures presented in the poem and the failure to "deliver" the awaited prophecy at the end of the poem. The poem reads as a tragic secular manifesto, which paradoxically reifies the lost strength and authority of the religious biblical text. However, recent readings by Alan Mintz, Hanan Hever, Michael Gluzman, and Hamutal Tsamir have complicated this secular/religious dichotomy by emphasizing the authoritative position gained through the use of the Bible, rather than its loss. Instead of focusing on the secular rupture of Bialik and his generation, we can read continuity between the biblical language of authority and domination and the modern poem in the prophetic mode, which reinscribes these structures of power. We could say that the thin ice the poet-prophets stride across embodies the notion of Zionist secularization, which is only partially able to repress the terrifying explosive theological abyss underneath its pseudo-prophetic veneer. In the following pages I want to build on this more complex understanding of the relationship between secular and religious language, but at the same time argue for a more nuanced understanding of biblical

⁶⁰ Baruch Schwartz, "Ezekiel's Dim View of Israel's Restoration," in *The Book of Ezekiel: Theological and Anthropological Perspectives* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 54.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶² Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 682.

intertextuality in Bialik's work. As opposed to a transfer of biblical authority, his use of the prophetic mode imports both structures of power and structures of weakness into Modern Hebrew poetry.

As Mintz eloquently argues, "'In the City of Slaughter' is founded upon a lie,"⁶³ since it represses the Jewish defense of Kishinev. There actually was a semi-organized Jewish defense of Kishinev, a fact which Bialik himself recorded in the prose notes of his mission, unpublished in his lifetime.⁶⁴ The portrait of the exaggerated and abject passivity of the victims served to justify the call for heroic "New Jews" and the one dimensional rejection of the Diaspora. The same can be said of Bialik, then, as of Ahad Ha'am: "immediately upon hearing of the massacre, he imposed an interpretation on it that, despite evidence to the contrary, he would maintain."⁶⁵ The firm distinction between the victimhood of the Diaspora and the potential heroism of the Zionist New Jews made by the poem is analogous to a dichotomy between religion and secularism.

Hever argues that criticism needs to "inquire as to the twists and turns of this contrast and not accept the religious/secular dichotomy at face value."⁶⁶ The ideological position posits an insidious transfer of religious language and authority into modern secular Hebrew culture, based on the notion of Carl Schmidt's political theology.⁶⁷ Hamutal Tsamir's article contains a precise formulation of this idea: "Zionism is founded on a rebellion against religion – or to be more precise against "Judaism-as-religion" – but it "does not get rid of" religion or its main foundations (God, Halakhic law and the belief in redemption and a Messiah), rather it transfers and translates them into the earthly realm, the political-national."⁶⁸ Thus the modern use of the prophetic mode in the poem is not merely a literary convention or flourish. The use of religious language necessarily brings with it the return of religious content.

For Hever, understanding the theological power of the poem is based on a distinction between the speech of the prophet and the text of the prophecy. To build on my discussion of originality in previous chapters, we could say that the prophetic text must be read beyond a narrative container for the *ipsisissima verba* of the prophet, or for that matter, the voice of God as a character in the poem. In essence, Hever narrates a transition from "oral speech" to a written text, claiming the power of the written text. The voice of God claims to be poor as the victims and the prophet-poet turn silent, exhausting prophecy – but the text itself preserves "fragments of the sacred":

⁶³ Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, 131.

⁶⁴ Yaakov Goren, ed., *'Eduyot nifga'ey kishinov 1903* [The Testimony of the victims of Kishinev as taken by H.N. Bialik and his colleagues] (Tel Aviv: Yad tabinčin and ha-ķibuts ha-me'uħad, 1991).

⁶⁵ Zipperstein, *Elusive Prophet*, 204.

⁶⁶ Gluzman, Hever, and Miron, *Be-ir ha-baregab: bikur meħar* [In the city of slaughter: a visit at twilight], 67.

⁶⁷ Schmidt gives demonic articulation to the idea that religious structures are retained despite the secular transformation of society. In *Political Theology* he discusses the way in which the modern state secularized theological concepts especially in relation to power. For example, "the exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology." Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 36.

⁶⁸ Hamutal Tsamir, "Ben tehom le-iyaron [Between abyss and blindness: political theology and Hebrew secularization in Scholem and Bialik]," *Mikan* (forthcoming).

The text of the poem, which ends with the termination of prophetic speech, scattering it in the desert in all directions – actually makes present the holiness at its foundation, in being a written text. It is true that speech is stifled, and God commands his prophet not to sound his rebuke, as stated above. But what is meant to act is the substitute for speech, i.e. the written text itself. Bialik produces "In the City of Slaughter" as a sanctified text, as "fragments" of the sacred in Lachover's language, which is meant to replace prophetic speech and serve to invigorate the nation and rescue it from its abject position.⁶⁹

The ideological approach I have sketched out above endeavors to look beyond the cultural categories and dichotomies that it has inherited. However, while attempting to critique categories of religious and secular, weak and strong, at times it still reinscribes a monolithic notion of "strong prophets" inspired by Ahad Ha'am which I aim to nuance. Like Shavit, Michael Gluzman compares the poem to the Book of Ezekiel, emphasizing the biblical text as a presentation of "strong prophecy." Yet in contrast to Shavit, Gluzman does not read Bialik's poem as a biblical parody. Rather, for Gluzman, Bialik's allusions to the Book of Ezekiel help constitute an authoritative male voice that represses weakness. Gluzman links Ezekiel's prophetic authority to a rhetoric of male violence. "The prophet Ezekiel creates a rhetoric of national rage that condemns the nation through a gendered metaphor that identifies idol worship (עבודה זרה) with sexual betrayal."⁷⁰ The prophetic metaphor of the land-as-woman is particularly virulent in the prophecy regarding Oholah and Oholibah, the "whoring" sisters who function as metaphors for Israel and Judah in Ezekiel 23-24.⁷¹ As Gluzman points out, the characterization of the Kishinev rapists as "donkey meat" in l. 71 alludes to Ezekiel 23:19, which describes the male-concubines of the sisters using the same phrase. Through this allusion, the poem blames the victims, especially the frightened men who did not protect their wives from rape:

The metaphorical rape and humiliation in the prophecy of Ezekiel becomes reality in Bialik's poem; the wrath of the biblical text which is intended for the entire nation, who is figured as a prostituting woman, is focused on the men who have been revealed as defective in their gender in Bialik's poem.⁷²

In this psychoanalytic reading, Bialik uses the strong rhetoric of Ezekiel to mask his own traumatized identification with the victims of Kishinev. The adoption of this authoritative male tone gives Bialik "the opportunity to distance [himself] from a feminine position, and female discourse"⁷³ such the sentimental weepiness of the poetry of *Hibat Zion*, Romantic Hebrew poetry written in previous decades. Weeping, or "the tear," a recurring image in

⁶⁹ Gluzman, Hever, and Miron, *Be-ir ha-haregab: bikur mehar* [In the city of slaughter: a visit at twilight], 68.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁷¹ "The metaphor of "the land-as-woman" implies a varied group of word structures...expressed through an entire range of images, each of which details one of the elements of that experience, including eroticism, penetration, raping, embrace, enclosure and nurture, to cite only a few. Together, they make up a mutually interrelating and integrated whole." Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 102. See also George Lakoff, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980);; Chana Kronfeld, "Rewriting the Woman as Land in Esther Raab's Poetry" (Berkeley, 2000).

⁷² Gluzman, Hever, and Miron, *Be-ir ha-haregab: bikur mehar* [In the city of slaughter: a visit at twilight], 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Bialik's poetry, embodies a feminized, sentimental mourning, while the prophetic mode is in contrast a tone of high rebuke. Yet as I will show, the book of Ezekiel cannot be exclusively characterized by a tone of high rebuke, and its notion of male gender is more complex and vulnerable than Gluzman's argument suggests. Perhaps Bialik's prophetic intertextuality is motivated by identification with Ezekiel's weakness, and not only with his strength.

Thus Bialik's intertextuality with Ezekiel activates both the authoritative, punishing male voice and the great passivity and vulnerability of the prophet in the face of this voice.⁷⁴ Paradoxically, while Ezekiel conveys the punishing misogynistic voice of God, his own body often becomes the passive canvas for God's punishment.⁷⁵ The divine voice as heard through the medium of Ezekiel is judgmental, punishing, and legalistic, especially in the first part of the book. At the same time, the voice of Ezekiel is wan, protesting. He is silenced, passive – lifted from scene to scene and commanded to execute difficult physical tasks. He speaks for the first time when he recoils from cooking his food on human dung.

Like Ezekiel, Bialik's prophet-poet also inhabits the unstable position between great agency, expressed as a punishing divine voice, and the passivity of the object of punishment. This unstable position is expressed in last stanza of "In the City of Slaughter," which returns to Ezekiel 23. In the last stanza, the biblical intertextuality suggests an ambiguous portrait of prophetic power. As we saw, the prophet-poet is to bear the cup of sorrows to the desert: וְנִשְׂאתָ עִמָּךְ שִׁמָּה אֶת-כּוֹס הַיְגוֹנִים.

The image of a cup of positive or negative destiny is familiar from the prophets and the Psalms.⁷⁶ This exact coinage already appears in Ahad Ha'am's "Moses," in reference to moments of prophetic discouragement, when the prophet cannot stand the prevalence of evil all around him.⁷⁷ The Russian calque combines two biblical phrases: Jeremiah 16:7 refers to כּוֹס תְּנַחֲוּמִים, "the cup of comforts." In a mirror image, a cup is filled with יְגוֹן, "sorrow" (singular) in Ezekiel 23:33:

כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה כּוֹס אַחֲוֵתָךְ תִּשְׂתִּי הַעֲמָקָה וְהַרְחַבְתָּהּ תִּהְיֶה לְצֹחֵק וּלְלַעַג מְרֻבָּה לְהֵכִיל: שִׁכְרוֹן וְיָגוֹן
תִּמְלֵאִי כּוֹס שִׁמָּה וְשִׂמְמָה כּוֹס אַחֲוֵתָךְ שִׁמְרוֹן: וְשִׂתִּית אֹתָהּ וּמִצִּית וְאֶת-תְּרֻשָׁתָהּ תִּגְרַמֵּי וְשִׂדְיָהּ תִּנְתַּקֵּי
כִּי אֲנִי דִבַּרְתִּי נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה:

⁷⁴ According to Elaine Scarry, it is precisely the vulnerability of the human body which enables the construction of a powerful divine voice. "Throughout the writings of the patriarchs and the prophets, we again and again and again return to a scene of wounding. It is a scene that carries emphatic assurance about the 'realness' of God, but one that (for the participants inside) contains nothing that makes his 'realness' visible except the wounded human body." Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 200.

⁷⁵ See Rhiannon Graybill, "Voluptuous, Tortured, and Unmanned: Ezekiel with Daniel Paul Schreber." in Jennifer Koosed, ed., *The Bible and Posthumanism*. Semeia Studies. Atlanta: SBL, forthcoming.

⁷⁶ See for example Psalms 16:5 "Yahweh is my portion and my cup." Robert Alter translates "cup" as "lot" here, emphasizing its idiomatic sense of destiny. Alter, *The Book of Psalms*, 46.

⁷⁷ This phrase is probably a calque from Russian. The 1896 coronation cups distributed in honor of Nicholas II caused a stampede in Khodynka Field as rumor spread that the cups contained gold coins. The phrase is first documented in Hebrew as the title a tribute volume to the Baron De Hirsch in 1898. *Zikhron moshe o kos yagonim* [The memory of Moses or the cup of sorrows: a eulogy for the Baron Moshe de Hirsch], 1898.

Thus says the Lord:
 You will drink the cup of your sister,
 the deep and wide one.
 It will be for derision and scorn,
 the one holding much.
 You will be filled with drunkenness and sorrow.
 The cup of desolation and horror,
 the cup of your sister, Samaria.
 And you shall drink it and drain it
 and you shall gnaw at its shards,
 and you shall tear out your breasts
 For I have spoken – the word of the Lord Yahweh (Ezek 23:32-34).

The image of the cup of "drunkenness and sorrow" is a powerful and weird image. Paradoxically, the state of celebration or pleasurable debauchery becomes terrifying and disorienting. As William McKane puts it, the sinister combination suggests "a banquet of death...the anti-banquet theme, the gruesome reversal of the benevolent host and wholesome hospitality."⁷⁸ As opposed to drinking wine freely at a banquet, Oholibah is forced to drink the enormous cup of wine down to its unpleasant dregs and is further forced to gnaw at its broken shards.⁷⁹ Even as Ezekiel pronounces a punishing prophecy against the woman-as-nation here, he is also linked through metaphors of consumption to the female-nation object, for he too is forced to digest a scroll on which are inscribed "lamentations, dirges, and woes" (2:3) and later commanded to eat barley cake baked on excrement (4:12). Thus his mouth becomes an organ forced to close or to open, suggesting a feminine position of victimhood.

If we were to follow Gluzman's notion of prophecy, we would expect the poet-prophet of Bialik's poem, as an authoritative, dominating figure, to be force-feeding the nation dregs from this cup. However, the cup of sorrows is to be borne (וְנִשְׂאתָ) by the poet-prophet to the desert. The Hebrew root of the verb is the same as the root of מִשָּׂא, "oracle," prophetic poem, or literally a "burden." Is the prophet-poet "bearing" the cup as a prophecy of rebuke for someone else, or is he himself fated to drink from it? This ambiguity is echoed in the metaphor of consumption that follows: וְאֵת-לִבְבְּךָ תִּתֵּן מֵאֲכָל לִחְרוֹן אֵין-אוֹנִים. Literally, the phrase can be translated as, "and give your heart as feed for an impotent rage." Is the prophet-poet to eat his own heart, or give it over to feed an external force? The drama of the poet-prophet has an external element, as opposed to Ahad Ha'am's formulations of the commission as a solely inner voice. At the same time, the poem amplifies the difficulty of distinguishing subject and object in the prophetic text. Is Ezekiel the punishing agent or the punished victim? In some sense, the paradox of revelation is that he is both. Thus, the prophetic voice in Bialik becomes not only a way to mobilize authority, but also a way to demonstrate the disintegration of the subject.

A further image for the disintegration of the prophet-poet's self is presented by the image of tearing the soul into ten strips: וְקָרַעְתָּ שָׂם אֶת-נַפְשְׁךָ לְעֶשְׂרֵה קָרָעִים, "and bear with you

⁷⁸ William McKane, "Poison, Trial by Ordeal, and the Cup of Wrath," *VT* no. 30 (1980): 487–92. See also, Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21-37*, 493.

⁷⁹ Cf Ezekiel's forced consumption in 3: 1-2; 4:9-12.

the cup of sorrows there." Bialik's line alludes to the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam, the future first king of the kingdom of Israel. Ahijah tears Jeroboam's garment into twelve strips:

וַיֹּאמֶר לִירְבֻעָם קַח-לְךָ עֲשָׂרָה קְרָעִים כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִנְנִי קֹרֵעַ אֶת-הַמַּמְלָכָה מִיָּד
שְׁלֹמֹה וְנִתְתִּי לְךָ אֶת עֲשָׂרָה הַשְּׁבָטִים.

And he said to Jeroboam: take ten strips for thus said Yahweh the God of Israel, I am tearing the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and I will give to you the ten tribes (1 Kgs 11:31).

This intertextuality overlays the poet-prophet's psychic disintegration onto the biblical national loss and disintegration. The prophet, according to Ahad Ha'am, embodies the national spirit of the Jewish people. In this image, though, Bialik presents a prophet who is a sign of the disintegration of the nation. His own soul seems to reenact the break up of national unity and eventual "loss" of the tribes.

If prophetic authority requires coherence, because the voice of divine authority must communicate a message of absolute consistency, then the text of Ezekiel once again presents a problematic model. The book's contradictions regarding collective versus personal responsibility, as well as the vacillation between rage and comfort I discussed earlier have lead Michael Fishbane, for example, to call the text a "theological tangle" or "acknowledge that we cannot identify a clear continuity in the thought and ideology of the prophet Ezekiel."⁸⁰ The final line of Bialik's poem mirrors the fragmentation and inconsistency of Ezekiel. Like the frustrated prophecy of "In the City of Slaughter," which is sent out into the storm, prophetic speech has always been in danger of getting lost. In Harold Fish's elegant formulation regarding Ezekiel: "it announces the doom of its own language."⁸¹ Generally, the prophetic position vacillates between mourning and rage, speech and silence, as it struggles to seek and a *ניב שפתיים* – a fixed expression with which to express trauma.⁸² Bialik's work contains a complex relation to tears and weeping, which as Gluzman points out are constructed in opposition to prophetic authority. However, at the end of the poem the dichotomy between rage and weeping is collapsed, as the poet-prophet must both weep and roar.

I have tried to show how troubling and destabilizing elements of the text of Ezekiel have continued to work through the Bialik text. Though the prophet-poet is positioned at the dead-end of religious experience, the text actually recuperates the complex ambiguity, inconsistency, and weakness of the prophetic biblical text. Bialik's most politically influential

⁸⁰ Michael Fishbane, "Sin and Judgment in the Prophecies of Ezekiel," *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 183.

⁸¹ Fish's pronouncement is made regarding the song of the sword (Ezek 21: 9-10), though it seems to express a more general sense about prophetic speech. Though the audience may at first be entertained, "if and when that sword manifests itself against the princes of the people, it will put a stop to the very *Sitz im Leben* of the prophecy itself, to this scene in which the people sit around him waiting for their entertainment." Harold Fish, *Poetry with a Purpose: Biblical Poetics and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 45.

⁸² In line 137 the speaker tells the poet-prophet that he will carry his sorrow forever but be unable to express it: *ויבקשתך ולא תמצא לו ניב שפתיים*. "And you will seek, but be unable to find it language of the lips." Cf the consoling prophecy of Isaiah 57: 19, discussed above.

"poem of wrath" seems to answer Ahad Ha'am's call for a prophetic voice of heroic, uncompromising moral rebuke. However, through complex biblical intertextuality, Bialik is able to access and expand a tension in the prophetic texts between strength and failure, success and weakness. Readings that have split this dialectic into categories of ancient and modern, projecting strength into a heroic textual past and weakness unto the secular present, have misread the continuity of weak prophecy from the biblical text into modern Hebrew poetry. While in recent years critical readings have challenged the dichotomy between religious and secular in modern Hebrew literature, claiming that the secular is actually still structured by the political theology of religious texts, not enough work has been done challenging the view of "strong" religious texts, which have become reified as one-dimensional assertions of divine strength and certainty.

Return to the Abyss

I started this chapter with Miron's image of the thin ice below the modern poet-prophet's feet. The status of the modern prophetic mode can be tied to the terrifying abyss described in the poem "In the City of Slaughter," but the multivalent notion of the abyss continues to reverberate in Bialik's 1915 essay "Revelment and Concealment in Language," and beyond. There is a kind of circularity in the reception of Bialik's poem and essay. Perhaps the most well-known iteration of the topos of the abyss is in Scholem's confession-letter to Franz Rosenzweig from 1926. The ideological approach to "In the City of Slaughter" traces its intellectual lineage, in part, to this rediscovered critique of the revival of Modern Hebrew by a great scholar deeply implicated in the production of modern Hebrew culture. Yet the image of the abyss appears even earlier in the work of Scholem's lifelong friend, Walter Benjamin. Thus we can speak of an intertextuality between Bialik, Scholem, and Benjamin, mediated through the biblical and kabbalistic texts they were all interested in. Rather than proceed in chronological order, I wish to narrate the topos of the abyss from Scholem to Benjamin and back to Bialik's essay.

As opposed to the meaningless abyss portrayed by Bialik's poem, the abyss that appears in Scholem's letter is overfull with meaning. Scholem writes about the dangers of the revival⁸³ of the Hebrew language in a 1926 letter from Palestine: "We do live inside this language, above an *abyss*, almost all of us with the certainty of the blind."⁸⁴ The revivers of Modern Hebrew speak as if secularization is possible, but Hebrew contains an "apocalyptic thorn" that cannot be removed: the religious meaning inherent in the seemingly secularized religious language is "*ein Abgrund*," an abyss that could "break out" to annihilate the next generation, because "Hebrew is pregnant with catastrophes." The abyss here is viewed as all powerful; the names locked within the sacred language "haunt our sentences," says Scholem. "One or another plays with them in writings and newspapers, lying to themselves or to God that this means nothing."

If we applied this letter to the poem "In the City of Slaughter," we could say that Bialik's seemingly secular "play" of biblical tropes and language cannot be used without

⁸³ Or what he calls *Aktualisierung*, the "actualization" of Hebrew.

⁸⁴ Gershom Gerhard Scholem, "Bekenntnis über unsere Sprache [A confession about our language]," in *Acts of Religion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), 226.

repercussions, without reinscribing the authority and power stored in the prophetic texts, without "the power of the sacred speak[ing] out." Following Scholem, then, we could say that according to this approach a *secular* prophetic mode is only a "*façon de parler*," a way of speaking, about a mode which is still deeply entangled in the theological, but repressing that entanglement.

As Scholem's letter dramatizes, the particular paradox of Jewish nationalism is the creation of the secular vernacular inside the medium of the sacred language, which will lead to unplanned repercussions. In the same way, the constitution of modern secular poetry through the biblical prophecy carries a price. Though the letter is a confession, it is also a veiled prophecy of rebuke, a version of Bialik's wrath poems. Scholem predicts the return of God to secular language, in an "inescapable revolution of language." As he narrates this looming disaster, his letter is filled with direct and authoritative claims. "Truly no one knows what is being done here," or "God will not stay silent."⁸⁵ However, like all good prophets of rebuke, Scholem leaves the looming disaster ambiguous; since the letter is written decades away from statehood, it is difficult to predict what form the return of religion would take. Scholem's metaphors are themselves prophetic: opening the eyes of the blind, or rebuking the metaphorically blind are figures that are part of prophetic vocabulary, as we saw in chapter two. The way in which Scholem constitutes authority through prophetic forms helps explain the almost fetishistic fascination with the letter in recent decades.

Benjamin's 1916 essay, "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man," unpublished in his lifetime, but certainly influential for Scholem, suggests a path not taken to the abyss. The negative abyss is a force to be negotiated with, rather than avoided or covered over:

The view that the mental essence of a thing consists precisely in its language—this view, taken as a hypothesis, is the great abyss into which all linguistic theory threatens to fall, and to survive precisely suspended over this abyss is its task.⁸⁶

There is a sense that mental entities, the things and events of this world, are not only language – they are something more. It is almost a spiritual belief that keeps theorists poised above an abyss. Benjamin draws a distinction in the essay between a bourgeois notion of language meant to communicate content and a kind of pure language of "no means, no object, and no addressee of communication."⁸⁷ The abyss seems to be an ever-present power of negation that enables the task of the theorist, and the essayist. Later in the essay Benjamin preserves a similar poise in discussing Genesis, a suspension between a religious and secular attitude to the biblical text: "the object is neither biblical interpretation nor subjection of the Bible to objective consideration as revealed truth, but the discovery of what emerges of itself from the biblical text with regard to the nature of language."⁸⁸ To build on Benjamin, perhaps we could say that the prophetic mode in modern Hebrew poetry could help reveal

⁸⁵ It seems that the syntax of his sentences also follows a kind of biblical parallelism, increasing its identification with biblical prophecy: for example, "This country is a volcano. It houses language." Or for a tripartite parallelism: "Truly we speak in rudiments; we truly speak a ghostly language; the names haunt our sentences." Translation *ibid*.

⁸⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 1: 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 63.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 67.

the nature of prophetic language, especially its relation to revelation, concealment, and power, whether or not it takes the Bible to be "revealed truth."

In Bialik's 1904 poem, as we saw, the abyss functions as an image for a senseless cosmos not governed by a basic ethical structure. Bialik's own work, though, suggests the most useful way of thinking about the poet-prophet's walk across the ice. Ten years after writing "In the City of Slaughter," Bialik returns to the image of the abyss in his influential 1915 essay, "Revelment and Concealment in Language." The essay begins with a paraphrase of Psalm 36:7, discussed earlier, which translates the biblical theme of divine justice to a discussion of the power of language. In speaking of the pre-history of everyday words, Bialik notes that "some words were like the high mountains of the Lord, others were a great abyss."⁸⁹ The great abyss here (תהום רבה) seems to allude to a primordial creative force. Some people, says Bialik, use words without awareness of their complex and powerful genealogies, and think they can lead their thoughts or emotions "beside the still waters and across [an] iron bridge."⁹⁰ These people are unaware of the instability inherent in language and communication – they don't know how "shaky is their bridge of mere words, how deep and dark is the void (התהום הפתוחה) that opens at their feet, and how much every step taken safely partakes of the miraculous."⁹¹ These people, later identified as prose writers, are represented as crossing over a river that has frozen into "a solid block."⁹² On the other hand, poets and visionaries, who are sensitive to the complexity and ambiguity of words, constantly revivifying dead metaphors, are like those who cross the river as it is thawing, and have to jump precariously from one ice floe to the other, aware of the dangerous glimmering abyss below.

Though the essay is more generally on language, it suggests a way to complicate the notions of the abyss that lies beneath Hebrew literature. The negative, fluid abyss enables desire and vitality – words "writhe in [the poets' hands]; they are extinguished and lit again, flash on and off like the engravings of the signet in the stones of the High Priest's breastplate, grow empty and become full."⁹³ In Bialik's essay, poetry becomes a negotiation with a vital and dangerous sacred, represented in the religious image of the priestly breastplate, emblematic of the oracular prophetic power available to poets. In contrast to Miron's formulation, poets' negotiation with the abyss is not only a struggle with secular nihilism and death. At the same time, the theological power of the abyss has not yet turned demonic, as in Scholem's letter.

Scholem's threatening predictions remain within the paradigm of strong prophecy, of the power to predict devastation and catastrophe, to retroactively explain history. With attention to Scholem and the ideological critiques of canonical modern Hebrew literature, by Hever, Mintz and Gluzman, we can say that the abyss below the modern prophet-poets is composed not only of post-enlightenment doubt, but also the dynamic and dangerous language of the classical prophetic texts. I submit, though, that the "power of the sacred" is

⁸⁹ I will be using Jacob Sloan's excellent translation of the essay. Haim Nahman Bialik, "Revelment and Concealment in Language," in *Revelment And Concealment: Five Essays*, trans. Jacob Sloan (Jerusalem: IBIS Editions, 2000), 11.

⁹⁰Sloan translates here as "the iron bridge of the Messiah," but I render here the original Hebrew: גשר של ברזל .

⁹¹ Bialik, "Revelment and Concealment in Language," 15.

⁹² Ibid., 24.

⁹³ Ibid., 25.

not only the power of domination, authority, and certainty. Perhaps, upon investigation, the abyss does not necessarily have a looming monstrous quality, as if it were the repository of divine power – but rather it is the messy record of a tradition already replete with ambiguities, failures, anxieties, and melancholic formations. It is not only the weak modern poet-prophets who walk on thin ice, but the biblical prophetic enterprise itself which could be said to be full of "haunting doubts, subtle dichotomies, lurking bathos, ever-present dangers of losing integrity and abusing authority,"⁹⁴ as the classical prophets tread the precariousness of history and the insufficiency of language to decipher and transform reality. To elaborate on Bialik's image, the poet-prophet's position on the edge of the abyss becomes generative. The abyss has not been created by Zionism, or secularism, but has always been part of the language of representation. This abyss is a mix of authority and doubt; perhaps when it comes to prophetic language, we could say that there is thin ice all the way down.

An Addendum by Uri Zvi Greenberg

At the end of his essay "Moses," Ahad Ha'am claims that "'Prophecy' does not vanish but for a time, and then it returns and attacks its bearer and rules him against his will."⁹⁵ As we saw, this statement seems to call for a messianic revival of prophecy, while at the same time bracketing it in quotation marks as a secularizing *façon de parler*. Though the bulk of Ahad Ha'am's essay discussed prophecy as a metaphor for political guidance and social justice, "prophecy" in these last lines turns from an abstract concept into a violent force, visceral as a parasite or a *dybbuk*. In many ways, Bialik's poems of wrath and their reception are haunted by this primal disavowal; the poet-prophet at the end of "In the City of Slaughter" cannot produce a prophetic message, and the "authenticity" of Bialik's prophetism is questioned again and again throughout its critical reception.

When Uri Zvi Greenberg adopts the prophetic mode two decades after Bialik, he confronts the paradox of secular nationalism head on, violently exposing its disavowals and denials. In Greenberg's maximalist, avant-garde long works, "prophecy" is no longer put in quotation marks as the mark of universalist values. In Hever's articulation, Greenberg constitutes himself in the shadow of a "National Poet," like Bialik, whose ability to speak for the nation is contingent on the "universalist elements of his poetry."⁹⁶ He sees himself as a kind of "shadow government" to the Zionist establishment in the Yishuv, demanding that national Zionism fulfill its promises.

On the one hand he constitutes the National "I" according to the traditional paradigm of centrist nationalism. But on the other hand, he systematically exposes the central ruse of this nationalism and disputes the manipulative way it uses universalist values in order to serve and strengthen particularistic interests.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Miron, H.N. *Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, 2000, 50.

⁹⁵ "אין ה'נבואה' מסתלקת אלא לזמן, ואחר כך היא חוזרת ותוקפת את נושאה ומושלת בו בעל כרחו"

⁹⁶ Hannan Hever, *Moledet ha-mavet yafah: estetika u-politika be-shirat uri tzevi grinberg* [Beautiful motherland of death: aesthetics and politics in Uri Zvi Greenberg's poetry], *Sifriyat Ofakim* 214 (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'oved, 2004), 21.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

If Scholem was explicitly terrified of the theological power of Hebrew coming back, though also ambivalent about its possible vitality, Greenberg has no such scruples. Greenberg's direct attempt to release the violent power of the sacred from its secular bindings is Scholem's worst nightmare. The abyss that Scholem so fears is actively summoned, consecrated, and celebrated in Greenberg's poetry. Together with Greenberg's unabashed claim to authenticity, though, he translates the biblical prophetic text into a form constantly unraveling itself through its own language. While Bialik's poem often seems to highlight the successes and failures of prophetic *figures* in the spirit of Ahad Ha'am, Greenberg's vast prophetic canvases also call attention to the possibilities of prophetic *texts*.

Greenberg's poetry undercuts Ahad Ha'am's domestication of prophecy – moving beyond the scene of the prophetic call narrative to its expansive corpus filled with rapid and confusing shifts in address, commonplace even abject imagery, stutters, "embarrassing" apostrophes and a focus on bodies, impractical hyperbolic political advice, sheer incoherence. In its brevity, the following reading I offer cannot hope to substantively engage with Greenberg's long career as a modernist prophetic poet, or a poetic prophet, but is offered as an "addendum" to the golden age of prophetic poetry in Hebrew letters, pointing to the destabilizing potentialities of prophetic intertextuality in modern poetry, its complicated relation between aesthetics and political power. As I will show in a brief example, in Greenberg's modernist juxtaposition of high and low registers, the prophetic tone of sublime high rebuke is undermined by a bitterly comic deflation.

Greenberg's 1929 collection, *House Dog* is in many ways a late response to Bialik's turn-of-the-century poems of wrath. Greenberg mourns the loss of Bialik's prophetic power and his domestication in the role of "National Poet."

גם ביאליק, גאון השירה הזועמת,
 מי שהיה נבזרזאדן קפיו
 ומי שניבו כמו פתן נשף
 את חלב הלב...
 בנה לו ארמון ויהי למגיד
 משלים, פסוקים, ספורי מעשיות
 בקל אספה ובכל חתונה
 ובכל לוויה.

Even Bialik, the genius of wrathful poetry
 Who was a Nebuzaradan of the mouth,
 Whose language bit the tallow of the heart
 Like a snake...
 Has built himself a palace and become a storyteller
 Of proverbs, verses, tall tales
 At every gathering, at every wedding
 And at every funeral.

In Greenberg's imagination, the qualified, careful use of the prophetic mode in Bialik and his generation's poetry is reread and transformed into unabashedly political and "neo-religious" prophecy. The denial of speech when witnessing the Kishinev pogrom,

figured as a loss of the consolation of **גִּיב שְׂפָתַיִם**, literally "a language of lips" in Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter," is reimagined as a violent assault. In Greenberg's backward look, Bialik is a poet-prophet whose prophetic language actively assaults its audience, biting the tallow of the heart. Bialik's poetry is given the power of Nebuzaradan, Nebuchadnezzar's officer, who burned down Jerusalem and murdered the prophet Zachariah, according to Jewish tradition. The destructive power of prophecy is constituted as a lost ideal.

לְמָה אֶדְמֶנּוּ, בִּיאֲלִיק, כְּעַתָּה?
וְשִׁירֵי הַזֶּעֶם נִשְׁלָדוּ בַּחֲנוּת!

What shall I compare you to, Bialik, now?
And your poems of wrath are [for sale] in the store!⁹⁸

Greenberg critiques the Zionist Yishuv in Palestine as obsessively mercantile, operating with the logic of peddlers and bankers. In "House Dog" he writes with derision about a conversation overheard in a Tel-Aviv workers' eatery.

רְאוּבֵן הִחֵל סֹחַ וְשִׁמְעוֹן שָׁמַע:⁹⁹
"מִפְעַל-הָאוֹר-שֶׁל-רוֹטְנֶבֶרְגַּ – הַפְּלֵא!
הַיַּרְדֵּן יִסָּב אַחֲזֵר "בְּקוֹנְצִיִּים"
וְהוּא עִם הַיַּרְמוּקַיִם יִשְׁכַּב בְּפִלֵּא...

וּבְנֵהָרִים – מִמֶּשׁ לְהִתְפַּקֵּעַ:
אֶכֶל בְּרִגְנֵי וְכֶסֶף דִּי;
אֶדְ סֶדֶר – סֶדֶר רַע: לִישׁוֹן בְּתִשְׁעַ
וְלִקְוֹם מְחַר כְּשׁוֹר הַחַי – –
אֶד – אֵין דְּבָר... יָבוֹא שְׁנוֹי וְדַאי!"

Rueben began speaking and Simeon heard:
"The-light-factory-of-Rotenberg – the wonder!
The Jordan got turned back – with "tricks"
and lies with the Yarmouk [river] in the joint...

And in Naharayim – you could just burst:
Bourgeois food and plenty of money;
But the schedule – a bad schedule: asleep at nine
and wake tomorrow like a live ox –
Ach – no matter... change will come for sure!"¹⁰⁰

In this conversation, we have the experience that Scholem wrote about three years earlier – the uncanny presence of the sacred in the revived secular language. Though the workers are talking about mundane topics like the pay at various factories, the presence of the degraded sacred glints through their Hebrew. The Jordan River is both a geographical resource for the

⁹⁸ Uri Zvi Greenberg, *Uri Tsevi grinberg: kol ktavav* [Collected works], ed. Dan Miron, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1991), 100. (my translation)

⁹⁹ The change in font appears in the original.

¹⁰⁰ Uri Zvi Greenberg, *Uri Tsevi grinberg: kol ktavav* [Collected works], 2:116.

state in the making, but also a witness to the glory of the divine warrior in Psalm 114, and his redemptive power during the Exodus from Egypt. The simple workers have the names of the eponymous ancestors of the Israelite tribes. Rather than the arrival of the messiah, or the revolution, they hope for a change in shift hours at the factory.

According to Miron, Greenberg had two distinct prophetic modes. The first mode was "rooted in the apocalyptic atmosphere of the years immediately following World War I and the Balfour Declaration,"¹⁰¹ and is characterized by a style that is "opaque, experimentalist, overly metaphorical, and subject to widely differing interpretations."¹⁰² Miron implies that this early prophetism was pseudo-prophetic, overly aesthetic, unreliable. In contrast, Greenberg's second prophetic mode was "more responsible, more sober." The poet-prophet, who was to function as "the guide of Zionism" now needed to be "clear in style and message, use straightforward diction, address sharply defined issues, and develop a rhetoric aimed at persuasion and condemnation rather than suggestion." This second prophetic mode is narrated as a journey toward "prophetic self-definition," which includes a growing assurance in Greenberg's own mantic powers.¹⁰³

In describing Greenberg's long and stormy engagement with the prophetic mode, Miron offers a teleological narrative to describe the transition from more "poetic" compositions of the twenties to a "purely" prophetic position which disavows aesthetics for neo-religious prediction and truth telling. If the heart of prophecy is its message, as Ahad Ha'am avows – three decades later, Greenberg's modernist affectations are a distraction from this message. Prophecy can only be a tone of high rebuke, or the record of a successful prediction. Thus, Miron proposes to read the "weaknesses" of Greenberg's poetry as un-prophetic.

If Greenberg perceived himself as "the guide of Zionism," the political messages of his poetry, beginning in the late twenties and especially during the thirties, were read by the establishment as objectionable, fascistic, and inciting murder. Yet as Oreet Meital points out, these infamous rightist pronouncements were undercut by a poetics of contradictions and incoherencies, and cannot really constitute a clear political position.¹⁰⁴ Meital reads Greenberg's prophecies as texts of trauma, represented by the image of the wound. Rather than prophecy that is directed toward the future, Meital calls for a reading that focuses on "the ongoing presence of the past in [Greenberg's] poetry."¹⁰⁵ Following Emanuel Levinas and Elaine Scarry, she claims that "divine revelation, which awakens man to the trauma of existence, is what transforms him into a prophet."¹⁰⁶ Prophecy's primary action is not to

¹⁰¹ Miron, H.N. *Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, 2000, 34.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ As Oreet Meital describes, many on the right considered Greenberg to be prophet who could predict events in the future, and critics such as Kurzweil and Miron alluded to his real mantic abilities. Even David Ben-Gurion remarked on Greenberg's "historical intuition." Oreet Meital, "Mukbraḥim hayinu lišno et asher ahavnu': mishpaḥah ve-leumiyut be-shirat atsag [We had to hate what we loved': family and nationalism in U.Z. Greenberg's poetry]" (Ben Gurion University, 2006), 165.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 154.

¹⁰⁵ For Meital this claim is focused specifically on *Sefer ha-ḳiṭrug ve-ha-'emunah* [Book of prosecution and faith], but I think the claim can be generalized for all his prophetic aspirations., 165.

¹⁰⁶ Meital, "Mukbraḥim hayinu lišno et 'asher ahavnu': mishpaḥah u-leumiyut be-shirat atsag [We Had to Hate What We Loved': Family and Nationalism in U.Z. Greenberg's Poetry]," 162.

provide political guidance, but rather to allow the transference of a traumatic and violent experience. As opposed to Miron's narrative of Zionist progress, she points out that the thirties for Greenberg were characterized by a growing estrangement from Zionism, including an immigration back to Europe, which largely tends to be glossed over. Meital's reading is helpful in exposing the fissures in prophecy, revealing its essentially unstable ground: "Reading Greenberg's poetry as the drama of the becoming of a subject, demonstrates that the attempt to present Greenberg's poetry as coherent ideological poetry *does* respond to the way in which the text wishes to be read, but this is an incomplete reading, that misses the conflict-ridden drama of constituting identity at its center."¹⁰⁷

By 1929, the prophetic mode was well-established in European poetry and letters as well as in the nascent tradition of Modern Hebrew poetry. In fact, at this point, the prophetic mode was already experiencing a decline. In the title poem of *House Dog*, Greenberg despairs of human vision, and instead chooses to be a dog: /ובוחר אני היות כלב/ "מכלבי הנבואה המגנדים." ("I choose to be a dog/ from the abominated prophetic dogs.")¹⁰⁸ While humans pass by spilt blood, blind or deaf to its call, the prophet-dog can see deeply into reality:

במקום שעוברים בני-אדם
 בלי שמע ברגלם ובנידם...
 מתעכב הכלב ושוהה
 במקום ששפד הדם

In the place that humans pass by
 without hearing in their feet and in their hands...
 The dog stops and lingers
 In the place that blood was spilt.¹⁰⁹

Instead of a sublime prophetic vision, Greenberg suggests a kind of prophetic sense of smell, the stink of prophecy.¹¹⁰ Rather than a heightened prophecy of rebuke, all the prophetic dog can do is whine and paw at the place of injustice. In the same reduced, fantastical universe, in the poem "בְּזֶה הָאֵגֶם כְּבַמְחֻזָּה" ("In This Pond, as in a Play"), he images "a prophet in the shape of a fish" (הַנְּבִיאַ בְּצוּרַת דָּג). In the disappointingly petty pond of the socialist Yishuv, the prophet as fish dreams of a great, deep, sea, but is instead passed over, or literally "pickled" as a fish (וּבְזֶה הָאֵגֶם אֲנִי נֹחֵמֵץ כְּדָג).

Greenberg returns to Ahad Ha'am's notion of strong prophecy in a short poem that was published as part of a separate addendum to *House Dog*. The poem seems to express the opposite of weakness, reading prophecy as authoritative, effective, and continuous. Greenberg here seems to be following directly in Ahad Ha'am's footsteps, and even alludes to the same two Talmudic sources cited in the by-then-canonical articles. However,

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Greenberg, *Uri Zvi Greenberg: Kol ktavan* [Collected Works], 2:123.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Sherwood's call for an understanding of prophecy beyond aesthetic Romantic categories. Yvonne Sherwood, "Prophetic Scatology: Prophecy and the Art of Sensation," *Semeia Studies* 82 (2000): 183–224. See discussion in Introduction.

Greenberg literalizes Ahad Ha'am's prophetic metaphors, while his use of language unravels their strength.

For Miron, this short poem marks an important stepping stone in Greenberg's transformation into an ultimately anti-aesthetic position, which gives up "poetry" – its opacity, ambiguity, and complex language for direct, authentic prophecy.¹¹¹ In contrast to Miron, I read the poem from "A Supplement to My Book House Dog" as an assertion of a strong prophecy that exposes the weaknesses inherent in the prophetic enterprise. As I will show, the poem's claim to authenticity, as well as the constant danger of its unraveling, destabilizes the precarious balance the modern prophetic mode maintained between literary conventions of prophetism and claims to authenticity, and between religious tradition and the notion of Zionist secularization.

*

הַנְּבוּאָה לֹא סָרָה מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל
וְאִם קוֹלָהּ כְּחֶרֶב לֹא יוֹנֵף בָּאֵם רְחוּב –
אֵין זֶה סִימָן.
אֱלֹהֵי הָאֵשׁ אוֹתָהּ בָּאֵשׁ יָמֵן
בְּמַעֲבֵה הַיָּמֵן:
כְּתוּמָה, כִּיּוֹם, וְכִמְחָר.
וְאִם הֵרָ לְפָנֶי בּוּאָה – תִּקַּב הַהָר
בְּזַעַם אֱלֹהִים,
וְתִפְגַּשׁ פְּנִים-אֱלֹהִים-פְּנִים
עִם כָּל מִשְׁטֵיּוֹן וְצָר,
וְעַל אַפָּם הַמְתַּעֲטֵשׁ תִּהְלֵ! /

הֵי, כֹּה לְחֵי, נְבוּאָת יִשְׂרָאֵל!
יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עֵיה"ק תרפ"ט

*

Prophecy has not strayed from Israel,
and if its voice is not brandished like a sword at crossroads –
this is no sign.
The God of fire appoints it in fire
in the thickness of time:
as yesterday, as today, and as tomorrow.
And if a mountain comes before it – let it cut through the mountain
with divine wrath,
and come face toward face
with every adversary and foe,
and against their sneezing noses it shall shine!

¹¹¹ Miron, H.N. *Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, 2000, 37.

Hey, to life, Prophecy of Israel!¹¹²

Jerusalem, the Holy City, 5789

The first line of Greenberg's poem alludes to the rabbinic topos of the cessation of prophecy. Yet, Greenberg biblicalizes Ahad Ha'am's Hebrew: instead of the Rabbinic Hebrew verb *נסתלקה* he substitutes the biblical term *סרה*. In contrast to Ahad Ha'am, Greenberg names prophecy without quotation marks; the poem tries to establish authentic prophetic power, not a secularized *façon de parler*. It is not the nation's spirit that keeps prophecy alive, but the God of fire himself who has prepared it in the "thickness of time." Contrary to using the language of religious prophecy metaphorically, the poem attempts to write itself out of the aesthetic realm and into true revelation. The postscript for the poem marks it as written in "Jerusalem, the Holy city, 5789" – the Hebrew year falling between 1928 and 1929.

Greenberg didn't always mark his poems with postscripts, but this particular date frames the poem against the background of *מאורעות תרפ"ט*, "the Events of 5689" also known as the 1929 Arab Riots, or the Buraq Uprising, and both the despair and growing militarization of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. This postscript records the poem itself as part of "thick time" and place,¹¹³ summoning the world outside the poem into its sacred temporality.

The poem asserts that prophecy is a continuous, powerful, and violent force in the destiny of the Jewish people. This continuity is hidden in the esoteric "depth" or "texture" of time. In discussing Ahad Ha'am and Bialik, I wrote about the rupture with tradition that the return to prophecy entails, against rabbinic, exilic traditions. Greenberg's declaration is colored by this rupture, yet his break with tradition is also paradoxically an antinomian, messianic religious revival. Despite the rabbinic acknowledgement of the cessation of prophecy, the poem seems to reveal the hidden, apocalyptic secret of Jewish history, which conflates "yesterday, today, tomorrow."

As we have seen, Ahad Ha'am speaks of the power of the 'prophet' with the rabbinic idiom referring to Moses, *יקוב הדין את ההר*, literally, "let justice pierce the mountain." For Ahad Ha'am, the power of the Mosaic prophet is located in his quixotic desire to bend the laws of nature and heaven to his ideals. Like Ahad Ha'am, Greenberg is interested in prophecy's power to make things happen. The quixotic will of the prophets, though, is transformed (back) into a kind of natural or divine force. Greenberg's prophecy, then, is drawn with Mosaic qualities, yet Moses the figure of the prophet has been written out of the poem. As opposed to describing a particular prophetic figure, this short poem refers to prophecy as an abstract noun with a definite article. There is no lyrical "I" in the poem. There is also no dialogic prophetic address. Prophecy has become a kind of Nietzschean "force," but also perhaps a formal quality, a way to constitute a text. Furthermore, in Greenberg's poem, the fierce power of law, associated with Moses, is attributed to prophecy itself. In a sense, the poem's rabbinic intertextuality attempts to reverse the rabbinic line of inheritance: from out of the hands of the "sages," power returns to "prophecy of Israel," as if Jewish history was running backwards.

¹¹² Translation adapted from Harold Schimmel's unpublished translation, but changed in a number of significant places. Cited in Miron, *H.N. Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, 2000, 36.

¹¹³ "Thick time" is an important concept in Greenberg's oeuvre.

In Greenberg's poem, prophecy is to meet its enemies "face to face." This is an echo of the eulogy for Moses:

וְלֹא-קָם נְבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר יָדְעוּ יְהוָה פְּנִים אֶל-פְּנִים

"And never again did rise a prophet in Israel like Moses, who was known by Yahweh face to face" (Deut 34:10).

This verse from Deuteronomy paradoxically establishes the charter of prophecy while at the same time already constituting a recurring possibility of rupture, since there is no equal to Moses. Thus, as Greenberg attempts to assert continuity through time, he also summons discontinuity. While in the Biblical passage it is God who knows Moses "face to face," in the poem this existentially powerful meeting is held with "every adversary and foe." The spiritual achievement of Moses is translated into violent confrontation. There is a slight variation in the use of the preposition too: the biblical phrase uses the more regular preposition "אל" while Greenberg uses an archaic "אֶלִי." The archaic form was adopted as poetic in Modern Hebrew, but the sole appearances of the preposition in this form in the Bible are in the Book of Job. Thus the unmediated power of prophecy, as described in Deuteronomy, becomes mediated by the extra archaic suffix and a kind of static interference from the text of Job, as if prophecy cannot quite close the gap.

The text's claim to authenticity and the strength of the poem's assertions are in constant danger of unraveling through the complexity of its intertextuality, its wild shifts in tone and grammar, and its plays with spelling, as characteristic of Modernist poetry. Even Greenberg's spelling of the title of the poem is curious: he spells the word לִי,¹¹⁴ "addendum" without the aleph *mater lectiones*, and it appears to resemble the word לוי, "Levite." The Levites, the tribe of Moses, are an uncanny deterritorialized tribe, the Jews of the Jews. The poem itself is part of an addendum that is a paradoxical continuation of a text that has already ended.

Greenberg's juxtaposition of the high registers of Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew with the low registers of Modern Hebrew creates a weakening, sometimes grotesque effect. The fissures in the language of the poem come to expose the strain of constituting this ultra-strong prophecy, and reveal the anxiety at the heart of the project of "strong prophecy." The poem's assertions cover over a gap, an anxiety that continuous divine revelation and communication may not be possible, or that the fragmented voice of the poet will not be able to contain them.

In a prose piece that accompanies the poem, Greenberg sets the stakes for a prophetic understanding of reality as a counterforce to the diasporic, money-grubbing sensibility exhibited by the current Zionist leadership.

מי שמלמד, שסמל הגאולה העיברית לא ה"מגן דוד" והארי השואג והזדכחות נפש בתכונותיה
מחדש, אלא עיגול המטבע, הגיונו – הגיון הבנקאי היהודי, המסתיים עם מות הגורף, אבל לא הגיון

¹¹⁴ Presumably meant to be vocalized לִי, though it is unvocalized in the text.

החזון, שהוא שכל-נשמה בכל תנועת שחרור ומהפכה, שהוא הכותב באותיות בקיר-בבל של כל שליט, קיסר ונוגש, ושסופו לנצח תמיד, משום שהוא דופק הזמן והדם.

Those who teach that the symbol of Hebrew redemption is not the "Star of David" or the roaring lion and the purification and revival of the soul, but rather the *round of the coin* – their logic is Jewish banking logic, which ends with the death of the body, but it is not *visionary logic*, which is the brain and soul of any liberational and revolutionary moment, which is written in letters on the Babylon-wall of every ruler, Caesar, and oppressor, which is always bound to win, because it is the pulse of the time and the blood.¹¹⁵

Based on these explicit poetics, we would expect Greenberg's poem to be starkly drawn in potent religious symbols. However, it seems to end in deflation, not with a roar but with a sneeze. It seems the worst thing one can say about the enemies of prophecy is that they have runny noses. Yet the ridiculous sneeze conceals an allusion to Job's Leviathan. The biblical text reads: *עֲטִישָׁתָיו תִּהְיֶה אֹר* – Leviathan's sneezes flash lightning (Job 41:10). The power of prophecy is compared to Leviathan, symbolic of a force that cannot be captured, enslaved or made an agreement with, as its power lies beyond the limits of human force and temporality.¹¹⁶ In the body of the book, prophets are reduced to dogs and fish, but in this addendum the animal-like power of prophecy takes its true, inhuman form.

Again, the slight variation from the biblical text is significant. Greenberg's text erases the word "light" from the sentence, and turns the frightening lightning-filled "neesings"¹¹⁷ of the mythical beast into simple Jewish sneezes. Thus, Greenberg's language violently yokes the new "marketplace" everyday Hebrew – which describes the petit-bourgeois sneezers and their wet noses – to the high register of the Job text, creating a grotesque effect. The power of the biblical language is comically diminished, while at the same time the language performs a violent struggle to bend the debased everyday into another form.

The grammar of the poem also reflects the strain of creating strong prophecy. The first line, which takes a forceful declarative position, and as shown earlier, is fashioned with a deliberately biblical verb, yields to a casuistic conditional: *If it's voice is not brandished...this is no sign*.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the final exclamatory line of the poem yokes a biblical greeting¹¹⁹ to a slangy exclamation that sounds like the beginning of a pioneer folk song written by popular song writer Haim Hefer, like "Hey, the Jeep!" or "Hey to-the-South, to Eilat!" Rather than functioning as a stepping-stone to authentic mantic prophecy, the poem functions as a more "opaque" text than its simple declarations and rhymes would bode. Its alternating Biblical

¹¹⁵ Greenberg, *Uri Zvi Greenberg: Kol ktavan* [Collected works], 2:42.

¹¹⁶ The god of fire "prepares" (*yiman*) a fire in which to contain prophecy using the same distinct verb as the text of Jonah which tells how God "prepared" (*ya-yiman*) a big fish to eat Jonah and keep him alive at sea. Modern Hebrew would usually use the imperfect *yemaneh*. This is the archaic preterite form. Prophecy is concealed like the reluctant, fleeing Jonah – a prophetic figure far more ambiguous than Moses.

¹¹⁷ I'm using the KJV translation to suggest the high register of the Hebrew.

¹¹⁸ The expression "this is no sign" is actually a calque from Yiddish, meaning, this signifies/means nothing. The word *siman* is RH and does not appear in the BH corpus.

¹¹⁹ Cf 1 Sam 25:5.

Hebrew and Rabbinic Hebrew registers, its complex intertextuality and modernist juxtapositions are symptomatic of the attempt to constitute strong prophecy through the theologically problematic texts of Job and Jonah, and more widely in the face of weak prophecy.

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